Can You Feel it Right Now?

by colormyheartred

Summary

When Emma Swan agrees to let her annoying neighbor Killian Jones join her to go to the grocery store, the last thing she could have ever anticipated is becoming his wife over the course of a conversation with some people from his past.

(based off of this prompt: you asked me to the store with you and your child, and now my distant relative we met thinks I'm married with a baby)

Notes

In an attempt to write a Single Mom!Emma oneshot, I ended up unearthing this prompt, which subsequently brought me to the inevitable conclusion that I needed to write it to it's fullest potential.

So, instead of writing the fics I had intended to write, I've started to write this instead, and I hope it's an enjoyable ride for you, because so far, I'm having a blast.
Chapter 1

one.

Her apartment is small.

There’s one bedroom, a bathroom, and a tiny living space that joins together the living room with her kitchen. Her stove works only twenty-five percent of the time, and her fridge smells like a skunk died in it. There are cracks in the walls and the sink in her bathroom often drips.

And her neighbor, one Killian Jones, enjoys a number of things, including, but not limited to: listening to incredibly loud music, banging his headboard against the wall between their bedrooms any given time between the hours of one and six in the morning any given night, and setting the smoke alarms off in the building at two in the morning.

She’d met this devastatingly handsome man two weeks ago, the morning she and her small son, Henry, moved into the building.

He’d come rushing to her aid, claiming she was in need of some muscle, and tried helping her with her mattress as he told her his name. She not-so-accidentally stepped on his bare toes in the process of telling him hers.

To say they’re enemies would be accurate, she thinks.

Henry is officially one, and he keeps things interesting for her during her off-hours while she’s at home. She chases him all over her apartment some nights when he gets hold of her phone and won’t let go.

He’s a good boy, though. He’s handsome as they come, and despite the occasional frustration, he’s made being a single mom fairly simple.

“He’s crying,” she sighs.

He’s crying for her and it’s barely seven in the morning on her day off.

Emma pushes out of her bed and drags her fingers through her hair so she can pull it up into a ponytail before she leans over her son’s crib.

He sobs at her for a few seconds and she pulls him out, settling him onto her hip. His lower lip trembles, but as she kisses his forehead, his cries soften into a hiccup. He sticks his fist into his mouth and leans against her.

“Well, good morning to you too, monkey.” She leaves a few kisses to the side of his head and shuts her eyes as she breathes him in.

Every day, she realizes how lucky she is to have him. She almost didn’t. She almost gave him up out of the pain of reality. But the second she heard his voice she was in for it and ended up holding him and wanting him all the more.

Emma carries him out into the kitchen after changing his diaper and settles him into his high chair so she can feed him some cereal, and by the time she grabs his bottle to fill it with milk, he’s crying again.
“What?” she asks, setting the bottle down on his plastic table. Henry just cries at her and she drops her shoulders in defeat. “Henry, you’re going to wake the neighbors if you keep crying. Is it that tooth? Is it coming in?”

Emma leans down to check his open mouth and shrugs her shoulders at him. “I don’t know what to do with you, kid. Have your milk.”

She presses the bottle into his mouth and thankfully, he drinks it, but as soon as he’s done, his cries return, and he refuses to even try to eat the Cheerios she’d poured out for him. She presses her hand to his forehead and checks his temperature with the thermometer, finding that he is indeed running a slight fever. He needs medicine, but they’re out.

Emma lifts him out of his chair and carries him to his playpen in the living room, allowing him to continue sobbing as she goes to change into clothes for their trip to the grocery store.

She shuts off her lights before going to grab the bag she’s been using for Henry’s diaper stuff. She sticks some things that should keep him occupied inside and drapes it over her shoulder after shrugging on her coat.

It’s December in New York City, and while she should be excited about the holiday season, she’s found herself bitter about the whole idea. She can’t afford to give Henry a good first official Christmas. She can barely afford to give herself anything nice every once in awhile.

Henry’s still sobbing when she meets him in the living room. “Hey, baby boy, I’m sorry I can’t give you any painkillers. We’re out. That’s why we’re going to the store.”

Emma dresses him in his coat and hat and leaves him in his pajama clothes because he’ll probably feel warmer in them.

As she settles him onto her hip, he slows his cries, something that gives her partial relief, but he’s still upset, and Emma knows there’s nothing she can do but be here for him, so she hands him his teething toy and kisses his forehead as she makes her way to her front door.

There are three locks on it and one is broken. She slides the chain toward the wall and unlocks the key slot before opening the door, only to find her neighbor standing on the other side, his fist raised to knock.

His eyes widen at the sight of her and she tilts her head at him. “What are you doing here?”

“He’s been crying for quite some time. I wanted to make sure everything was all right. Like a good neighbor might.”

“Oh, of course, you’re being a good neighbor.” Emma rolls her eyes. “It’s because he’s teething. As we’ve discussed. Multiple times.”

She shifts Henry’s weight on her hip as she turns around to lock the apartment.

The thing about Killian Jones is he doesn’t know when to quit.

He’s come over to her apartment many times when Henry has burst into tears, apparently worried that she’s not doing her job as his mother or something, and he always asks, at the end of it all, if she’s interested in going for pizza, or to a movie, or to a bar.

She always says no. Because he’s selfish and cocky and apparently he’s bored, because he hits on single moms in his apartment building when he could be dating literally anyone else.
“Here’s the thing, Killian,” Emma says, turning around to face him again. “I’m not interested in you. So you can go back home and sleep. I have to go shopping.”

Killian’s brow furrows and he looks at Henry, whose cries continue in a low whimper. “Would you at least like some help? If I know anything about your boy it’s that he gets clingy when he’s teething and it might be hard for you to get much of anything done at the store.”

Emma groans. He’s right. How he knows that much about her is beyond her. “Fine.” She searches his eyes for a moment. “But stop coming over. We’re not friends, Jones. We’re neighbors.”

“I know,” he smirks. He’s eyeing her up and she groans again in frustration before taking the lead to the elevator. “You’re adorable when you’re pissed at me, Swan.”

Emma doesn’t have the energy to yell at him, so she just thrusts her middle finger up at him and keeps walking.

He laughs and jogs up beside her.

After pressing the down button on the elevator, she turns to look at him. “Why is it that you think weaseling your way into my business with my kid is going to get you anywhere?”

Killian arches an eyebrow and sticks his tongue into his cheek before dragging it over his upper lip. “I’m not one to back down from a challenge, Swan.”

She gives him a look. “Yeah, well, I don’t do one night stands with my next door neighbor.”

He just smiles and leans in so his lips press against the shell of her ear, “Darling, one of these days you’ll find yourself with an itch that needs scratching. It’s only a matter of waiting out your instincts.”

Emma would smack him, but the elevator doors open, and she finds that shooting daggers at him with her eyes is just as effective.

She does need his help at the store, after all. She can’t risk alienating him before she can get her shopping done.

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They have to take the bus to the grocery store, because their apartment is in a rather densely populated part of New York City, and Killian ends up boarding the full bus behind Emma, who cradles her son as she sits in the last available seat.

He stands beside her, holding onto the bar over her head, and she occasionally looks at him, making him wiggle his eyebrows at her so she’ll roll her eyes.

She truly is adorable when she’s pissed at him.

Honestly, the only reason he’s so interested in Emma Swan is because the day they’d met, she’d been so adamant on not talking to him and letting him know who he’d be living next to.

She’s a curious creature, Emma Swan, with her one-year-old boy, the cutest he’s ever seen, and a murky history he’s sure is filled with as many mistakes as his is.

Her hair is lovely, tied up into a ponytail, and she’s wearing a bag over her shoulder. Henry’s holding a toy in his mouth, but then he releases it and it falls to the floor of the bus. Killian,
without hesitation, leans down to grab it for the boy.

Henry grins up at him, a stark contrast to the tears he’d been shedding earlier, and Emma sighs as she watches Henry stick the toy back into his mouth.

Killian catches the eye of a woman sitting in the row before Emma when the bus jolts and it causes him to shift forward, nearly sending him into her lap. She laughs with him and he winks at her.

“Apologies. I’m not usually this clumsy around beautiful women.”

The girl laughs. “Right.”

Emma audibly groans and he glances back at her, lifting an eyebrow, but she just turns to the gentleman sitting beside her and asks him to pull the cord for her.

“So, love, where are you headed?” Killian asks the gorgeous brunette.

She sighs. “Work. You?”

Killian glances at Emma, who attends to Henry in her lap, and then back at the woman he’s chatting up. “I’m headed to work myself. I’m a lawyer.”

“Oh!” the woman gasps, her brow knitting as she takes in his appearance. “What do you practice?”

Killian shrugs. “I’m a divorce attorney. I’m just heading in for some paperwork I left on my desk.” He gestures down at his outfit. “And I’m the boss, so I figure dressing down isn’t a bad thing.”

His new friend nods her head. Her tone is dripping with desire and she drags her teeth along her lower lip. “Absolutely.”

When he glances back at Emma, she rolls her eyes, and Killian looks up when the bus pulls to a stop. “Well, this is my stop. It was truly wonderful meeting you-”

“Michelle,” she fills in the blank when he extends his hand to shake. She takes his hand as he digs into his pocket for his card, then he leaves it in her extended palm.

He winks at her as Emma and Henry go to the door of the bus and says, “Give me a ring sometime.”

He jumps out of the bus and onto the sidewalk where Emma waits, her eyebrow cocked and a smirk on her lips. “Oh, so you’re a lawyer now. I thought you were a doctor. Or was that just last week when you had what’s her name in your bed?”

Killian gives her a look. “Are you eavesdropping on my seducing other women?”

“Our walls are very thin. I couldn’t help it if I tried.” She shakes her head in annoyance and presses her hand to the back of Henry’s head as they walk the sidewalk toward the grocery store. “And you should probably stop that, by the way, because I work way too many hours to come home to hear you blasting Journey while you’re finding some hidden treasure over there.”

He just smirks at her despite the fact that she won’t look at him. Sometimes, he likes to imagine she likes him just a little bit, but she’s so guarded that she won’t let him in.

He’s known her for all of two weeks and all he finds himself wondering about is this woman and her infuriatingly short temper for him.
Killian grabs a cart when they walk into the grocery store and Emma continues to hold a now partially soothed Henry in her arms.

“Okay,” she says. “Let’s get him some baby aspirin first and then we can figure out the rest of my list.”

Emma leads the way and he follows her, having a look around the shop as he does. Grocery stores are usually a playground of a sort for him, and so far, he sees at least one woman he wouldn’t mind giving his number to.

“Ow! Jones, watch where you’re pushing the cart or I’ll regret letting you help me.”

Killian looks at Emma to find that he’s run the cart straight into her. She gives him a hard look and grabs the baby aspirin from the shelf.

With some difficulty, Emma works the lid off, and she holds the pill in between her fingers while she tries to feed it to her boy. Henry whips his head around a few times, keeping his lips pressed together, and Killian furrows his brow, moving toward them.

It pulls at his heart, seeing Emma and her son. He knows she loves her boy quite a bit. In the two weeks they’ve been neighbors, all he’s seen of her is her constant willingness to try with her boy.

Often, he hears her talking to her son through their wall, and it makes him smile, because the care she gives to Henry is far and above the kindest part of her.

Gently, he says, “Here, let me see if I can’t do it.”

Emma tilts her head to the side and her reluctance gives way when Henry starts whining quite loudly. He takes the pill from her and smiles at Henry.

“Hey, Henry,” Killian says, earning Henry’s attention. “It would make your mum and I quite happy if you’d open your mouth and have this medicine. It’ll help your mouth feel much better, I promise.”

Surprising both of them, likely, Henry allows Killian to put the medicine past his little lips, and his arms are suddenly drawn out toward him.

For a half second, there’s a moment shared between he and Emma as they look at one another. He finds that she’s impossibly sweet, the way she’s gazing at him, as if she can’t believe he actually made it happen, that he got her son to take the pill when she couldn’t.

“Seriously, kid? You want him to hold you now?” Emma half-whines. She narrows her eyes at Killian. “You can’t pretend he’s yours and go pick up some poor innocent woman here buying cereal. Got it?”

Killian gives her a look. “Love, do I look like I’m that desperate?” Her eyebrows pinch inward and she drops her shoulders. “Okay, perhaps I am.” He gives her as honest a look as he can muster. “I swear I won’t.”

Henry whines until Emma hands him over to Killian and when he’s in his arms, Henry clutches Killian’s coat tight in his fists. Emma hands him Henry’s pacifier, and Henry eagerly accepts it, suckling on it as he stares at Killian with his wide eyes.

Kids have never been on his list of favorite things, but as he holds Henry in his arms, Killian finds that it isn’t half as bad as he’d thought it would be.
If any of his friends or family saw him now, they’d truly think he’s a reformed man, holding a baby in his arms.

When he looks at Emma, she seems to be in thought, her defenses lowered, and Killian smiles at her. “He’s a heavy little guy, isn’t he?”

Emma laughs. “Yeah. And he’s strong, too. Watch your nose. He might steal it from you.”

Killian chuckles and turns his attention to Henry. The boy reaches up to touch his face and Killian scrunches up his features at him so he’ll giggle. He does.

“Oh, next stop: milk.” Emma says on a sigh.

She pushes the cart forward and Killian just smiles a little at Henry. He runs his fingers up his belly until the baby starts to laugh and he laughs, too.

It’s a delightful thing, helping Emma with her groceries, and he actually thinks they’re making some progress.

All he truly wants is to be friends, because she’s been so impossibly hard to break through to. And he thinks maybe today is his chance. After two weeks of suggesting venues for them to bond, she finally let him accompany her on this trip.

The grocery store is probably as good as it gets with her, so he’ll take it.

When Killian glances up, he immediately regrets it. Up ahead in the aisle they’re walking down, Killian finds someone he’d thought he’d never see again.

“Shit,” he curses under his breath.

Emma gapes at him. “Hey! Watch your mouth around my baby, Sailor. He mimics now.”

He tilts his head toward the couple in the aisle a few feet ahead of them and murmurs, “Darling, we should get out of this aisle. There’s someone I’d really rather not see again.”

“Who? Mr. and Mrs. Perfect over there?” Emma asks, furrowing her brow. She snorts. “What’s wrong with them? Did you try to flirt with her?” His neighbor leans in closer so she can whisper, “Is it your baby?”

Killian gives her a hard look. “No. That’s my college roommate and his wife. I unfriended them both on Facebook years ago because I thought that I’d never see them again.”

“What’s wrong with them?” Emma asks, not caring as she pushes the cart forward.

Killian reaches out to grab it, effectively stopping her from getting them any closer. He uses the kid on his hip as a human shield, but he knows it’s not the best guise. “Nothing’s wrong, I just…”

“Killian?” Mary Margaret Nolan gasps. “Killian Jones, is that you?”

He turns to face her, easing himself into a smile as he studies the woman. She waddles toward them quickly, her smile spread as far as it possibly can. Her eyes shine brightly and she gasps, her shoulders jumping as she clasps her hands together over her heart.

“Oh my gosh, it is!” Mary Margaret grins. She spins around and Killian glances over to find his former roommate walking toward them, a smile on his own face. “David! Look at who I found!”
David chuckles as he joins his wife. He has a few things tucked into his right arm from shopping in lieu of a cart or basket, and he’s dressed comfortably for the December weather, a scarf falling from his neck and his coat unbuttoned.

It has been years since he’s seen the man and he’s standing in a grocery store in the middle of New York City with his expecting wife, looking at him as if he’s about to pick things up where they’d left them; as if his faith in him had been so shaken that he couldn’t believe that he’d ever truly see him again.

“Killian Jones.” David shakes his head. “It has been, what, six years since we last talked?”

Killian shrugs, shaking his head. “It’s been awhile, for sure, mate.”

He smiles at the man and holds out his hand to shake. David complies eagerly. “Well, how are you, buddy?”

“Good, good,” Killian nods. “You and Mary Margaret appear to be doing quite well.”

He glances down at Mary Margaret’s belly and David chuckles. “Yeah. We’re great.”

Mary Margaret, meanwhile, has a look at the situation, at Emma, who is still standing there, and at Henry, who has attached himself to Killian’s hip with his small arms suddenly around his neck and his soft head of hair brushing against his collarbone.

Her eyes grow wider. “Oh, Killian! I knew you’d settle down eventually, I just didn’t think it would happen so soon after…” Mary Margaret stops herself from continuing and Killian’s face falls as his heart drops to his gut.

He looks at Emma and back at the happy couple standing before him, and suddenly, he’s jealous of his old roommate. He’s got a wife and a baby on the way, and Killian has nothing.

He can’t admit to the Nolan’s that he’s still wallowing and broken after what happened, not now. It’s been six years without contact. He hasn’t been back home in ages. His own brother doesn’t know what he’s up to.

And he knows what David would say if he explained that he’s just here to help his neighbor with her clingy child. He’d tell him “I told you so,” or “You haven’t changed one bit.”

The thing is, he can’t let David win this time. Because he’d won when Killian left six years ago. David Nolan is the very definition of his worst nightmare coming true. It’s his past come back to haunt him and he doesn’t want his past to consume him right now.

So he figures there’s nothing to lose here except for a few awkward minutes of his life.

Killian smiles and shakes his head. He wraps his arm around Emma’s middle, silently praying that she’ll go along with him on this. Knowing her, she’ll end up spoiling it for him.

“Oh, right, uhm… this is my wife, Emma. And our boy, Henry.”

Mary Margaret smiles wider and when Killian meets David’s gaze, his friend has a pleasant look on his face.

“It’s nice to meet you, Emma,” Mary Margaret says, holding out her hand. Killian’s hand falls to the small of Emma’s back and she hesitates for a moment before reaching out to shake Mary Margaret’s.
“Yeah.”

“Darling, this is Mary Margaret, and her husband David. He was my college roommate. I’ve told you about him.”

Emma nods her head and laughs, suddenly in the spirit of things. “Right. Hi.”

She shakes David’s hand and then settles her hands on the cart.

Killian looks between his former friends, wanting nothing more than to get out of here, but Mary Margaret is eager to continue bombarding them with information.

“We’re just here for the weekend,” she explains. “It’s kind of a babymoon. We’re due in a month and we wanted to get away for a bit before the Christmas chaos. Storybrooke is nice, but we wanted to check out New York City. What a nice surprise, getting to see you again.”

Killian smiles at her as her hand falls to the curve of her bump. “Aye. A real delight. I was just wondering about you the other day and how you were doing.”

“Well, if you’d come home for the holidays, maybe you’d know,” David teases, chuckling.

Emma cranes her head to look at him and he meets her eyes, finding them alight and up to something. She shrugs her shoulders and shakes her head. “Sorry about that. It’s my fault. I keep him pretty busy at home.”

Killian’s smile spreads softly in amazement, that she’d actually dive in and do this for him, and he gives David and Mary Margaret an apologetic look in return. “What can I say? I’m a family man now.”

He turns his attention to Henry then, finding the boy sitting up on his hip again instead of lying against him. Henry smiles at him from behind his pacifier and Killian chuckles, letting his fingers dance up his chest until the boy giggles and curls his hands up toward his much larger one.

“Well, that is the best news,” Mary Margaret says in her hopeful tone. Killian looks over at her.

David smiles a little. “Hey, listen, we’re only in the city until tomorrow morning. Maybe you’d like to get together for dinner? Reminisce about old times?”

And while he knows he’s pushing his luck, David and Mary Margaret have silently been judging him this whole time.

Killian laughs. “You know, that would be great. Emma and I hardly get out anymore thanks to this little guy.”

Emma nudges him in the side and he meets her frantically wide eyes. “Um, honey, I have that thing tonight.”

“Oh, no, darling, it’s fine. We can reschedule that. My friends are only in town tonight.”

She turns back to them and smiles. “It’s just that our puppy has been kind of sick lately and I’m worried about—”

Oh, so this is how she’s playing it.

“Sweetheart,” Killian sighs, shaking his head. He nudges her side. “Spot is going to be just fine. I can have the vet come over when we finish shopping.”
Emma narrows her eyes slightly at him. “Yes, *dear*, but what about the tickets to Broadway we had tonight?”

Killian scoffs. He drapes his arm around her shoulder. “Believe me, Emma, we can get tickets for another night. My friends are here for only tonight. I want you to finally meet them.”

He watches her carefully as she turns back to them. She shakes her head. “Well, dinner it is.”

Mary Margaret gasps happily. “Wonderful!”
two.

Emma only waits three seconds after David and Mary Margaret leave to turn on Killian, her eyes blowing wide as she presses her pointer finger up at him.

“What the hell was that?” she asks him angrily. “We’re married? On what planet is that okay?”

Her companion takes a deep breath and he glances away from her for a second. “I did it because it seemed appropriate in the moment. I didn’t think we’d end up making plans for dinner later tonight.”

Emma rolls her eyes at him and pushes her cart forward, wanting to avoid having to stare at him for any longer than she has to in the middle of the aisle.

She pulls open the fridge for the milk and grabs a jug. She settles it into her cart. “Yeah, well, we apparently have dinner plans now, Smart Guy. Explain that one to me.”

Killian sighs. “I just…I’ve known David nearly my whole life and seeing him judging me after all these years got me wanting to prove him wrong.”

“Of course.” Emma rolls her eyes and pulls on a thin smile. “Maybe next time you should invite the busty brunette from the bus to dinner and marriage.”

Killian scoffs. They head down the aisle for cereal and Emma stops to grab some Cheerios. “I wasn’t serious about her.”

Emma hums. She clutches the box in front of her for a moment as she stares at Killian and shakes her head. “You’re a terrible liar. Maybe we should go tonight so I can watch you screw it up and lose this little game you’re trying.”

She drops the box of cereal into her cart and pushes forward, her neighbor following closely behind her.

There’s only one reason she allowed him to use her in that moment back there, and it was because she saw the raw fear in his eyes when he told her he really didn’t want to see these people.

He’d offered to help her with her kid, so she’d thought giving him a conversation with people he really didn’t want to see would have been enough to pay him back for what he’d done to help Henry.

Of course, now things are getting out of hand.

“Why don’t you like them anyway? They’re nice people. They probably wouldn’t care if you told them you were sleeping around and were currently in the process of trying to get into my pants.”

Killian arches an eyebrow at her as she stops to grab a box of diapers from the shelf. “Is it working?”

Emma rolls her eyes in disgust. “Please. You’re following me around the grocery store holding my baby. Half an hour ago you were giving your number to someone on the bus. You’re not wooing me.”
Killian sighs. “Well, I suppose I gave it the old college try.”

He turns his attention to Henry when the boy makes a noise and Emma looks at her son, too. Seeing Killian’s gentle smile with her son is almost enough to forgive him for everything he’s ever done and is currently in the process of doing.

He’s somehow incredibly good with her son, and that’s saying something, because Henry typically doesn’t like people until he’s known them for a while.

“I suppose I was a bit ashamed of the fact that he’d gotten himself a family and is obviously well off, while I’m currently drowning in debt, sleeping around, and drinking myself to sleep most nights.”

Emma lifts her eyebrows and nods. “I see.”

She turns back to her cart and moves down the aisle to grab some baby wipes. His honesty is real and she’s jarred just slightly by it, because he’s typically so different.

“We grew up together,” Killian continues lowly. “He was there when I left town. He tried to get me to leave, actually, because he thought I’d never get my life in order.”

Emma glances over at him and silently assesses him. “And you grew up in…”

“Storybrooke,” Killian answers. He gives a gentle tilt to his head when she just stares blankly at him. “It’s a small town in Maine.”

She arches a skeptical eyebrow at him and says, “Seriously? You grew up in some fairytale town? Let me guess, it’s one of those quaint places by the ocean where everybody knows each other and their business.”

Killian shrugs his shoulders. “Pretty much.”

Emma snorts and shakes her head. “So what are you doing hiding from it all, then?”

She’s not naive. She’d seen the look in his eyes when Mary Margaret brought something up from his past that he clearly hasn’t moved past.

She gets it. She has a couple of awful memories from her own history she’d like erased and forgotten, but it’s hard when she wakes up every morning to the sight of her son, and to the memory that she’s been running her whole life to get to this point.

Killian shakes his head and clenches his jaw. “It’s not any of your business, Swan.”

Emma hums. “Fine. I get it.”

She turns back to her cart and pushes them out of the aisle, turning toward the chip aisle. She grabs a bag from the shelf.

Her stomach twists because things have suddenly shifted between she and Killian Jones. She can’t just treat him like she doesn’t understand what’s going through his mind, because honestly, if that had happened to her, if she ran into someone from her past, she would want to cover up too.

It’s not the greatest of solutions, but she gets it.

“It’s only for tonight,” Emma says. “Right?”
Emma looks up at him and he shrugs, clearly not have anticipated her to agree to do this stupid thing with him—*for* him. “Yeah.”

She takes a soft breath. “Fine. I’ll do it. I’m gonna have to find somebody to watch Henry, but it shouldn’t be a problem.”

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Killian helps Emma into her apartment with her grocery bags while she holds Henry. The boy had apparently decided that being attached to Killian’s side was enough by the time they got on the bus back to the apartment complex.

It didn’t hurt his feelings. He just kind of liked holding the boy—feeling like he truly was his son for however long they’d been playing pretend.

He shakes it off now, though, because Emma Swan isn’t his wife, and Henry isn’t his son. He’s got a whole world around him filled with beautiful women that won’t deny him like Emma has.

He doesn’t understand why she won’t even consider a friendship with him, but he could care less, because after tonight, he’s considering moving out of the building to find himself a new neighbor that doesn’t care about how late he stays up after work.

“Put those there,” Emma says, tilting her head to point at the counter in her kitchen.

There are dishes stacked up in her sink and toys scattered *everywhere*.

He hasn’t ever actually been inside of her apartment. He’s always been told to get lost while standing at her front door. It’s something of a miracle that he can’t take for granted.

Emma carries Henry to the room that must be her bedroom as Killian does as she tells him and emerges a few moments after he plucks out the jug of milk to add it to her fridge.

On a sigh, Emma starts rummaging through her bags.

“So, we need to discuss our story if we’re going to be able to corroborate tonight.” Killian says casually. He opens up her refrigerator and grimaces at the smell. “Gods, what do you put in here?”

“I don’t know. It always smells like that.” Emma shrugs. He stares at her and then settles her milk down inside. He closes the door and shakes his head.

“Swan, that’s not natural. You should clean it.”

Emma glares at him. “Yeah, well, I don’t exactly have time for that. I have a one-year-old and I’m always working.”

“Then let me fix it,” Killian offers offhandedly. He reaches into a bag and removes a box of cereal, setting it down on the counter where there’s space.

“Oh uh,” Emma shakes her head. He snaps his attention to her to find that she’s standing there with her hand on her hip and her eyes wide. “You were only helping me today because Henry was being difficult. That’s all.”

He nods in understanding. “Alright, well, we still need to discuss some things before we have dinner with my friends. Because if either one of us slips up and makes it seem inauthentic, we’ve spoilt it.”
Emma gives her attention to her groceries for a few quiet moments and he watches as she puts things into a cabinet above the sink. She crumples up the bags and sets them down below her sink in a collection of grocery bags, and then she stands upright and faces him with her arms folded.

“Okay. Fine. What do I need to know?”

Killian licks his lips. “I majored in pre-law in college with intentions of graduating and going on to law school in New York.”

Emma’s eyes suddenly brighten and she laughs. “Oh, so you weren’t completely being an ass to what’s her name on the bus, then.”

He rolls his eyes and continues in a somber tone, “Obviously, law school never happened. I just came to the city after my ex girlfriend passed away, trying to run from God knows what.”

It makes Emma quiet. The teasing that had once been in her eyes fades and she frowns at him. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Killian forces a smile. “I’m alive, aren’t I?” He swallows thickly and bites down on his lower lip for a few moments before releasing it. “I’ve got an older brother called Liam and our parents aren’t in the picture. David was my best friend growing up, so he knows all this about me and it might come up.”

Emma nods in understanding. “Okay. So… how about us? How’d we meet?”

A smile twitches at the corners of his lips and he shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t know, Swan. You tell me. How’d we meet?”

She stares at him for a few beats, considering him and the question, and then she says, “It was raining, and I was standing at a bus stop waiting for my bus. You had an umbrella and came over and said, ‘You look wet.’ And I laughed and said, ‘You look dry.’ And then you offered me your coat because I was freezing and we got on the same bus even though you needed to take the next bus, just so you could walk me to my building.”

Killian laughs. It’s probably the most ridiculous meeting story he’s ever heard in his life and if he’s being honest, he would have settled for: she moved into his building and stepped on his foot when she told him her name.

“Alright. If you feel good about that story.”

She clearly can tell that he doesn’t like her story, tilting her head to the side. “What would you prefer, then?”

“It’s fine, Emma,” he insists. “Just a bit cliché is all.”

Emma stands there in silence and then releases a heavy breath as she shrugs. “Okay, then, what do we do? You’re a lawyer, right?”

He nods his head. “Family law. I handle a variety of cases. I’m the boss, obviously. And I did get my law degree in New York.”

“Oh, Emma sucks on her lip. “And I’m an artist. How long have we been together?”

“Three years,” Killian says, finding himself lingering on her choice of occupation in his mind.
Could she be an artist at heart? If she weren’t somehow stuck raising this little boy on her own, would she be painting or sculpting or drawing instead? He knows he’ll never get an answer from her. She’d just as soon let him fix her fridge.

“Got engaged after six months. Married two years ago.”

He watches Emma for signs that she might want out of this, but she just nods and shrugs her shoulders. “Sounds realistic.”

She wets her lips and moves to her sink. He watches as she turns on the water and starts cleaning the pile up of dishes there.

She’s beautiful, but it’s nothing he hasn’t realized before. Her hair dances as she moves and the line of her jaw is a gentle curve. Her eyes shine greener than emeralds.

Is it realistic that he would have ended up with such a woman? Probably not. But David and Mary Margaret bought it fairly easily.

“I proposed by leaving you little Scrabble letters around your place,” he says, finding himself daydreaming just a little too much. He snaps out of it when Emma looks at him. “You had to figure out which order they went in and by the time I came over with the ring, you’d figured it out.”

Emma gives him a look. “And you thought my story was lame.”

“What? You think Scrabble letters isn’t elaborate enough? Would you have preferred being proposed to on Christmas morning? As if I’m some pathetic poor soul who couldn’t find a better way to ask the woman he loves to marry him?”

She laughs and shakes her head. “No. That would be the least creative way you could possibly have done it.”

“Exactly, and we both know I’m creative,” Killian teases, wriggling his eyebrows. She rolls her eyes, just as he’d hoped she would, and her smile is a gentle curve that presses a dimple into her cheek. “So the Scrabble tiles, then?”

Emma shrugs. “Scrabble tiles are fine by me. Do we like to play Scrabble together? Is that why?”

Killian considers it for a few moments and then nods. “Aye. On our third date you told me it was your favorite game and I teased you for it because the game isn’t the most exciting, but then you taught me to love again.”

Emma punches him in the arm and he chuckles. “God, even as my fake husband you’re an idiot. Go home. I’ll meet you in the hall at six.”

He winks at her. “Wear your nicest dress tonight, love. You’re married to a lawyer.”

She gives him a warning look and Killian just lifts his eyebrows at her as he heads for her door.

Emma grimaces as she works herself into her little black dress. It’s the only decent dress she owns and it barely fits her thanks to the remaining baby weight that refuses to go.

Henry’s chattering from his crib, thankfully finished with his whining for the day, and Emma has a look at the time. It’s almost six, which means any second now the sitter will be here, and she still
hasn’t zipped the back of this damn dress up.

In that moment, she decides to do the one thing she swore she’d never do. She bangs on Killian’s wall and says, “Jones, come over here. I need your help.”

Her relationship with Killian Jones is one confusing roller coaster, ultimately having started with her hating him for how he immediately wanted to hit on her, continuing on that same path as she realized that he was her neighbor and his nightly activities included bringing home various women, but since this morning, things have changed.

She knows a little too much about him now, and his behavior makes sense. It’s not justified, but it makes sense. He’s just as broken as she is and he hasn’t been able to heal.

And now they’re going out to dinner posing as a married couple with his college roommate and his college roommate’s pregnant wife.

And basically, Emma Swan is an idiot.

Killian’s voice comes from the other side of the wall, “What?”

“Come over here,” she repeats. “I need help zipping up my dress and the sitter’s going to be here any second.”

For a second, she thinks he’s gone, but then he says, “Are you certain?”

“Yes!” Emma all but shouts. “Oh my God, like ten hours ago you would have been scrambling over here to help me. Get over here, Jones, or I’ll wear sweatpants and a tee shirt to this dinner.”

“Oh, well, don’t do that, love,”

Emma groans softly and puts her face in her hands. Why on Earth is she even doing this? She could be sleeping. She could be cuddling with her kid, watching TV, eating junk food, wearing whatever the hell she wants.

Instead, she’s about to do a huge favor for a guy she wanted gone from her life a few hours ago.

Her front door opens and closes and Killian says, “Swan?”

Emma heads out into the main living space and goes straight to Killian, who wears a fancy looking blue two-piece suit and dark red tie. His hair is actually combed over and he looks kind of nervous.

It makes her laugh softly to herself as she turns around and allows his eyes to take in her slightly bared backside.

“Are you nervous?” she teases.

She’s talking about the night to come, but she gets the idea that he might think she’s talking about zipping her up.

“Gods no,” Killian replies smoothly.

This just in: Killian Jones is definitely a man.

His fingers are calloused and rougher than she’d anticipated, but he’s gentle as he takes her zipper up her back. His other hand helps move her hair out of the way, and when he’s done, she turns toward him as she adjusts her hair again.
When she looks up at him, she finds that he’s staring at her with his eyes blown wide, as if he hadn’t anticipated that she’d look like this. His jaw hangs open for a few moments and Emma feels a blush crawling up her neck, tickling her ears and cheeks.

“Swan, you look…”

Emma releases a sigh and shakes her head. Not wanting him to continue with his inevitable comment, she cuts him off by saying, “Okay. Thanks for your help.”

Emma runs her fingers down her sides and goes back into her bedroom to grab Henry. She carries him into the living room to put him in his playpen and hands him his favorite toys, earning a delighted giggle when she kisses his head.

“I’m going to be back really soon, kid,” Emma whispers. “I love you so much.”

She smiles at the way her son stares at her, with such innocence in his little eyes. His fingers grip at the side of the playpen and he babbles at her.

There’s a knock at her door and Emma stands upright. She crosses the room, going past Killian, who stands there kind of looking like a fool, and opens the door to find the sitter.

“Hey! So you know all the rules. I’ll just be out for a few hours. Should be back by eleven.”

The girl comes into her apartment and grins when she sees Killian standing there. Her eyebrows go up as she looks at Emma, but she just rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “Just a friend.”

“Mmm,” the girl teases. She goes to Henry and her son makes an excited sound. “Hi Henry! I’m going to play with you for a while before you go to sleep, okay?” Emma watches as the sitter turns around. “I think we’re all good, Emma. See you later!”

Emma waves at the girl and grabs her clutch from the counter where she’d left it earlier. She checks it briefly and nods as she looks at Killian.

“Okay. Let’s go.”

As soon as they’re out of the apartment, Emma hears Henry start to cry and it breaks her heart because she really could be in there with him, and she honestly should, but she presses forward regardless of what she could or should be doing.

Killian has a smirk on his lips when she glances up at him as they head for the elevator.

“A friend?”

Emma gives him a look and shakes her head. “Don’t push it, Killian.”

“Oh, come on, love, I’m growing on you.” He teases.

She presses the down button and turns toward him just as he digs into his coat pocket and pulls out two gold rings. Her eyes widen and her heart skips a beat.

“Emma Swan, will you be my fake wife tonight?” he asks.

Emma grabs the ring from him. “You are seriously committed to this, aren’t you?”

Killian raises his eyebrows at her and tilts his head to the side. “Well, my friends are quite perceptive. They’ll notice if we’re not at least wearing our wedding bands.”
She considers him for a few long seconds.

She could easily just turn around now, but there’s something about the challenge, of forcing him to actually straighten up for one night and *not* find some woman at a bar he can bring home.

The thought is a hopeful one, she’s sure. He probably has a rolodex of numbers in his phone ready to fire at will and he’ll be asking one of those very unlucky women to be the second lady he’s seen all night.

On a sigh, Emma nods. “Just tonight. I’m not playing this game with you forever.”

“Of course not,” Killian says with teasing in his tone as Emma slides the ring on over her finger.

It’s a perfect fit. When she looks over at Killian, he slips the ring on over his wedding finger, too.

He holds his arm out for her when the elevator opens and lifts an eyebrow. “After you, Mrs. Jones.”

She really hopes the place they’re having dinner serves plenty of alcohol, because she’s going to need it.
three.

The place is insanely fancy.

There are two forks and there’s a wine glass plus a normal glass and Emma feels _incredibly_ out of place. Not to mention, the man sitting beside her has his arm draped around her and she has a wedding ring wrapped around her finger.

This is easily the wildest thing she’s ever done to get free food.

“I’m so glad we decided to do this,” Mary Margaret sighs happily. She’s staring mostly at Killian, thank God, and Killian just smiles and nods.

“Aye. It’s been quite some time. How are things for you?”

David bobs his head. “They’re great. The business really took off after you left. We’ve had a hard time keeping things from imploding at times, but, honestly, Killian, you missed out on a great opportunity.”

Emma has _no_ idea what’s going on, so she just studies the expression on Killian’s face, that of a mixture of sadness and regret. It fades quickly and he switches on some new persona, the one they’d crafted earlier in her kitchen.

He smiles at her and she smiles back at him, trying to play along as his loving wife. “I don’t think I missed out on anything.”

His fingers suddenly start trailing down her arm and she tries to think of a good way of scolding him without actually rupturing whatever it is that they have going here.

Emma laughs and shakes her head. “Don’t make this about me, honey biscuit.”

There’s a look in Killian’s eyes that she challenges with a lift of a single eyebrow, and his hand falls away. It’s a victory in and of itself.

“Aye, well,” Killian sits up straighter and sighs. “Emma and I wouldn’t have met and I wouldn’t have become half as successful as I am working here in the city.”

Mary Margaret strokes over her baby bump. She looks genuinely interested when she asks, “So you’re practicing law, then?”

Killian hums and bobs his head. “Aye. Family law. I just started my own firm, actually.”

Mary Margaret and David both exchange impressed looks and Emma smiles a little to herself. It’s obvious that these people care about Killian and what he’s doing with his life.

It’s just a little upsetting that his choices have led him to pretending to be married to his next-door neighbor, but with these sappy sweet people as the ones caring over what he decides to do in life, she can’t blame him.

She can only imagine the scolding he’d get if they ever found out that he’s not the kind of guy any girl would ever want to bring home.
At that moment, the waiter returns with their drinks and some bread to share, and conversation stops.

After they place their orders, Emma has to resist the urge she has to just nurse her glass of wine, instead biting down on her tongue as Mary Margaret turns to her and asks, “So what do you do, Emma? Do you stay home with the baby or do you have work?”

“She’s an artist, actually,” Killian speaks up proudly. She looks up at him and he grins at her. He looks every bit the doting and enthusiastic husband. Almost as if he’s been thinking about her art all day. “Go on, love, tell them about your… art.”

Emma shrugs as she turns back to his friends and sighs. “I paint. Landscapes mostly. Sometimes I paint people.”

It’s easily the most depressing thing she’s said all day. And she knows it’s not the last.

Art used to be something she did, even before the mess that was her previous relationship. He’d made her feel wrong about painting, so she let go of it. She doesn’t even know if she still has her painting supplies or if they were sold for gas money.

“Aye,” Killian confirms. “We’ve got a few of those hanging up at the apartment. You’re bloody magnificent at it, sweetheart.”

Emma grits her teeth as she smiles and reaches up to pat his cheek. “Aw, thanks, pookie bear.”

Killian hums a laugh as she removes her hand from his face.

“So you must be thrilled with a baby on the way.” Killian turns the conversation back toward Mary Margaret and David and the actual married couple exchanges the sweetest of glances.

“Yes,” Mary Margaret says. “It’s a boy. We’re still debating on what we want to name him.”

Killian laughs. “I know how that is. This one was indecisive until the delivery room.”

Little does he know, that’s the complete truth.

It stings and it feels a little too real, talking about her kid as if he and those memories belong to Killian, so she reaches for her wine and has a few polite sips.

Mary Margaret chuckles. “Did you wait to find out the gender before or after?”

Emma shakes her head. “After. I wanted to be surprised.”

The woman nods in understanding. “I could have waited, but I don’t know, it’s so tempting with all the time you spend at the doctor.”

Emma laughs even though she has no idea what Mary Margaret’s going through and has another sip of wine. All this talk about Henry is making her think about Neal and it’s getting her anxious.

“Your son is adorable,” Mary Margaret says, and Emma smiles in thanks.

“Thank you,” she says, finding the look in the woman’s eyes genuine. “He just turned one a few weeks ago.”

Mary Margaret smiles at that. “Well, you and Killian are very lucky. He seems like a good little guy.”
“Aye,” Killian agrees. “He really is. Most of the time. He’s had his fair bouts with teething lately. Good luck when you get to listen to the baby cry for no good reason for hours on end.”

Emma rolls her eyes slightly. He doesn’t even know the worst of it and he’s acting like he does. God, what an idiot.

Or maybe she’s the idiot for going on this double date with him.

David groans and shakes his head. “God, don’t tell me that. I was just moving past the idea that I’ll be getting no sleep for the first few weeks and changing all of the diapers I possibly can.”

Mary Margaret laughs and rubs a circle into her husband’s back. “That’s right you will.”

Emma can only imagine what that’s like. Her heart swells for the two of them, seeing how happy they seem to be together. They seem like a complete match.

“So where do you live in the city?” David suddenly asks.

Killian smiles and immediately answers, “East side. We’ve got ourselves a great loft apartment.” Emma nods. “I had it designed just for us. It’s got four bedrooms and three baths. Plenty for growing our family.”

He smiles down at her and she reaches beneath the table to pinch his thigh. He jerks his leg and bites on his tongue, continuing to smile.

“Oh, I would love to see it,” Mary Margaret says. “I’ve always thought interior design was so interesting.”

Emma lifts her eyebrows pointedly at Killian for even bringing up the lavish life they apparently live and they both turn to his friends at the same time.

“It’s being painted,” Emma explains.

“Aye,” Killian sighs, flawlessly adding as if they’d practiced it, “Fumes everywhere. It wouldn’t be a pleasant trip.”

Emma bobs her head and gestures to Mary Margaret’s belly. “Besides, paint fumes aren’t good for the baby.”

The woman nods. “You’re absolutely right.”

David looks a little skeptical. “Oh, well, maybe next time then.”

“Yeah,” Killian agrees. “It’ll be done in a few days. Hard to believe you’ll just barely miss it.”

David and Mary Margaret make a mutual sound of upset and David grabs the loaf of bread to cut into it.

“Well I’m sure it’s great,” Mary Margaret says. “Much nicer than our place back home.”

David laughs. “Yeah, we just have the two bedrooms and the nursery. It must be nice being able to plan for new additions.”

Emma and Killian both look at each other and chuckle. Killian shrugs his shoulders.

“Well, you know, once you have one…” He trails off.
Emma snorts at his idiocy and he grabs at her leg under the table, arching an eyebrow of warning at her.

She covers it up with a quick, “Let’s see you go into labor for twelve hours, sugar muffin.”

Mary Margaret giggles. “You two are the sweetest couple. How did you meet?”

Emma holds her mouth open as she stares at Killian, about ready to dive into their cliché love connection, but he grins at her and then turns to face his friends as he speaks.

“She moved into my building, actually. I tried to help her move in and-

“I accidentally stepped on his toes and dropped my mattress on him.” Emma finishes, shaking her head.

Killian laughs. “Aye.” His eyes seem brighter than they were before as he gazes at her now. It’s scary, because she made it just a little too real. “But it didn’t deter me. I kept at it. She was the most beautiful lass I’d ever set eyes on and I needed to get to know her.”

His words make her heart flutter and she grabs for her glass, desperate for a drink. Things really shouldn’t be getting so real, but she can’t blame him for her choice of words.

“Well, I’m happy you found happiness, Killian.” Mary Margaret says in a motherly tone.

“Aye.” Killian says warmly. He’s still staring at her and Emma wants to run. “Me too.”

There’s something spoken in the silence that follows, an admiration that goes far deeper than she thinks he must have felt for her before this moment.

He has this whole fantasy painted in his head, of this happy life that they’re living, but as he stares at her, she thinks he’s only thinking of the few minutes at the grocery store where they’d worked together and actually got along.

It’s what she’s thinking of, anyway. And it isn’t good for her avoidance strategies.

“Killian, you really should come back home,” David says after her has a bite of bread. “I know a lot of people would love to see you again. Get to meet your wife and son.”

Killian stiffens a little and his attention goes to his friends. He swallows as his jaw clenches and then shakes his head. “I don’t know, mate. It’s just… it’s been so long and Emma and I have all these great plans for Henry’s first serious Christmas here in the city.”

David nods in understanding, though his eyes seem sad. Mary Margaret shares that look.

But Emma isn’t about to suggest going to Storybrooke, Maine for Christmas after all this talk of happiness Killian’s supposedly found with her, so she keeps her lips closed, even when Mary Margaret gives her what she’s certain are puppy dog eyes.

Conversation moves beyond getting Killian to go back home, and instead David and Killian share great stories about their college days.

Emma finds them genuinely funny and Killian grins at her cheekily when she reaches over to take his hand after hearing one particularly sad story about a prank gone awry for him. She releases his hand and rolls her eyes at him with a minute shake of her head.

By the time dessert rolls around, Emma feels just a little too close to these people- Killian
especially.

She’s learned far too much about the Nolan’s and their quaint little life in Storybrooke, and Killian has ended up sitting just a little closer to her, his laughter warm in her ear and his voice a low rumble.

“The town is so lovely in the winter,” Mary Margaret says. “Right now it’s covered in snow, and there are Christmas lights all along Main Street, so it’s really quaint.”

David nods in agreement. “And Granny’s Diner still has those Christmas specials.”

“Really?” Killian asks, a smile in his tone. “Even the gingerbread pancakes?”

“Especially the gingerbread pancakes,” David says in the affirmative. Mary Margaret chuckles. “I have gone to Granny’s a hundred times since she put out the holiday menu.”

“Cravings,” Mary Margaret admits in a hush to Emma, who chuckles and nods.

Killian drapes his arm around Emma’s chair as he shifts so he’s sitting back and Emma straightens, pressing her arms down on the table. She braces her chin in her hand as she listens to Killian talk about Granny’s with a special fondness in his tone.

“You’d love it, darling,” he says on a wink, forcing her to meet his eyes. “It’s this little old fashioned place. I used to work there before Liam asked me to work for him instead. Granny would get pissed when I was late for my shift. She’d make me stay past close to clean the dishes.”

Emma chuckles. She can almost imagine him, ten years or so younger, acting like he owned the place only to be straightened out by an older woman who wouldn’t put up with him. It’s what she wishes she could do to him now, as he’s sitting here pretending he’s married and high up in the world when he’s anything but.

“I do miss it,” he admits to his friends.

“Then you should come home for Christmas,” Mary Margaret says, her tone edging on hopeful. “We have a spare bedroom you could use. And I’m sure Henry could have just as much fun in Storybrooke as he’d have here. He’d be around family in Storybrooke.”

Emma’s hands fall from the table and Killian drops his gaze so he’s staring at her.

She catches her breath, because she knows exactly what he’s about to say. And it means she’s in for the Christmas of her life.

But the thing is, it wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world. The Nolan’s are such nice people, and this town they love so dearly sounds like the fairytale it promises to be. She already feels at home with these people, and with this town.

“Alright. I’ll come home.”

David smiles wide and Mary Margaret giggles happily. Emma can’t find it in herself to fight Killian when his friends are so happy.

“Well, I’m glad to hear that.” David says. “I’m sure everyone in town will be excited to meet you, Emma.”

Emma’s eyes widen and she forces a smile. “I’m excited to meet them, too.”
He’s thankful that Emma waits until they’re on the sidewalk outside of their building.

The taxi driver probably would have reported them, though he’s sure any number of people could be listening as Emma yells at him in the middle of the sidewalk, so while the first ten minutes were spent in a horribly uncomfortable silence, this might be an even worse fate.

“I cannot believe you agreed to drag me and my kid all the way to Maine for Christmas,” Emma shakes her head. “Did you even consider me at all, Killian? Did you consider what I have going on? What about my son?”

Killian sighs. He settles his hands on her arms but she swats them away. “Swan, it’s just for a week.”

“Hm,” Emma bites down on her tongue. “So what you’re telling me is that now that we’ve conned your friends into believing we’re married with a kid, we have to continue to lie to them, and to an entire town, for a week.”

Killian stares at her blankly. She throws her arms up in the air and laughs maniacally.

“What the hell did I do wrong to get into this position, Jones? I don’t want to be your friend and yet you insist upon trying anyway. Then, when I just start coming around to the idea of being your friend, suddenly we’re married.”

Killian sighs. His breath is white in the cold air and Emma’s cheeks are bright pink. She folds her arms to her chest and shakes her head.

“I don’t think continuing this is a great idea. It’s a lot you’re asking of me and honestly, even going to dinner tonight was a stretch. Why don’t you just tell them the truth? That you’re a loser who won’t settle down because you’re afraid of commitment?”

He furrows his brow in confusion as his heart leaps in his chest. He’s about to ask her where she’s drawing her insight from, but Emma yanks off the ring he’d given her and puts it in his hand.

“I’m not just another one of those women you meet at a bar or on the bus. I’m your neighbor. And I might… “ She pauses, searching his eyes. “I might be your friend.” It’s a small victory in the midst of a beating, because he’s started feeling the same way towards her. She’s much deeper than he’d imagined, and he just wants more. “But I’m not your wife and I’m not going to act like this whole thing was a good idea, because it wasn’t. Helping you with this was a mistake.”

And then she’s storming up to the front door of the building, her fury practically exuding from her with smoke coming from her heels.

Killian chases her and catches up to her at the elevator. He steps in beside her and shakes his head.

“If you don’t do this for me, David is going to come out on the other side looking much better than me.”

Emma gives him a look. “And why does that matter to anyone but you?”

“Because David was the last person I talked to before I left town and he told me that he believed that I would never find happiness like he had.” Killian closes his eyes and shakes his head. “So in order for me to prove to him that I’m alright, that I’m in fact better than he is, I need you to help me.”
The elevator doors open and Emma steps out. She doesn’t look at him. They move in silence until they reach their doors.

“What, is this some sort of competition?” Emma snaps. “Which one of you can have the better life?”

“A little bit,” Killian retorts, his eyebrows raised. “Listen, David doesn’t believe in me, Emma, and I have a feeling you know what that feels like. That’s why I need you to help me.” She stares at him and clenches her jaw. “You’ve already done so well. Tonight at dinner, even I was sold that we were a happily married couple.”

Emma’s eyes get wide and she shakes her head slowly.

“So, what’s your plan, Killian? We have to pick up this act every year?” she asks. “We have to pretend we’re that couple every Christmas and stay over at their house and-”

Killian shakes his head. “No. We’d just… leave and I wouldn’t stay in contact with them.”

Emma huffs out a sigh. “No. I’m not doing it.”

He watches as she turns to open her door. “Emma, there’s free food. All week. And I’ll make sure your rent gets paid this month.”

She stops and looks over at him.

“Besides, I know you can’t have plans for Henry’s first Christmas here and it must be bothering you quite a deal. If you come to Storybrooke with me, I can at least give you that.”

For a few long moments Emma stares at him and he thinks for sure that she’s about to deny him. But then her gaze softens as her eyes fall in thought.

She shakes her head and releases a heavy sigh. “Okay. Fine.”

Killian smirks at her. “Great. We’ll leave next Saturday.”

Emma rolls her eyes. “The second it gets to be too much, I’m out.” He shrugs in agreement. Emma folds her arms to her chest. “And you’re not kissing me. And we’re not sharing a room. I don’t care what they said about a guest room. We’re not doing that because we’re not together.”

“Of course,” Killian agrees.

His neighbor nibbles on her lip. “And you have to swear to me on your life that you’ll stop flirting with me and trying to get me to sleep with you. Because we’re friends, Killian.”

His smile spreads and he tips his head once. “Aye. I swear on my life.”

Emma eyes him warily and nods her head. “Okay. And you can’t have any girls over this week.”

Killian gives her a look. “Swan, we’re not actually married.”

Her eyes widen and she shrugs. “Okay, then I’m not playing house with you.” She reaches for the doorknob and Killian groans.

“Fine. No girls.”

Emma smiles then and hums. “This whole thing might actually work in my favor.” She opens up
her door. “See you, Jones.”

Killian barely waves at her before her door is shut, and then he turns to his apartment door to lean his forehead against it. “Bloody hell. What have I done?”
four.

He actually holds up his end of the deal. He doesn’t have anybody over, and as an added bonus, he doesn’t play his music half as loud as he usually does.

Emma kind of feels sorry for him, because he’s about to return to the home that apparently he’s spent six years trying to stay away from, and not only that, he’s returning home on a con. It’s probably not the way he might have dreamed of making his big return in the slightest.

Emma somehow gets her boss to agree to giving her the week off when she explains that her kid is sick and she needs the time to help him get better, and honestly, it’s starting to feel like a sick joke to her that she’s doing this for Killian Jones.

He’s not her favorite person in the whole world, with his behavior and attitudes, and yet, he’s managed to break into her mind and start nigling at the back end of her every thought.

So, okay, maybe she’s been hard on him because she hates the way he’d tried to become friends right off the bat. He’s not that bad of a person, she knows now, despite the fact that he tends to keep her up nightly with all the noise coming from his side of the other wall.

He has wounds that hurt and he has fond memories that bring bright light to his eyes. And he’s gentle and kind with Henry, so it’s not like he’s a monster. He’s just an idiot and she doesn’t have time for him being an idiot while he tries getting his life together.

Emma lies awake listening to the sound of Henry sleeping early the morning she’s supposed to meet Killian in the hallway for their trip up to Maine.

Truthfully, she’s only really been hard on him because of her past experiences with guys. They haven’t all been great, and one of them abandoned her with three months left in her pregnancy.

Killian isn’t a bad guy. He’s just as hurt as she is. But he’s managing it in quite possibly the worst way ever.

On a groan, Emma buries her face into her pillow and tries to wipe away the memories she has of their night out with the Nolan’s, with their kind hearts and stories that went on for hours.

She tries to forget how Killian had stared at her in certain moments, at the way his hand felt against hers, and how, despite all of the lies, he’d told them the truth about their meeting.

For a lie to seem natural, it should be rooted in some truth, she supposes.

“Mama,” Henry says, suddenly awake and standing in his crib when she looks at him.

Emma laughs and crawls down her bed to go grab him. She takes him into her bed with her and cuddles close to him, leaving kisses on his cheeks.

“Hi, Henry,” she whispers. Emma strokes his hair back. “Did you sleep good? Huh?”

Henry babbles at her and she plays with his fingers as he sits contentedly in her lap. “We’re going on a trip today, monkey.”

Emma takes her fingers through his hair and smiles softly. “You need to be really good, okay?”
She thinks about how long they’re going to be gone for, considers all of the potential disasters that are to come, and sighs heavily.

In just a little while, they’re going to be going to Maine and they’re going to pretend to be a family with one Killian Jones.

It’s not the worst way to spend a week, especially considering that her plans for Christmas included taking Henry to see the tree at Rockefeller Plaza and maybe visiting Santa if she had the time. She hadn’t even really planned on taking off work, because she’s kind of been trying to get out of New York, ever since she’d moved here. It just hasn’t felt like home, and it’s pricey as all get out.

Regardless of whatever frustration she has about Killian Jones and his decision to make her his model wife, she’s about to do this. She’s about to do this for Henry, who has had the busiest year a little boy could possibly have.

She wants to give him the best she possibly can. She wants him to have the life she wasn’t able to because of the life her birth parents gave to her when they left her on the side of the road.

There’s just something about the way David and Mary Margaret painted the picture of Storybrooke that’s drawn her in. It seems not only safe, but also warm, and inviting, there.

And despite her baser judgments, Emma wants to know what it feels like to have a home. Even if it’s only for a week.

///

Killian lies in his bed the morning he’s due to go back home regretting every decision he’s ever made leading up to this point.

He probably shouldn’t have left Storybrooke in the first place, but here he is, not in Storybrooke, living the life he swore to himself, and to David, that he’d never live.

And it’s the thought of David getting the upper hand that makes Killian feel just confident enough to do this again.

Emma and Henry aren’t going to be collateral damage. If anything, they’re just along for the trip out of state, and he knows Emma silently appreciates the fact that he’s given her the opportunity for giving Henry a Christmas.

She works as a waitress, he thinks, because he’s seen her in her little outfit with the nametag still attached to her chest. He’s also seen her heading out with a bag over her shoulder, so part of him wonders if she’s also attempting to attend school.

Either way, he’s blown away by just about every single word that falls from her lips. He might talk a big game, but he knows she’s far too good for him.

From her side of their shared wall, he hears her get up out of bed, only to return a few moments later with a chattering baby in her arms.

It’s a rather sweet sound, Henry talking in his little voice while Emma soothes him. Killian finds himself almost wishing he could be over there, squeezing Henry’s little fingers and toes, giving his head kisses while he breathes him in.

“We’re going on a trip today, monkey.” Emma says, and he grins at the nickname she’s given to
her son. “You need to be really good, okay?”

Henry makes a rather loud noise and Emma laughs. Killian shifts his arm to rest above his head, straining to hear her because she’s happy.

She’s so bloody beautiful when she’s happy and he can’t even see the crinkles by her eyes or the dimples in her cheeks, but he knows they’re there.

“We’re going to meet so many people,” Emma murmurs. “And you can’t get upset when Killian wants to hold you, okay? He’s… he’s your daddy for now.”

Killian’s heart skips a beat and he drags his hand over his face.

“Kind of,” Emma amends a second later. “It’s confusing. Mommy doesn’t like it. But I wanted to give you a good Christmas, monkey. We can have yummy food and see Christmas lights. And there will be lots of snow, so we’re going to have to bundle you up warm.”

Killian’s lips curl into a smile. His teeth dig into his lower lip as he turns onto his side so he can stare at his alarm clock.

“And you’ll get plenty of kisses and cuddles,” Emma promises her son. “And this year, your dad won’t try to take you from me because he’s far, far away from us.”

For a moment, he wonders about this mysterious father of Henry’s. He knows only bits and pieces about Emma, and the father of her son is something in particular that she works quite hard at keeping from him.

He supposes it’s a part of her past that’s much like his in that she’d like to put it behind her and work her way around it. Neither one of them are very good at it. Maybe it’s why they’re so electric when they’re together.

“I love you, Henry,” Emma’s voice is quiet. “And I really hope this is a good year for us.”

His alarm goes off and Killian shuts it off with a sigh, glaring at the numbers. He hears Emma shift on the other side of the wall, her head falling back against it.

“We’d better get up, huh?” she asks, and he thinks she’s talking to Henry, but then she knocks on the wall twice. “I know you’re awake, Killian.”

He smiles, because he can’t help it, and pushes himself up so he’s leaning back against the wall where her voice comes from.

“You’ve got excellent hearing.”

Emma hums. “It’s a mom thing.”

Killian laughs and drags his fingers through his hair. “Well, then, yes, it’s time to get up. We’ve got a few hours’ drive and I know you’ll probably want the grand tour when we arrive.”

From the other side of the wall, Emma is quiet.

“You know, this is the most idiotic thing I think I’ve ever done in my life and I’ve done a lot of dumb crap.” Emma tells him.

Killian tips his head back so he’s staring at his ceiling. “Aye, well, this isn’t my greatest adventure, either.”
They both sit in silence, backs to the thin wall between them, and he hears Emma turn, her sheets scraping under the sound of her shifting motion.

“I’ve got a question for you, Emma,” he says quietly.

“Yeah?”

He reaches up to press his hand against the wall and licks his lips. “Do you actually paint?”

It takes her a few seconds to respond. “I did. Before Henry was born. Before… a lot of things.” She pauses. “I grew up in the foster system, so painting was the only thing that was constant for a long time.”

Killian’s heart aches, for the little girl who was passed from home to home, without ever finding a place to call hers. He can see it in her eyes that she’s an orphan, just as he and Liam are. At least he had Liam, for whatever time that was.

He closes his eyes as he tries to think of what kinds of art she must have come up with, and he likes to imagine that she’d be rather talented with the brush, knowing how gently she’d scrubbed the dishes in her sink the other day.

“I’d love to see your art sometime, Swan.”

Emma laughs. “Of course you would.”

Killian sighs. The moment is over. She’s running from him.

“Emma Swan,” he murmurs her name, shaking his head. “Whatever will I do with you?”

///

Killian has this old pickup truck that he takes her to after leaving the building with their bags. He says it’s his brother’s, that he’d come to New York after stealing it, and never intended on bringing it back home.

She can almost see it now: the truck getting just as much of a warm welcome as Killian will, if not more, if his friends and family don’t really care to see him again.

“You’re going to have to put this bottom part in,” Emma informs him, holding out the base of the car seat for him to take as soon as she opens the passenger’s side door.

He grumbles a little, giving her a look. “I wasn’t aware my husbandly duties extended to the trip beforehand.”

Emma lifts an eyebrow, adjusting Henry on her hip. “Hey, buddy, you’re the one that wants us there.”

Her companion chuckles. “Aye. I suppose that’s true.”

On a heavy sigh, he opens up the cab door and boosts himself inside.

Killian installs the car seat with quite a deal of grief, cursing under his breath while Emma sways with Henry in the snow. She watches him with a lifted eyebrow, and he pulls himself back when it’s finished, breathless.

“There. It’s all set.”
She checks it to see how well he’d done, and she’s pleasantly surprised to find that he’d done it right. Emma settles Henry into his car seat and then drops down to stand outside of the truck with Killian, her breath coming out in a puff of white air.

“Okay,” she says. “Well, he’s ready to go.”

She drops her arms to her sides and sighs so her breath fills the space between them. Her brow creases as she stares at Killian and he smirks at her.

“Are you ready to go, Swan?” Killian asks.

Emma licks her lips and tilts her head at him in a challenge. “If you are.”

Killian hums. He digs into his jean pocket and pulls out two very familiar gold bands. Of course. It’s all part of looking the part.

She gives him a hard look, but he just smiles and falls onto his knee, in the snow, and says, “Emma Swan, will you be my fake wife for the week?”

Emma rolls her eyes so hard she thinks they might fall out of her head.

“Get out of the snow, you idiot.”

She plucks the ring from his hand and yanks him to his feet. All the while, he’s smirking at her like he’s won a prize.

Emma slides the ring on over her finger and holds her hand up at him. “Okay. Promise this is only going to be the week, because I can’t-”

“It’s only for the week, love,” Killian tells her as he slides his ring on. He takes a deep breath and lifts his shoulders and his eyebrows. “And as soon as it’s done, we won’t ever have to see those people again.”

There’s something in his tone, and in the way he so quickly carries himself off so he’s hopping into the driver’s side, that touches on years of pent up tension.

She doesn’t know the exact details of what happened, but she has a feeling that mostly, it was the loss of his girlfriend that sent him into a downward spiral, David got angry with him, and somehow Killian got to where he is now: faking a happy family and life in order to prove him wrong.

It’s kind of a sad reality when she thinks about it.

And, of course, she’s no better, hopping into the truck beside him.

She hasn’t ever had an actual family in her whole life, so all of this talk of small town intimacy has chills running down her spine, and it’s not just because it’s freezing cold out.

Killian starts his truck as Emma buckles in and she looks back at Henry, who bounces his feet in his chair and babbles to himself. Turning forward again, she sets eyes on Killian first, who has his jaw clenched as he pulls the vehicle into drive. He licks his lips and furrows his brow.

It’s not the first time she’s thought about how attractive he is. But the thing about him is that she kind of can’t stand him, even though they’re just barely friends and doing this horribly ridiculous con together.

Emma averts her attention to the road ahead of them and allows herself to watch their surroundings
for a little while, but then she realizes Killian’s taking the completely wrong way and she turns to him again.

“You’re not taking the highway?” she asks.

Killian shakes his head. “We are. We’re just going this way for a few miles first.”

Emma gives him a look. “That’s going to take like half an hour longer than necessary.”

Killian focuses on the road ahead. “What, you don’t want to spend time with your husband?”

His tone is completely normal, as if he’s just asking a simple question, but his eyebrows lift and he wears a dangerous smirk on his lips when he briefly looks at her.

Emma rolls her eyes. “You’re not even- oh my God.” She punches him in the side and he flinches, swerving the car a little. “Killian! There’s a baby in the car. Could you watch yourself for once in your life?”

“That’s going to take like half an hour longer than necessary.” He complains, practically whining at her.

They drive in complete silence for a few long moments, the only noise being the rush of the tires against the road and the traffic around them.

Henry makes a happy sound and grabs his toes when Emma glances back to check on him.

At least her kid isn’t as pissed as she is about this whole thing.

“I can’t believe I agreed to do this for you.”


Emma groans and tucks her hair behind her ears under her beanie. She focuses again on the road and takes a few deep breaths to steady herself.

Killian turns on his stupid road that’ll add time to their drive and Emma just sighs softly, telling herself to just have patience because Killian is paying her rent for the month and while she might hate him for his behaviors, deep down he’s a good man. He’s just hiding somewhere beneath the flirtation.

“So…” Killian says, glancing over at her just as she looks at him. “Henry’s dad. Would you tell me about him if I asked?”

Emma laughs once. “He’s a real piece of work. That’s all that matters about him.” She turns her head to cushion it on her shoulder as she stares out the window. “He’s out of the picture now.”

It gets quiet again until Killian asks, “Where’d you grow up?” He pauses. “Well, where’d you spend the most time? I know you said you were in the system.”

“None of your business,” Emma murmurs. She turns her attention to look ahead.

“Well it is if someone asks us where you’re from and I say one thing and you say another.”

Emma huffs a sigh. “Okay. Then we’ll say I’m from… Ohio. I moved to the city to pursue my art and go to school.”
Killian hums. She can sense his silent judgment, so she reaches for the radio and turns it on. She makes a face at the music that plays through the speakers.

“ Seriously, Killian? I would never have pegged you for classical music.”

He just shrugs. “It’s soothing.”

Emma scoffs. She switches the station to one that plays Christmas music, but then grimaces at the song and opts to turn it back off instead.

She sits back and wiggles her fingers on her thighs.

She stares at her “wedding” band and finds it oddly at home on her hand. While she had never thought about marriage before suddenly being married to Killian Jones, suddenly she’s thinking about what she could possibly be missing.

And then the idiot leans forward to switch the radio back on.

There’s a reason Emma doesn’t want a relationship with anyone, and for the most part, it’s because she hasn’t found a single person she can trust. Everyone has abandoned her, or has found a way to hurt her in some way, and Emma’s tired of it.

Killian Jones is just an annoying neighbor that she’s somehow gotten messily entangled with. After it’s over, she’s already planning on what she’ll say to the landlord in order to get him removed.

She waits for him to lean away from the radio before flicking it off again.

“What’s wrong with that song?” he asks defensively.

“It’s annoying,” Emma states. “It’s the equivalent to hearing nails on a chalkboard.”

Killian bursts out laughing. “I find it hard to believe that you actually think that about a three minute song about the magic of Christmas.”

Emma narrows her eyes pointedly at him. “I believe what I believe.”

Thankfully, he allows them to sit in silence rather than listening to the music playing over the airwaves.

“You know, it’s about a six hour drive,” Killian tells her after a little while. “We should probably talk about something.”

Emma gives him a look. “And what would you like to talk about, Killian?” He smiles and winks at her. “God, this is perfect for you, isn’t it? This is what you’ve wanted since you met me.”

Killian shrugs his shoulders. “It’ll suffice.”

Emma hums.

She looks ahead at the road, contemplating just how much she wants to talk about, and she realizes that heartache would come just a little too easily in this situation, with them pretending to be married, so she keeps her mouth shut.

It gets a little annoying when Killian starts rapping his fingers against the steering wheel of his truck, and even more annoying when he starts to sing Christmas carols under his breath, so Emma says, “Fine. You can ask me three questions.”
Killian grins wickedly at her. “Do you have any siblings?”

It’s a softball and she feels like she can handle it. She shakes her head. “Nope.”

Killian considers his second question carefully. He sits up straighter and glances at her as he asks, “How old are you?”

“Twenty four.”

He hums. “I’m twenty seven.”

Emma doesn’t respond to his statement. She just keeps staring on ahead at the traffic before them.

“Wow. Last question.” Killian murmurs, releasing a sigh. “Well, I could ask you what you like to do for fun, but I think I already know that answer.”

“You do, do you?” Emma teases, lifting an eyebrow.

He hums. “You’re an artist. Or… you were.”

Emma nods her head. “I already told you that one this morning.”

“Right,” Killian agrees, lifting his fingers slightly off of the wheel. His tongue digs into his cheek. “I could ask you what you do for work but I feel like that would be a waste of a question as well. I’ve got a fairly good idea about that.”

Emma narrows her eyes at him. “What are you trying to prove, Killian? That you somehow know me? You don’t.”

Killian’s eyebrows dance when she looks at him. He tilts his head to the side. “You’re something of an open book, Swan.”

“Oh, okay,” Emma humors him with a nod. She rolls her eyes and turns her attention to the side window.

They sit in silence for a solid five minutes before Killian says, “I think I’ll save my third question for later, if that’s alright with you.”

“That’s fine.”

She assumes it’ll happen within the minutes that follow, but it doesn’t. And it doesn’t even happen a few hours into their trip.

Whenever it’s going to happen, Emma has a feeling she’ll be caught backed against a corner with no choice but to be honest with him.

And that scares her.
Chapter 5

five.

He’s been dreading this moment for the entire six-hour drive to Maine. The Storybrooke sign is just as it was when he’d left, perched by the town line with its cheery font.

He grimaces the second he sees the damned thing and his tongue caresses the sharp edge of his teeth. He leans his left arm against the door and holds his head in it, using his right to keep the truck moving steady.

He hasn’t spoken to Emma in several hours, and she hasn’t said a word either, except when she needed to stop so she could change Henry at the rest area.

Coming home was never meant to be how he would spend this Christmas. He’d be just as content waiting around his apartment, drinking spiked eggnog and watching Christmas films until three in the morning. Sulking is how he would have rather spent this week.

Instead, he’s about to be bombarded with his past, memories he’d much rather forget assaulting him at every stop and juncture. The town is small, which means eventually Liam will catch wind of his arrival, if he hasn’t already shown up at the diner where David said he’d meet them.

Killian releases a pent up sigh at the sight of the first buildings. Snow trickles from the sky above, a gentle thing in contrast to the way he feels.

It shouldn’t feel like this, because he has a plan. He has Emma and Henry here with him, and they’ve got a really good story to tell. It’s just for the week. They’ll just lie their way through the week and he’ll never have to come back.

Killian glances over at Emma, who curls her legs up under her as she sits in the passenger’s side. She leans against the window, her beanie keeping her head and ears warm, and she twists the wedding ring wrapped around her finger.

“It’s going to be fun, I think.” Killian tells her as he looks ahead. “Lots of local traditions and the like. Usually Town Hall has this massive Christmas tree out front, and on Christmas Eve, the elementary school kids get together and sing carols.”

When he looks at Emma, she has a tiny smile on her lips. She allows her legs to fall down from the bench and she clasps her hands between her thighs to keep them warm.

“How many people are going to want your autograph?” she asks.

She’s clearly teasing him, her smile creating laugh lines by her eyes, and Killian chuckles. She joins him, her laughter soft and a pleasant surprise, after all of the time they’d spent sitting in complete silence.

“It’s hard to say,” he says honestly. “I’m not some sort of… town celebrity if that’s what you’re thinking. I’ve just been gone for a while. Most of the people that live in this town stay here.”

Emma hums in thought. “I guess that makes sense.”

They start driving into town then, and Killian manages to breathe without choking while he stares at the buildings he’d once frequented.
He smiles as they pass by the town library, hidden under the clock tower. “That’s the library where a good friend of mine, Belle, used to spend all of her free time.”

Emma smiles at that. “Is she going to be here still?”

Killian shakes his head. “I imagine so. She’s probably running the library by now.”

Granny’s Diner is up ahead and Killian’s stomach twists at the sight of it, at the reminder of all of the memories he has there.

“There’s Granny’s,” he says, but Emma’s already looking out her window at the building. “She has a Bed and Breakfast, too. I figure we could get a room.”

Emma narrows her eyes at him. “A room?”

“Aye, well, obviously I’d be sleeping out in the truck.” Killian says as he pulls into a parking spot in front of the diner. He shifts the gear into park and releases a sigh.

“Well, this is it.” Emma says.

Killian lifts his eyebrows at her. “Are you backing down from the challenge, Swan?”

“Never in a million years,” she replies. He watches as Emma opens her door and then as she grabs Henry from the backseat with such ease that it might look like she’s done it before.

Henry happily attaches himself to Emma’s hip and his little eyes widen at the snow that falls from the sky.

“Look at the snow, Henry,” Emma gasps. Killian can’t help but smile at the sight of Emma smiling and doting on her son. She turns to him after a beat. “C’mon, honey. Aren’t you going to show us around?”

“Yes, dear,” Killian replies with a teasing lift of his eyebrows. He opens his door and closes it, quickly hurrying around the truck to meet up with the single mother that’s pretending to be his wife.

“Killian?” a familiar voice questions from his right. Killian turns to see her standing at the arch leading into Granny’s, a gob smacked look on her face.

She looks delightful, in a warm winter coat and hat with a ball on the end of it. Her dark hair curls down her shoulders and her smile is brighter than a dozen suns.

“Belle!” he laughs, surprised. His smile spreads wide, toward his ears, and he goes to his friend, eager to give her a hug.

“I didn’t know you’d be coming back into town. What a surprise! It’s been so long.” Belle says as they pull apart.

Killian smiles, wanting now more than ever to brag on his good life. He nods his head. “Aye, well, I suppose now’s better than never.”

Belle gives him a gentle grin. “You’re right.” She pokes him in the chest. “But you, Killian Jones, have missed out on so much. It’s going to take me hours to fill you in on the gossip.”

Killian laughs. “I’ll have to meet you for a cuppa while I’m here, then.”
His friend looks around him and Killian stumbles slightly as he steps back. He sucks in a breath and holds his arm out to Emma.

“Uhm, Belle, this is my wife, Emma, and our son, Henry.” Killian waits for Emma to step into the spot beside him before saying, “Emma, this is my good friend, Belle French.”

“Ah- actually, it’s Scarlet now.” Belle says with a little nod and blush to her cheeks. She shakes Emma’s hand and Killian gapes at her.

“No,” he says, laughing. “You can’t have possibly gotten Will Scarlet to settle down.”

Belle sways from side-to-side for a moment and her smile spreads. “I’m not saying it was easy, but, I guess, with time, even the toughest of shells can be cracked.”

Killian nods his head. He’s reminded of how Emma had avoided answering his questions earlier and it makes him look over at her to find that she seems a little uncomfortable.

Belle smiles at Emma, though, and tilts her head to get a look at Henry. “He’s very sweet.”

“Thank you,” Emma says, getting her first words in since the start of the conversation.

Belle presses her lips together in a smile and tilts her head toward Granny’s. “I was just leaving Granny’s to head back to work at the library. We’ll have to talk soon, Killian.”

Killian nods in the affirmative. “Aye. Of course. I’m sure I’ll see you around town in a matter of hours.”

Belle chuckles and then waves at them. “Absolutely. It was so nice meeting you, Emma. It’s nice to know Killian found someone after what happened.”

Emma’s the perfect actress when she smiles and nods. “It was nice meeting you too, Belle.”

Killian watches as Belle walks away, her boots crunching against the snow on the sidewalk, and he catches her glimpsing back at him once before he gives Emma his attention.

“Come along then, darling, we should get Henry in out of the cold.”

Emma nods once and presses her hand to Henry’s back as they walk toward the diner.

///

She feels incredibly out of place walking into Granny’s Diner with Killian at her side.

It’s funny that it took her until this very moment to realize how terribly, horribly stupid she was when she agreed to do this for him, because she had a whole entire week to get hyped up for this and somehow couldn’t sense how much of a bad decision this was.

Killian is immediately recognized by at least half of the room that they walk into, which is a good seven people that come up to them with wide eyes and about a hundred questions, all of them fawning over the fact that he’s actually here.

An older woman is the first and Emma finds that she’s practically the embodiment of the establishment’s title. She’s a sweet old lady with glasses perched on her nose and despite her quaint outer appearance, she does have a bit of a flare for sass.

It’s humorous to Emma, watching the woman pull Killian Jones down by his cheeks so she can
look him in the eyes.

“Killian Jones, you better have a good reason for leaving. I was worried about you, boy.”

Killian laughs weakly. “Ah... well, I can’t say it was my best decision, but I’ve come back and I’ve got a family now.”

The woman releases his face and Killian stands upright, settling his hand on the small of Emma’s back.

“Granny, this is my wife, Emma. And our son, Henry.”

Emma isn’t prepared for the hug that Granny gives her. The old woman smells like a diner and old perfume, and her smile spreads to her ears.

“No kidding,” Granny says as she pushes away, giving Henry a thorough once-over. “Well, I’m Granny Lucas. I run this place.” Granny smiles at Emma and winks at her, tilting her head toward Killian. “I practically raised this one. I’m sure he’s told you about me.”

Emma just laughs and nods, even though no, Killian hadn’t told her any of that. “Yeah. Killian loved it here. It’s one of the reasons he wanted to come home.”

Granny makes an awed face, clutching her hands over her heart as she turns to Killian again. “Well, just so you know, Liam’s out of the state on business until tomorrow.”

Killian’s shoulders fall just slightly and if Emma isn’t mistaken, his smile becomes easier. He breathes out. “Just in time for Christmas, then.”

Granny hums and then turns toward her diner, where the ghosts of Killian’s past life all linger.

“Give them some space,” Granny tosses her hands. “You’ll have time to talk to him tomorrow night at the party.”

Emma cranes her head to look at Killian, her brow arched in confusion. She sure as hell didn’t pack for any parties.

“Let’s sit, hm?” Killian asks her, walking her toward one of the only empty booths in the establishment.

Emma finds it hard to relax with Henry beating the table as soon as she sits with him in her lap. Killian sits across from them, his eyes on the door, and Emma keeps glancing past Killian to find the prying eyes of Storybrooke’s citizens on them.

She leans in toward Killian and whispers, “You didn’t tell me you were the beloved of the town. Don’t you have any enemies?”

Killian shrugs his shoulders slightly and tips his head toward the door. “That’s why I’ve got one eye on the door, love.”

A waitress, a woman with a red streak in her otherwise dark hair, belly button showing at the base of her white top, and a smile stretched wide, settles herself at the head of their table.

“‘Well, if it isn’t Killian Jones,’” she says, giving him a once-over long enough for Emma to become uncomfortable.

Emma clears her throat at the way Killian stares back at the woman, with his jaw unhinged and his
tongue dancing over his lips.

“Honey, I’m going to take Henry to the bathroom. He needs a changing.”

Killian finally looks at her and loses the look straight from his face. He smiles and nods. “Aye. I’ll… I can show you where it is.”

“No, I’m sure I can find it,” Emma insists. She rises out of the booth and stares back at the waitress with a thin smile. “Hi. I’m Emma. Killian’s wife.”

And she hopes the woman’s hearing it as: *keep your hands to yourself*, because she doesn’t have time for the Killian Jones she knows coming out to play.

The woman nods her head in a slow motion, understanding in her eyes. “I’m Ruby. Granny’s granddaughter.” She points to the back of the establishment and adds, “The bathrooms are in the back hallway. You should be able to find them easily.”

“Thanks.”

Emma carries Henry past all of the patrons in the diner with her heart racing. She just needs to breathe, because it’s *suffocating*, being surrounded by all of these people while Killian reacquaints himself with them.

She steps through the back door and easily enough discovers the ladies room, but as she’s standing outside of it, a guy walks out of the men’s room and nearly runs into her.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” he says, and Emma looks up to find a pair of brown eyes staring back at her. He has dimples in his cheeks when he smiles at her and he narrows his eyes at her when he says, “I don’t think you’re local, are you?”

“No,” Emma laughs. “I’m just… visiting.”

The guy nods his head. Emma takes in his appearance and finds that he’s a cop, based on the badge he’s flaunting.

“Well, it’s good having you here. I’m Graham. If you have any questions, Miss…” He lingers, waiting for her to give her name, and Emma holds her mouth open for a moment.

“Jones.” She ends up blurting out, and quickly covers with, “Emma. I’m here with my husband. He grew up here, apparently.”

Graham’s eyes narrow intentionally and he suddenly frowns at her. “Jones? As in *Killian Jones*?”

Her heart skips a beat at the connotation and she nods slowly as she shifts Henry on her hip. “Yeah. Why? Is there something wrong? Something I should know?”

The man takes a deep breath and his eyes widen as he shakes his head. “No. No, I’m sorry. I just haven’t seen him since the accident. He blames himself for what happened, but...” Graham cuts himself off as he stares at her. “Is he… is he here?”

“Yeah,” Emma says, nodding. “He’s out there having a meet-and-greet with the entire town. Apparently he’s a rock star around here.”

Graham laughs. “Well, Storybrooke is a small town, Emma. Him coming back is kind of a big deal.”
Henry starts to babble in her ear and Emma turns her head, smiling at her son while she adjusts his coat.

“This is your son?” Graham asks, almost timid.

Emma laughs softly. “Yeah. He’s one.” She turns to the officer, who stands there with big eyes, and tilts her head toward the bathroom. “I was going to change him.”

“Right,” Graham smiles. “Well, it was nice meeting you, Emma. I’m sure we’ll get the chance to meet again before you leave.”

Emma just nods and turns to open the bathroom door. Thankfully, it’s a private bathroom with a lock, and she leans back against the door once she’s inside.

“Mama,” Henry says her name, pressing his little hand against her cheek. She turns her face to stare at him and his other hand curls into her hair.

“Henry, what are we doing here?” she asks him quietly. “Why did I decide that this was a good idea?”

Emma presses a kiss to his forehead and closes her eyes as she lingers there, wishing for just a second that her life would suddenly be made better.

It’s a mess, her real life. She’s a single mom living in a dumpy apartment, working a job that pays close to nothing, while she’s been attending night classes and trying to finish her degree.

And when she opens her eyes again, she stares at Henry, and she finds that all she wants is for him to have something she’d never had before: something good.

As long as she’s here, pretending along with Killian, she can offer Henry something good. This place, even if it’s size is terrifying to her, it’s not New York City and it’s not any of the places she’s ever been before. She can be someone new here, and maybe that’s for Henry’s benefit.

With a new breath of air in her lungs, Emma crosses the small square bathroom for the sink and stares back at herself. “Alright, Mrs. Jones, you’re here for Christmas with your husband, so you better get out there and act the part.”

For solidarity, Emma does check Henry’s diaper, and when she finds it clean, she just gives him kisses until he giggles with her and then leaves the bathroom.

When she walks back into the diner, she finds Killian looking back for her, his eyebrows lifting and a smile on his lips. At the head of the table, a man with a long face and a leather jacket stands, his hands on his hips.

Killian stands up from the booth as she comes to stand by the man and he holds his arm out for Emma. “Darling, this is Will Scarlet, Belle’s husband.”

Emma nods in understanding. She shakes Will’s hand as Killian introduces her and Henry to him.

“Gods, Jones,” Will says, shaking his head. “You’ve done mighty well for yourself.”

Emma actually finds herself blushing a little under the man’s gaze. She looks at Killian and he shrugs. There’s a moment that they just stare at one another and her heart skips a beat.

“I don’t know. I guess she likes me.”
She laughs. “Only when you feed me. I’m starving.”

Killian rolls his eyes and allows her to slide into his side of the booth.

“She’s a gold digger, I’ll tell you what,” Killian teases, glancing back down at her.

She catches his wink and gives him a momentary glare that fades into a smirk that only a wife would give her husband when he’s teasing her.

Emma averts her attention to the menu placed on the table before her and she plays with Henry’s fingers as she leans her cheek against his baby soft hair.

“What do you think, monkey?” she murmurs. “Want to share a grilled cheese with Mommy? Huh?” Henry makes a loud noise and she laughs. “Shh. It’s okay.” Emma turns to Killian, finding him still chatting with his friend, and her stomach gurgles. “Hey, Daddy, we got a hungry kid over here.”

Killian turns around, apparently awed by her name for him. He glances down at Henry and nods. “Right.” He smiles a little at Will Scarlet. “I’ll come by sometime while I’m here this week. We’ll have a beer.”

And just like that, Killian Jones makes time for her and for her kid. It doesn’t take anything other than a quick nudging, and he doesn’t complain. He slides in next to her and she feels her heart stop for just a fraction of a second when he smiles at her.

“Well,” Killian says on a sigh. “That was far more chaotic than I could have ever dreamed.”

Emma laughs softly and he joins her with a weary shake of his head.

Killian barely looks down at the table before he looks back at her with his eyes shining so blue and honest. “I apologize for overwhelming you. I know it’s a lot.”

Emma shakes her head. “It’s all good.”

“Yeah?” he asks, furrowing his brow. “Are you certain?”

She manages to smile at him and finds his hand on top of the table, giving his fingers a gentle squeeze. “Yeah.”

Emma quickly takes her hand away from his when Ruby, the waitress from before, comes to their table and tilts her head to the side as she says, “What’ll it be, Joneses?”

Killian’s smirk is wide, first directed at Emma, and then he lifts his eyebrows at Ruby before rattling off what he wants.

“Can I get a hot chocolate with cinnamon on top?” Emma asks, receiving a nod and a warm smile from Ruby. “And grilled cheese with onion rings.”

“Alright,” Ruby collects the menu from the table. “It’ll be right out.”

When she goes away, Killian sits up straighter and licks his lips. “Hot cocoa and cinnamon? Is that your favorite hot beverage?”

Emma lifts a challenging eyebrow. “Is that your third question?”

Killian laughs, waggling his finger at her. “That’s not quite fair, love.”
She hums and leans her cheek against her baby’s head as she stares back at him. She kind of likes teasing Killian Jones, and it’s the reason her heart squeezes tight at the look of loss on his face.

But she knows she can’t allow herself to let this become anything other than some long, twisted lie, because the moment she allows herself to feel something for him, that’s the moment she’s lost.

Killian Jones isn’t going to last if she lets herself fall for him. The world is far too big and his problems run far too deep.

And yet, when they get their hot chocolates with their whipped topping and a little gets on his nose, she bites back laughter before handing him a napkin from the dispenser and making sure gets it all as he wipes it off.

Needless to say, this is going to be a very interesting week.
six.

The onion rings Emma ordered disappear in under ten minutes. She feeds Henry some of her grilled cheese, but he seems more content with the jar of mashed up carrots she pulls out of the bag she’d carried in with them from the truck.

Her contented sigh as she munches on her grilled cheese makes him smile a little to himself as he eats his burger.

“So you prefer onion rings over fries, then?” he asks as soon as he offers her his fries and she denies him.

Emma gives him a little look and shrugs her shoulders. “Maybe.”

Killian takes it as a victory. He glances over at the door when the bell tinkles and he finds David with Mary Margaret right behind him walking into the diner.

The couple approaches their table and smile widely. It’s enough for Killian to remember why they’re doing this; he can’t let David see that he’s just as lost, if not more lost, than when he left this place.


“How was the drive? Not too bad, was it? I heard a storm was coming this way.” Mary Margaret says worriedly.

Killian shakes his head. “No. Not bad at all. Only hit a little traffic in the city, but that’s to be expected.”

“Oh good.” Mary Margaret gives him an easy smile. She settles her hands over her baby bump and David looks around for a moment before gesturing across from them.

“Would you mind if we sat with you?”

Killian scrunches up his face. “Of course not. Please.”

He takes another bite of his burger as the pair settles in across from he and Emma, and Emma sits back, giving Henry her attention when he gets some of his food on his chin.

“So you’re here for the whole week?” David asks.

Killian glances over at Emma, who meets his eyes at that moment. “Ah… yes. We’re here through the twenty-sixth. We’ve got to get back home for some things with Emma’s family.”

Emma’s eyes widen slightly and her jaw falls open, but he just gives David and Mary Margaret his attention.

“Of course.” Mary Margaret smiles. “Emma, would you and Henry like to join me? I’m supposed to make some treats for tonight.”

Emma pauses as she stares back at Mary Margaret and he holds his breath, worried that maybe
she’s suddenly felt like it’s too much. “Tonight?”

Mary Margaret suddenly laughs. “Oh, you don’t know. It’s fine. We have a traditional tree lighting and decorating ceremony tonight. Tomorrow, there’s a party at Granny’s, and the day after that, we have a snowman competition, and then it’s Christmas Eve and Christmas day.”

“Oh,” Emma blinks. She pulls on a smile as she turns to him. “Back home we just celebrated on our own schedule.”

“Aye, well, welcome to a small town, love,” Killian says lightly. His arm goes around her and she shifts forward a little so his arm doesn’t touch her.

It makes him wish she weren’t so opposed to being around him.

He’d thought they were getting closer, with their light teasing earlier, but apparently, he was wrong.

“Where are you from, Emma?” David asks.

Emma regards him with an unflinching smile after having the last bite of her grilled cheese. “Ohio. My parents are coming to the city when we get home, though. They love seeing Henry.”

Killian’s heart aches.

He knows that nobody truly cares to see Henry. Nobody truly cares to see Emma.

They’re both lost, but they’re the most beautiful individuals Killian has ever set his eyes on, and it’s not fair that she has to dream up a family that cares to see them.


Emma tilts her head to the side and smiles. “Yeah. It is nice.”

David hums. Killian watches Emma shift Henry in her arms, turning him so he’s facing Killian. He stretches his arms out when they lock eyes and Killian chuckles.

“Wanna see Daddy?” Emma asks. “Okay. You can see Daddy.”

“Daddy,” Henry repeats.

Killian’s heart about leaps from his chest at the sound slipping past Henry’s lips and he feels tears suddenly welling up in his eyes as he takes the boy into his arms.

Henry has a smile on his face as his fingers clutch at Killian’s shirt and he repeats the word until Killian is almost certain he’s lost the ability to speak.

In all of his life, he’d never thought of becoming a father. Even with Milah, he’d never gotten this far, but with Henry in his arms, grinning so happily, the warmth that blooms in his heart feels more radiant and real than any feeling he’s had before.

Killian kisses Henry’s head and allows the boy to sit on his lap, his fingers gripping the edge of the table while he murmurs little nothings in between words he knows.

“Daddy,” Henry says, and he tips his head back, giggling when Killian makes a face at him.

When he looks up at his friends, David has a dumb grin on his face and Mary Margaret looks like
she could probably faint.

“Alright,” he teases them. “Enough ogling me and my baby, you two. What would you like to do until the tree decorating ceremony?”

David looks over at his wife and then back at him. “Well, I was thinking we could go visit Robin at the bar? If Emma’s alright with spending some time with Mary Margaret, that is.”

Killian feels Emma shift in her spot. She wears a delicate smile as she reaches up to tuck her hair behind her ears. “Sure. I’d love to.”

He smiles back at her, silently thanking her when she looks at him, and she just shrugs in the gentlest of ways.

“Where do you live, Dave? Would it be better if we drove separate or…?”

“Ah… we live just up the street a ways. It’s not too far from everything.”

Killian bobs his head. He turns to Emma and his fingers latch onto Henry’s small ones. “So I’ll just see you later then, darling.”

He realizes what separating means. It means there are a lot of moving variables in play that he’ll have no control over. But, he trusts her, and he hopes she’ll be able to hold her own.

She hums and looks down at the baby in his arms.

Killian kisses the top of his head and closes his eyes as he breathes him in. “Alright, my boy. Off to Mummy.”

Henry whines when Killian attempts to hand him off to his mother and he just chuckles. “It’s alright, lad. I won’t be gone for long. I promise.”

Killian lifts Henry up in his arms for a moment, meeting his eyes. He breathes in deep and presses his palm over the boy’s belly.

“It’s alright.” Killian promises him quietly. He decides then to tickle his little toes and the boy kicks him as he laughs. “See? You’re alright, Henry.”

Killian stands up and Emma slides out of the booth after him. She grabs Henry and settles him down on her hip and then looks up at him with a weak smile.

“Okay, I guess we’ll see you later.”

Killian bobs his head. “Aye. I suppose so.”

David and Mary Margaret are already up and Killian knows this splitting up business is risky, because without each other there to ensure their stories stay the same, there’s no telling what could happen. He just hopes Emma doesn’t get too overwhelmed.

They continue to stare at one another until it’s been well over the acceptable and normal amount of time, and David says on a half-groan, “It’s not for long, Killian. C’mon. Robin’s waiting.”

He sucks in a breath and gives Emma a look that she nods at. A smile twitches at her lips as he grabs his coat from the booth and slides it on.

“We’re fine.” She says in a quiet tone, for only him.
“I know.” Killian’s jaw clenches and he knows he can’t linger any longer, so he just nods once and turns to go without another word.

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Mary Margaret Nolan is one of the most cheery people Emma has ever met. She immediately smiles at Emma as soon as the guys are gone and the apples of her cheeks get pink with a sweet blush.

“So, Emma, what do you say we head home?”

She sucks in a nervous breath and manages to smile at the woman. “Sure. Let me just grab Henry’s diaper bag.”

Emma leans down to pick up the bag after getting both herself and Henry into their coats again, and as soon as she stands, she settles it over her shoulder.

She’s just the slightest bit worried that she’s going off alone. It’s not like this was her plan, after all.

She doesn’t know what she should know about Killian, or what Mary Margaret will expect her to know, and she hopes things don’t get dicey because as soon as things get weird, she’ll probably be prone to ruining it with bad excuses and thinly veiled attempts at lies.

She wonders briefly if Killian has any allergies or if he prefers one cookie to another at Christmastime, but then shakes it off as she and Mary Margaret walk out into the cold afternoon.

There are clouds overhead and snow trickles just slightly, so Emma adjusts Henry’s hat on his head and then her own before ensuring he’s snug in his outfit.

“What do you think so far?” Mary Margaret asks. Emma looks at the woman with an unasked question on her lips and the woman chuckles. “Of Storybrooke. What do you think?”

“Oh,” Emma laughs. She glances around as they make their way up the sidewalk to who knows where and she shakes her head.

It’s far quieter than she could have ever anticipated and she kind of loves it. The people seem kind. The buildings are old and permanent. There’s a certain feel in this town, of homeliness, and she’s anticipating the events in the week to come, because they should give her even better insight as to what this place is actually like.

But so far, it’s kind of a dream town. The kind of town she could see herself living in.

“I think it’s nice,” Emma says on a sigh. Her breath is white in the air and her nose starts to feel cold, so she holds Henry tighter to her. “How long have you lived here again?”

“Almost ten years,” Mary Margaret answers. “I grew up a few miles from here and went to college with David and Killian. After freshman year I convinced my family to move here, too.” Emma can see a twinge of sadness in Mary Margaret’s eyes and she loses her smile for only a heartbeat before saying, “Our place is right here in this building.”

Emma follows Mary Margaret into the apartment building and then up three flights of stairs until they reach the top floor. Mary Margaret sighs happily when she unlocks the door and flips on the lights.
“Well, this is our home,” she says warmly. “You can feel free to take your shoes and coats off. Put them anywhere, really. There’s nobody coming over tonight.”

Emma just stands there taking in the loft space while the woman speaks. It’s quaint and warm, with a rustic and vintage feel.

Mary Margaret gets straight to work after she sheds her winter clothes. She heads into the kitchen and rummages through the cabinets until she finds two mugs.

“Would you like a hot chocolate to warm up?”

Emma’s staring up at the ladder that leads up to the living space on the second floor of the apartment with curiosity and she snaps her attention to Mary Margaret with her jaw hanging open.

“Um… sure. I just had one at the diner but I could have another.”

Mary Margaret hums. “There’s nothing wrong with too much hot chocolate. My mom used to make the best cocoa when I was little. She’d melt the chocolate herself.”

Emma laughs softly as she toes out of her shoes. She settles Henry down on the couch near the door and gets him out of his coat and hat, folding them up and settling them with hers at the table where Mary Margaret had left hers tucked over the back of a chair.

“That sounds really good.”

“Mm,” Mary Margaret closes her eyes for a moment as if remembering. She starts a flame on her stove and settles a pot of water onto it. “Well, I have three types of cookies I was hoping you would help me with. I already have finished a few batches, but we have to have enough to serve something like two hundred people tonight.”

Emma’s eyes widen as she carries Henry over to the kitchen island where the sink resides. She looks over at her son and brushes his hair out of his eyes, leaving a kiss to his head when he decides to snuggle up against her.

“Oh!” Mary Margaret gasps, turning around. She settles a hand over her belly. “And I should have mentioned this earlier, but I have a crib in the nursery. It should be big enough for him, I think.”

Emma follows Mary Margaret down the hall into the nursery, with little woodland creatures painted on the walls and little woodland creatures on the rocking chair and in the crib. It’s quaint.

Mary Margaret sighs as she stands before the crib and Emma looks at her son. “Hey, monkey, do you want to take a nap? Huh? It’s been a long day, hasn’t it?”

Henry whines softly and she kisses his forehead. Emma glances over at the rocking chair and back at Mary Margaret, whose eyebrows lift skyward. “Oh, would you like to use the rocking chair? You can. I’ll just…”

Mary Margaret moves across the room to the chair and plucks up the stuffed animals. She settles them in her arms as if they’re one big pillow and doesn’t let go, instead just watching as Emma sits in the chair with her son.

She’d never had the money to buy a rocking chair this nice. It has cushions and it appears to ease into a rock all on it’s own.

Emma shifts Henry in her arms until he’s lying with his pacifier in between his lips and she rocks
him back and forth. Mostly, she watches his eyes, finding them slowly closing between each lulling motion, his fingers clasped tight around her shirt like he always does when he’s fighting a nap.

Henry breathes in deep and stretches, his little limbs wiggling, and then he burrows his face toward her chest and releases that breath in a satisfied, sleepy sigh.

When he was smaller than this, she’d sing, in the back of her beat up car, rocking him with tears in her eyes because of the fear she had of never being enough for him. It’s been a really long year, but getting to hold him in her arms and watch him fall asleep is worth it.

Henry, now asleep and breathing in even breaths, feels heavier, and Emma looks up to find Mary Margaret still standing there watching with attentiveness in her gaze, those stuffed woodland creatures clutched tight in her arms.

Emma manages a small smile and carries her son over to the crib, settling him inside and grabbing one of the toys for him to hold in place of her shirt. He eagerly latches on and she removes his pacifier.

She turns back to Mary Margaret, who gasps and nods. “I’ll just put—”

Emma watches the woman settle the creatures down in the chair again and Emma would laugh, but her kid is asleep.

Mary Margaret leads the way out of the nursery and they decide to leave the door cracked a little so they can hear him when he wakes up again.

When they stand in the kitchen, after washing their hands and rolling up their sleeves, Mary Margaret gives Emma the job of rolling out the gingerbread dough to cut while Mary Margaret herself crafts some more of the dough.

After they get a batch in the oven, Mary Margaret busies herself with the hot chocolates that got abandoned halfway between the hand washing and the gingerbread cutting.

“Do you mind your hot chocolate with cinnamon on top?” Mary Margaret asks, glancing over at Emma as she holds the shaker over Emma’s mug.

Emma’s eyes widen. “No, no, that’s fine. That’s… the best way to have it, actually.”

Mary Margaret hums and smiles as she peppers some on top of the whipped topping. “I love it too. David used to think I was wild for doing it, but I think I’ve made him a fan over time.”

Emma chuckles as Mary Margaret hands her the mug and they both sip at it in silence.

“It’s very good,” Emma finally says.

Mary Margaret just smiles softly and sips at it again. “I’m glad you like it.”

Emma finds the silence that follows quite off-putting, so she decides to start a conversation. “That rocking chair was really comfortable. Where’d you get it?”

Mary Margaret grins at her. “You think so? We had one of our friends in town make it for us. His name is Marco. He and his son are kind of a carpenter duo.”

Emma smiles at that. “Really? That’s amazing. I wish I had that chair for Henry’s room at home. The one I- we- have now is really kind of awful.”
Mary Margaret frowns. “Well, maybe I could ask Marco if he’d be willing to make you one.” She gasps and brings her hot chocolate down toward her belly, her eyes getting wide. “What if we gave it to you as a Christmas gift?”

Emma holds her mouth open and shakes her head, because the kindness of this woman is truly insane. “Oh, no, Mary Margaret, that’s fine. We hardly know each other.”

Mary Margaret settles her hot chocolate down on the counter and settles her hands on Emma’s.

“Emma. I want to.” She smiles so warmly and kindly. Emma’s heart feels like it could possibly not race any faster than it is. “You and Killian deserve something nice. It’s been years since we’ve seen him and now you’re his wife, so that makes you just a part of the family as he is.”

Emma holds open her mouth and gives Mary Margaret a weary look. “It’s really nice of you, Mary Margaret, but Killian can’t have meant that much to you. He only told me a little about Storybrooke before we met you at the store the other day.”

Mary Margaret sighs and lets go of Emma’s hands, mercifully. She frowns a little. “Killian went through a lot before he left town. It was in the middle of the summer when the accident happened and Killian completely lost it. We thought he wouldn’t ever make it out of his depression. But, come to find out, he found you and, Emma, you brought him back.”

Again, Emma opens her mouth and shakes her head, feeling weak. She doesn’t know what to say, or how to get Mary Margaret to stop putting this whole thing on her.

Mary Margaret just shrugs her shoulders. “You and Killian seem really happy together. You have a beautiful son and I’m sure your home is stunning.”

Mentally, Emma grimaces, knowing that their separate homes combined wouldn’t be half as nice as what Mary Margaret must be envisioning.

“David and I are just really happy to have you here.” Mary Margaret says as she returns to her cocoa. She laughs once against the rim of her mug. “And, as silly as it might seem, we were almost hoping that you’d consider sticking around.”

They’ve only been here for a few hours and the woman is already talking a permanent relocation. God help her if Killian succumbs to this family thing he’s got going here in Storybrooke.

“When did you get married?” Mary Margaret wonders. “I mean… was it a winter wedding or a spring wedding?” Mary Margaret’s voice is hopeful. “Because David and I got married in the fall. It was very brisk that morning, but I loved it nonetheless.”

Emma bites down on her tongue and stops lifting the mug toward her lips for half a second as she tries to remember what they’d talked about. She doesn’t think he’d ever said what month they got married.

“Um… we got married in January, actually.” she manages a smile at Mary Margaret after having a sip of her hot chocolate. “But we went to Florida for the wedding. It was nice.”

Mary Margaret grins back at her. “That sounds nice. I wish I had been there. Do you have pictures?”

Emma stalls for a moment. “Uhm… yeah. But they’re back home, obviously.”
Mary Margaret chuckles. “Of course.”

The woman settles her mug back down on the counter and wipes her fingers on her apron. She suddenly scuttles out of the kitchen and into a side room, separated only by a slight wall divide, and when she emerges, she has a book in her hands.

“This…” Mary Margaret hauls the book onto the counter by the sink. “Is my wedding album. Killian was David’s best man. Think you might like to see what your husband looked like pre-haircut?”

Emma furrows her brow in confusion and Mary Margaret just tips her head toward the living room, already moving toward it with the book in hand.

“But what about the cookies?”

“It won’t take long for them to bake,” Mary Margaret promises. “Besides, I have a feeling that once the festivities start tonight, you’re not going to get much free time and I want to get to know you, Emma.”

It makes her heart flutter, because no one ever has wanted to know her, well, except for Killian Jones, and look at where that led her.

The two of them sit down on the couch and Mary Margaret easily flips open the book to the first page, and immediately, Emma has to smile.

She’d spent a night at dinner with the Nolan’s, but seeing them a few years younger, captured in fractions of a second on their wedding day has to be more revealing about who they are than anything else could be.

Mary Margaret looks like a fairytale princess in her dress and she explains that the gown had once belonged to her mother. David appears handsome in his suit and he has tears in his eyes when he sees Mary Margaret the first time.

Emma wonders what it must have been like, getting married, having those feelings for the person they had fallen in love with. Knowing that they’d have a future together.

She supposes she should at least pretend she can understand what that feels like, to love someone so truly and purely, but she doesn’t have even a fraction of a clue.

“Oh! Here he is.” Mary Margaret’s smile spreads and she covers the image on the page for a second, her eyebrow arching. “Are you ready? Because… well, it’s interesting.”

Emma is more curious than anything, so she laughs and nods.

When Mary Margaret removes her hand, Emma finds herself staring at a smiling Killian Jones, his arm wrapped around David in a photo of the two of them. And his hair is long enough that it’s in a ponytail. His fringe is equally as long, getting in his face and everything.

She snorts and giggles, shaking her head. “Oh my god. You’re kidding.”

“I am not,” Mary Margaret laughs. “Killian for some reason refused to cut his hair in high school and he carried it with him through college.”

Emma laughs again, unable to help herself, because he honestly looks ridiculous, and it gets worse as Mary Margaret flips the page, because she gets a side shot of the gloriously long locks.
“Are you sure he wasn’t just wearing a wig?” Emma asks, making Mary Margaret laugh.

“No. It’s all real.”

Emma stares at the pictures and shakes her head slowly.

“I’m surprised he never told you about how long it was,” Mary Margaret casually says, flipping the page. She glances up at Emma and she widens her eyes slightly.

Emma covers up her frantic search for an answer with a laugh. “Well, can you blame him for not? He’s going to get it tonight.”

Mary Margaret laughs along with her and it almost feels like they’re just old friends flipping through a wedding album, reminiscing about old times. And Emma allows it to sit just that way in her heart, as Mary Margaret continues to retell memories from that day.

Emma finds that she likes Mary Margaret quite a bit by the time the timer for the cookies goes off and they head back in to work. And she isn’t sure if that’s a good thing or a bad thing.
The second Killian enters The Rabbit Hole, he’s reminded of a past he’d like very much to forget. It rings in his ears, the bar fight he’d gotten in that night before he left, and David’s silence as they’ve made their way here has spoken quite loudly, too.

Killian chances a look at his friend and finds him with a lopsided grin as he nods his head at him.

“Listen, Killian, I know… things weren’t left in the greatest of places.” David stops him just short of moving any deeper into the bar. “And I want to apologize, because I know you were going through a lot and I wasn’t the most attentive friend at the time. I just…” David takes a breath. “I was an ass. And I was wrong.”

Killian snorts. “You can say that again, mate. You bloody well kicked me to the curb after Liam did the same.”

David’s brow creases sadly. “I know. I hope we can still be friends. Things are different, right? We’ve both got families of our own. Things are working out for you now.”

The idea that David Nolan would even apologize to begin with is earth shattering. The man has a hard time believing he could do something wrong, particularly in the area of their friendship.

And of course David feels like he can ask for forgiveness, seeing as this version of Killian seems to have his life in shape.

Part of him wonders if David would still see it this way if he knew the truth. If he knew that he still gets nightmares, or if he knew that he still drinks. If he knew that he spends his time going from woman to woman in search of something that he still can’t grasp in his hands.

Killian opens his mouth to reply, but Robin interrupts them with a, “Bloody hell, if it isn’t Killian Jones.”

Killian turns, laughing gently as he faces his old friend behind the bar. Robin steps away from the bar, coming toward him so he can wrap him in a quick embrace.

“I didn’t think I’d ever get the chance to see you again, mate,” Robin says, shaking his head as he steps back from him. “When David told me you’d be coming back to town I about lost my head.”

Killian chuckles and arches his eyebrow. “Well, I’m here now, mate. Just for the week, though. I’ve got a life to get back to in the city.”

Robin nods his head and David speaks up, “Robin and I have been running this place since you left.”

Killian hums. “Aye, well, that much is obvious.”

He gestures to the advertisement on the wall, offering the beer that he’d helped create back in college.

Robin and David exchange glances, but Killian pretends he doesn’t see the sadness that lingers.

“Does it still sell?” Killian asks.
He arches his eyebrow and saddles up to the bar as if he’d never left the place to begin with. Mindfully, he clasps his hands together on the wooden bar, allowing his wedding band to catch a glimmer from the light that hangs from the ceiling.

Robin returns to his spot behind the bar and he grabs a glass.

“It does still sell,” Robin says wryly. “And if you’d like a glass, I can offer one to you completely free of charge.”

“I should hope so,” Killian laughs. “I did help invent the thing.”

Robin winks at him as he fills the glass with the brew from the tap and then he settles it down before him.

David comes to sit next to Killian and he holds up his finger. “I would also like a glass, if you would, Robin.”

“Of course.”

As Robin fills David's glass, he takes notice of Killian’s left hand, wrapped around the glass as he has a sip of the ale. It tastes just as good as he remembers, if not better, and it doesn’t do anything to wipe the memories that flash through his mind.

“So what have you been up to, Killian?” Robin asks after he gives David his beer. The bartender folds his arms to his chest and tilts his head at him. “Down in New York City.”

Killian can sense some lingering pain in Robin’s tone. He pulls at the skin on his lower lip and shrugs his shoulders.

“I… I’ve been married to my wife, Emma, for two years now. We’ve got a baby boy.” A smile pulls at his lips at the memory of Henry sitting in his lap back at Granny’s, calling him Daddy, of all things. It makes the pain fade, thinking about Emma and about Henry, and it’s strange, because they’ve only really known each other a few weeks. “Henry’s his name.”

David and Robin both smile when he looks at them, warmth in their eyes instead of the chilly look they’d carried before.

“A boy?” Robin laughs. “Well, that’s great, Killian. Roland’s coming on five soon. You know Roland, don’t you?”

Killian furrows his brow and shakes his head. “No. Is that your son?”

“Yeah,” Robin beams.

He digs into his pocket for his phone and shows Killian his lock screen, a picture of a little boy with dimpled cheeks and curly dark hair, grinning at the camera. Behind him, a woman laughs and wraps an arm around him.

“He’s adorable.” Killian says gently.

Robin has a look at the image. “Thanks, mate. His mum in the background.” He gazes at the picture for a few moments longer. “Her name’s Marian. We met just after you left at the brewery.”

“A match made in paradise.” Killian hums. He has another sip of his beer. “I’ll take it things are going well for you, then.”
“For sure, yeah,” Robin smiles widely. He studies Killian for a few moments in silence, the only sound in his ears the sports programs playing from somewhere behind him and a low alternative rock station playing Christmas tunes. “And you’re a lawyer, I hear.”

He nods his head. “Aye. It’s been a blur, really. Since I left I truly made a change in my life.”

Robin and David both hum. David claps him on the back. “Well, I’m really proud of you, buddy. Glad you’re here, too. I’ve missed you and those poorly timed jokes.”

Killian rolls his eyes as Robin laughs. “I’ve moved on from them, Dave. Don’t count on hearing anything idiotic coming from me the week we’re here.”

“Aw, c’mon!” David laughs. “What about dad jokes? Surely you couldn’t pass up the opportunity now that you’ve got a kid.”

He feels a little blush in his cheeks as he shakes his head slowly. “Mate, you and I both know I can never resist a dad joke.”

David’s laughter continues and he nods his head. “It’s so good to have you back, Jones.”

Killian looks between his friends and finds that it’s easier to be with them now that things have picked up where they left off. Ignoring the hurt probably isn’t the best idea, but at least it’s easier than rehashing it all over again for no good reason.

“So,” Robin says. “Bit of a situation. My anniversary’s coming up in a few weeks. I’d like to think I’ve got it all under control, but I can’t even begin to think of what to give her.”

David groans softly. “I hear that.”

Killian hums. “Well, I don’t have to deal with that for a number of months yet, so… best of luck to you, Robin. It’s why you get married in the summer.”

Robin rolls his eyes. “We should have gotten married in the summer. There are very few things that you can do for your wife in the winter.” Killian arches his eyebrows and smirks at his friend, but Robin just rolls his eyes again. “Shut up, you.”

It’s not difficult to make up stories about his life with Emma, when he’s asked for them, and he flawlessly rattles off some insane story about how they were married and honeymooned in Hawaii and their tour guide got them lost for a solid six hours.

Robin and David eat it up like candy.

He isn’t sure if he should feel bad about dragging Emma into his conversations, especially when she isn’t here, so he ends it with that story and listens instead to how Robin and David are doing.

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Apparently, the tree decorating ceremony thing requires every family that wishes to attend to bring their own ornament. Mary Margaret has graciously offered Emma her choice of the Nolan’s Christmas tree supply, but Emma finds that she can’t just choose one of their ornaments, no matter how drawn she is to one object over another.

Henry’s sitting on the couch with a toy she’d brought from home and he happily shakes it as he chatters to himself. Emma folds her arms and smiles at him.
The Nolan’s apartment smells like gingerbread married peanut butter at the moment and Mary Margaret has the television on the local news station to keep an eye on the oncoming storm.

She’s still bustling around in her kitchen as fast as she can, waddling the entire way and stopping every so often to rub her belly.

“So, Emma, I was thinking that after the Christmas tree lighting ceremony, since the storm is coming tonight, maybe it would be best if we just came here and waited it out. I have a feeling Granny won’t host the party with a couple of feet of snow blocking her front walkway.”

Emma tilts her head to the side and opens her mouth as she reaches out for the tree again.

She’s still standing at the Christmas tree, trying to choose just one item that best represents the Jones family, and all she keeps landing on is the one that fell onto the floor on Christmas and has this giant dent on the bottom.

“Well, I…”

At that moment, David and Killian enter through the front door, laughing heartily at something, and she finds herself looking at Killian as he shakes the snow off of him.

He steps out of his boots and sheds his coat, leaving him in that damn attractive cable knit sweater of his and his scarf. He removes his scarf as he meets her eyes and she finds a grin on his lips.

“Well, sweetheart,” he exhales softly.

Emma manages a smile as she turns her attention half toward the tree again. “Hey.”

Killian approaches her with warmth exuding from him. Meanwhile, David goes to help his wife in the kitchen.

“What are you doing?” he asks on a chuckle.

She shakes her head and returns her attention to the tree, to the branch she currently has in her palm, and then sighs.

“We have to bring an ornament to the thing.”

Killian arches a confused eyebrow. “The thing.”

Emma gives him a look of grief, lowering her voice substantially as she speaks, “The tree… thing. Ceremony. I don’t know. It’s your stupid town.”

He laughs. “Ah.” He eyes the bulb in her hand with the dented bottom and drags his tongue over his lips. “So you want to bring a broken ornament to the festivities.”

Emma widens her eyes at him. “I don’t know what you want me to do, Killian. It’s not like we brought our own ornaments.”

Killian hums. “Well. That’s true.”

“Mama,” Henry says her name and she turns her complete attention to him.

She goes to sit on the sofa beside him and he crawls up into her lap before she can even move him there.
Emma looks up to find Killian gazing at the two of them and then a heartbeat later, he has his phone out.

She gives him a look, but he gives her one back, as if warning her, and they have the world’s longest staring argument, complete with pointed glares and tilted heads and flailing hands just out of the sight of David or Mary Margaret.

The Nolan’s are laughing about something in the kitchen and the television is still on, the local newscaster grumbling about the storm.

And Killian wants to take her picture.

Emma narrows her eyes at Killian and then he pulls out his lower lip in a pout, as if she’s about to buy his pleading. He starts to draw his hands together, as if praying to the high heavens that she’ll cooperate with him.

She supposes seeing him halfway to his knees isn’t a bad deal, so she sighs and smiles for a picture.

Killian plucks the broken ornament from the tree and sighs as he sits down beside her. Their legs touch for a second before Emma shifts to the side, moving away from him just a little.

“I realized I don’t even have your phone number,” Killian says in her ear. “And I might need it.”

Emma arches an eyebrow at him when he offers her his phone. “Is this the way you get other girls to give you their number?”

Killian gives her a dry look. “Swan, please. Just enter your number. I need it in case we’re separated.”

She lets him squirm a little before taking his phone from him. She enters her number, texts back to herself, and then hands it back.

Killian snorts and she meets his eyes, lifting her eyebrows at him. “What?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” He holds his phone up at her and a smile grows on her face. “Temporary Wife, you tell me.”

Henry reaches up to touch Killian’s phone and says, “Dada.”

“Hm?” Killian murmurs, as if it’s completely normal that this one-year-old boy is calling him his father. Henry suddenly decides to crawl off of Emma’s lap and into Killian’s, making him grunt and laugh. “Well, look who’s quickly becoming the favorite parent.”

“You wish, Jones.” Emma rolls her eyes and grabs the ornament from his open hand as Henry stands up with Killian’s help.

She watches as the two press foreheads together and she almost wants to curse the fact that her son is being so completely friendly to this man, because they weren’t supposed to get attached, much less within the first twelve hours of being a family.

“So do you guys want to bring up your stuff?” David asks, coming into the living room. He pops a cookie into his mouth.

Emma turns to look at Killian and he stays occupied with Henry while he says, “Dave, we’re staying at Granny’s. No need burden you with the three of us. Henry tends to cry a bit… it’s a
whole thing. Especially with the teething.”

Thankful he’s on the same page as she is, Emma doesn’t feel the anxiety start bubbling. Yet.

David tosses a hand at them and Mary Margaret chirps out, “Oh, but we need the practice! We’re having our baby in a month!”

“No,” Killian says on a sigh, settling Henry into his lap. “You definitely need the sleep. If you can get it you should take it. You don’t realize how much you take it for granted once you’ve got to be up at three in the morning and you’ve only slept for two hours to begin with.”

Emma briefly wonders where he possibly could have figured all of this parenting advice out from, but then she realizes that their walls are thin and he is quite perceptive. He didn’t need experience to figure out that babies are needy beings.

Maybe she doesn’t give him enough credit where it’s due.

Emma looks between David and Mary Margaret, but neither of them is fazed. David gives Killian a glare.

“Let us do something nice for you, Killian. We have a room. You don’t need to pay Granny for the week in one of her bedrooms at the inn. Besides, I hear it’s busy this week anyway. Something about people coming into town for the festivities.”

“Yes,” Mary Margaret confirms. “People from the state are coming down to see what it’s all about. I’m very excited. We might even make the paper.” She pauses. “But I’m worried about the storm! What if you got stranded at Granny’s and couldn’t be here for Christmas!”

Emma turns her attention to Killian, who releases a sigh. “Alright. I suppose you’ve got a point.”

Internally, she’s cursing him out and she’s punching him in the arm. Internally, she’s already halfway out the door with her kid, running from the situation. He promised her they wouldn’t be sharing a bed. He promised. It was part of their deal.

She allows her shoulders to sag as she shoots arrows at him with her eyes and he just pats her on her thigh, something that makes her wish she could just get up off of the couch and move away. This argument is only just beginning and she can’t believe he’d be so nonchalant about it all.

Well, maybe she can. He has been trying to get her into the same bed as him for a while now.

“I’ll go grab our things, love.” Killian says and then he’s handing Henry to her and she’s just watching as he bundles up to get back outside.

She sighs in defeat, but it doesn’t last long, because Mary Margaret asks, “Did you pick out an ornament?”

Emma studies the dented figure in her palm and nods. “Yeah. I think this works.”

“Oh, good. We should get going when your husband gets back. We have to set up a table and make sure the cookies are displayed in time!”

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Henry decides to cling to his mother as they walk toward Town Hall. David and Mary Margaret are already there, with their table setup, garnished with cookies that they’re quickly opening up so
people can enjoy.

Killian finds it a bit suffocating, seeing all of these people he’d grown up with slowly gathering in one spot.

So, he sticks with Emma and Henry.

Emma and Henry don’t know his transgressions, nor will they try and remind him of those past deeds.

It seems to him that Emma’s actually a little nervous. She keeps fidgeting with their ornament and she keeps her attention on Henry otherwise, the little boy chattering with her and laughing when she copies him in a high voice.

Emma kisses his cold cheeks and then turns to Killian. Her nose is red and her smile makes her cheeks fuller.

“How does this whole thing work? Is it like… hang your ornament whenever or…?”

Killian glances around at the people gathered in the square and then he stares at the giant tree.

“Well, I suppose we hang it now,” he says on a shrug.

The tree is already decorated with lights that will be lit in a matter of just under half an hour, and there are some ornaments gracing the tree up higher, but there are plenty of spaces at the bottom for tonight’s festivity.

The three of them walk up to the tree together and Emma seems to hesitate, looking up at him as she holds out their ornament in her gloved hand. “You want to help?”

Killian chuckles. “Swan, how on earth could I help?”

She shrugs, with her shoulders and her eyes. “I don’t know. Maybe hold my hand or something.”

*Hold my hand or something.* It’s a phrase he didn’t think he’d ever hear from her, but he takes it as it is and shrugs his shoulders before they work in unison to bring the ornament to the tree.

“Help us, Henry, we need your help!” Emma says, using her other hand to guide her boy’s toward the tree.

“Ah!” Killian says. “That’s a good help.”

Emma laughs and it makes him smile as they pull back. He keeps his eyes on the ornament for a few seconds. It’s a worn plastic bulb with the bottom dented in. Broken. Much like the lot of them. It’s fitting, he thinks.

He sticks his hands into his pockets as he watches Emma and Henry then, finding it a sweet sight to behold.

“Yay! We did it, Henry!” Emma cheers for Henry, who smiles behind his pacifier and allows his mother to give him a high-five. She gives his nose a kiss.

When Emma looks at him, her eyes shine at him, and he tilts his head back. “They’ll be lighting the tree in a few minutes. We should find a good spot to watch from.”

Emma nods in agreement.
They walk away from the tree and stop for cookies at Mary Margaret’s table first, causing the woman to smile wide and say, “Emma, your cookies are a hit. Thank you for your help.”

Emma shrugs her shoulders. He thinks she might be embarrassed, even if a little, so he winks at her when she glances up at him.

He’s chewing a gingerbread man and he says with a cheek half-full, “Did you make these, love? They’re very good. You should make them at home.”

She rolls her eyes and swats him in the chest. “Shut up.”

He just grins at her and meets Mary Margaret’s eyes. She has a warm look in her eyes, as if she’s incredibly happy, and he realizes that she’s happy for him, having found someone.

It’s enough for him to desperately wish he actually had.

Killian guides Emma away from the tree a short ways, discovering Will and Belle standing together.

“Oh! I knew we’d see each other again!” Belle laughs. She’s holding a mug in her hands and Will has a knit hat atop his head, to which Killian raises an eyebrow.

“What’s that about, mate?”

Will shrugs. “Granny. Knits me one every year so I figured I’d wear it tonight so she’d see.”

He hums and finds Belle eagerly engaged in a conversation with Emma and Henry. Belle seems inclined to play with Henry and he thinks it’s a good fit: Belle with a baby.

“God, she’s gonna want to talk me into one soon enough, isn’t she?” Will asks as he gazes off at his wife.

Killian shakes his head. “Probably.”

“She’d be a good mum,” Will tells him with a smile. “I just worry about me bein’ a complete idiot.”

They share a laugh, but Killian shrugs his shoulders. “I dunno, mate. I’m managing, I think.”

Will appears to be about to say something, but it’s at that moment that Regina Mills, mayor of Storybrooke, comes over the speaker system.

“Hi everyone. I just want to thank everyone for coming out tonight for our annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony. I see a lot of great family ornaments hanging on the tree.”

People cheer, for whatever reason, and Regina chuckles over the speakers.

“Alright. Who’s ready to see this thing lit up?”

Killian turns to be with Emma rather than with Will and cheers along with everyone gathered.

They’re not standing too far from the tree, but just far enough that they have a good view of all of the happenings, and as Mayor Mills begins the countdown, Killian finds people he knows, gathered with their loved ones, ready for the lights to shine bright.

He does realize in that moment that he’s standing quite close to Will and Belle, and that they could
be watching him and Emma for their body language, but he can’t bring himself to invading Emma’s personal space by pressing his palm to her back. He knows she’s not comfortable with it.

It’ll be interesting to see how she handles them sharing a bed later on tonight.

The moment the lights come on, Killian doesn’t watch anyone except for Emma and Henry, whose eyes go wide with awe. Emma’s holding Henry close and the lad makes a sound as he gestures toward the source of his amazement.

Emma herself looks breathless, the color of the lights dancing against her skin warmly, and her eyes soft. She turns her attention to her son and gasps before she asks, “Do you see that, monkey? Do you see how pretty that is?”

Killian doesn’t know if Henry does, but Killian certainly can see.

Emma looks up at him all of a sudden and her smile is a thin line, but there are creases by her eyes.

“Well, as far as tree lighting ceremonies go, how does that rank?” he asks her.

She lifts her shoulders just so and contorts her lips. “This is a tough one, considering all of the tree lighting ceremonies I’ve been to.”

He laughs. “Yeah? You go to a lot, then?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” she teases lightly.

Killian leans in close, against prior judgment, and wraps his arm around her middle. “Perhaps I would.”

And for a moment, he allows himself to pretend, and Emma seems to do the same, both of them looking back at the tree in the center of the square and doting on Henry at the same time.

He knows it won’t last, but it doesn’t hurt to pretend it might.
Chapter 8

eight.

The sheer beauty of the Christmas tree in front of Storybrooke’s town hall was enough for Emma to forgive Killian when he decided to put his arm around her.

It was almost enough for her to forget that they’re even doing this weird marriage thing. For a few moments, she’d allowed herself to imagine what it would be like to be happy and it felt good.

But, as David and Mary Margaret stand with them outside of their apartment door and Henry cuddles up with Killian, snow still clinging to both of their hats and shoulders, Emma feels uneasy. It’s their first night in Storybrooke and she had thought at the start of this that they’d be spending their nights separate. It was part of she and Killian’s agreement, after all.

“Well, that was fun,” Mary Margaret says on a sigh as they enter the apartment. “I think every year it just gets better.”

“There were a lot of people there tonight,” David nods his head as he toes out of his boots by the door. He’s holding the leftover trays in his hands and he carries them into the kitchen before slipping out of his coat.

Emma helps Henry get out of his winter gear while he’s still in Killian’s arms. She avoids making eye contact with the man she’s pretending to be forever devoted to so as to avoid any unnecessary lingering feelings to bubble over.

“It’s getting kind of late,” Mary Margaret says.

“Aye,” Killian agrees as soon as Emma holds Henry in her arms.

She’s out of her coat and boots, instead standing on the hardwood floors of the loft apartment in her socks. Henry’s fussing in her ear and she just needs to put him down for bed, so she clears her throat.

“I think we should head to bed,” she states, no matter how badly she wishes she didn’t have to with Killian. “It’s upstairs, right?”

David nods his head and rubs his hands together for sake of warming up. “Yes. If you need anything feel free to ask. Mary Margaret has a whole closet of blankets.”

“Oh, and if you want, the bathroom is down here. Down by the nursery.” Mary Margaret adds. She appears sorrowful, her brow creasing. “I’m sorry we only have one. It’s just what we have.”

Emma thinks it’s funny that she’d even apologize, because she has been so giving the whole time they’ve been here, but she smiles and nods. “It’s fine. Thank you.”

The ladder to go upstairs is kind of a terrifying feat with a one-year-old in her arms, but she makes it in one piece and sighs when she turns to find the little quaint bedroom.

There’s not much space up here. The queen-sized bed is positioned under a window and there’s an antique desk against the wall closer to the stairs. An armoire is pressed against the brick chimney that’s next to a short space that Emma presumes is storage.
The bed is covered with a massive quilt that Emma knows Mary Margaret must have crafted herself and on either side of the bed there are two dressers. Emma crosses the room, settling Henry down on the bed, and flicks on the lamps atop the dressers.

Killian had brought their bags up, as well as Henry’s portable bed, and it’s waiting to be set up.

Emma gets to preparing Henry for bed, which consists of his pajamas, a diaper change, and a solid ten minutes of cuddling with his favorite book in her hands while she sits up on the bed and reads to him in a low murmur.

Henry likes to point at the pictures and she’ll make the noises of the animals, much to his sleepy delight.

Killian comes up the steps with his heavy footfall then and she glances up from her reading just slightly to find him standing there in his night clothes: a plain white shirt and sweatpants.

Well, at least he isn’t down to his underwear.

He runs his fingers through his hair and then settles the clothes he’d been wearing as well as his bag down by the armoire and crosses the room to the crib that still needs to be set up.

It’s flawless, how he’s fallen into her and Henry’s lives, as if he’s always been here. Emma feels a knot tightening in her chest because of it, but she shakes it off, instead turning her attention to her son.

“What does the cow say, baby?” Emma asks Henry in a whisper as he starts to sag back against her body heavily. “Hmm? Does it say ‘moo’?”

She glances down at him and gives the top of his head a kiss, starting to sway a bit with him. “I love you a whole lot, kid.”

Emma rests her cheek on his head and watches as Killian assembles the pop-up crib. It doesn’t take very long and once he’s finished, he stands and tilts his head back toward it.

“I hope it’s alright,” he says lowly.

Emma just manages a smile as she settles the book down on the bed and carries her sleeping child toward the bed.

He sighs sleepily as soon as she settles him down and she tucks his favorite toy into his arm as well as a blanket around his body.

It’s quite cold up here. She can hear the storm that had just barely started at the Christmas tree ceremony. The winds are howling and there’s a moment where she can hear the ceiling squeaking against the weight of it all.

She stares at her sleeping boy for a few long moments and then retreats to the bed to her bag and Henry’s things she’d left laid out.

“I’ll sleep on the floor,” Killian tells her as she settles her bag on the floor and grips her nightclothes to her chest.

Emma lifts her eyebrows at him in surprise. “Really?”

He shrugs, already grabbing a pillow from the bed and a blanket from one of the dresser drawers.
“It’s no problem, love. I promised you we wouldn’t have to share.”

Her jaw falls open just slightly and she sees his smile inch up from the corners of his lips as his eyebrows dance at her.

“Though if you need me to keep you warm, I don’t mind. I’ve been told I’m quite the good bedfellow.”

Emma scoffs. “Shut up. The floor works.” Killian settles his pillow down on the floor and she sticks her thumb toward the stairs. “I’m going to go clean up for bed. If he wakes up—”

“I’ve got him, love,” Killian says gently. He sits on the bed facing Henry and gives an encouraging nod.

She rolls her eyes and goes to the steps to climb down again.

The Nolan’s only bathroom is small, but it does the job, and Emma finds herself lingering longer than she has to, just because she doesn’t want to have to face Killian Jones and his inevitable words about just about everything.

The night had been almost too much, with all of the lingering looks and touches, and it’s only been barely a day since they started this charade. She can hardly imagine what it’s going to be like after a few more of these.

She can’t get close to him and she can’t keep feeling like this is even a little bit real. Because it’s not. She’s here because Killian lied to his friends and he continues to lie to them.

As Emma leaves the bathroom, she can hear David and Mary Margaret’s voices murmuring lowly from their bedroom behind the wall.

“Night, Emma!” Mary Margaret all but sings as she draws close enough.

She stops walking and her eyes widen as she peeks into their room, finding them folding their laundry together.

“Oh! Goodnight.” She waves at them and the couple smiles back at her so kindly that she feels bad for just about every little thing she’s ever done wrong.

Emma immediately closes her eyes as soon as she’s out of their line of sight and exhales heavily.

Killian is upstairs waiting for her. She has her glasses on now that it’s bedtime and she knows he’s going to have something to say about them, so she throws up her defenses and tries to be prepared for just about anything.

She glances up at the upstairs room before climbing the stairs determinedly, and when she gets to the top floor, Killian is lying on the floor, turned to face her. He has turned out the lights, so it’s a bit darker than before.

She tosses her clothes into her bag and shivers at the cold air of the loft. She rubs her arms as she bites on her lip.

“And those glasses, Swan?” Killian asks quietly, a smile spreading on his face.

Emma finds him sitting up from the floor, curiously watching her as she stands between the bed and her bag. He’s laughing, the jerk, and Emma feels the need to wave him off as she shuffles
toward bed.

“Yeah. I’m blind. I get it. Laugh all you want, buddy, but Mary Margaret showed me some pretty damaging pictures of you earlier.”

“What pictures?” Killian asks, a furrow in his brow.

Emma just shrugs. “Some I’m sure you’re going to want to have burned someday.”

Emma peels back the sheets of the bed and climbs in after removing her glasses, frowning at the sounds of the old mattress and bed frame.

Her immediate impression upon lying still is that this bed is far, far too big for her.

But she doesn’t think it’s even a little bit appropriate to ask Killian to join her, regardless of the fact that she thinks it’s just a little unfair to him to be sleeping on the hard, cold floor while she’s resting atop a mattress with blankets.

As she lies there, staring up at the dark ceiling, she grimaces, because her toes are freezing.

“Are you cold?” she wonders in a whisper.

He doesn’t respond at first and then she hears him shift on the ground. “What?”

“I asked if you were cold,” Emma repeats in a whisper.


Typical man response. Of course. She knows he’s probably a little more than a smidge cold, with one blanket covering him as he lies on that cold floor.

“My feet are freezing,” she responds.

They let that sit between them for a few long moments. Emma isn’t sure what she intended for him to say about it, if anything. Maybe he’ll catch the hint she’s trying to give him. She just wants him to ask if he can come up and join her so she can give him a little bit of flack for it and he can help warm her up.

It’s selfish, but he’s the one who brought her here with intentions to use her for much more than body heat.

“What would you like me to do about that, Swan?”

Her stomach twists and she tosses her head from side-to-side. She cannot believe she’s about to do this, but, apparently this whole trip has ignited something new in her in regards to Killian Jones.

“Okay. Come up here,” she groans a little, keeping her voice quiet.

But Killian doesn’t move.

“God, Killian, I swear, if you don’t get up here in five seconds I’m going to yank you up here myself or rescind my offer. I’m already regretting opening my mouth to start with.”

He certainly moves then, hopping up to his knees before standing upright as he settles his pillow on the bed and blanket over the width of the bed.
“Oh, Swan, I don’t think you should regret opening that pretty mouth of yours,” he says quietly.

She scoffs and rolls her eyes, because of course, her gaze on the ceiling above their heads. He’s two people right now in her mind and she’s having a hard time deciphering which she’s with at the moment.

She rests her hands over her middle and waits as the bed shakes and jerks with each movement Killian makes to join her on the bed. The man is about as subtle as a train.

“You comfortable over there?” she asks as she shifts slightly to put distance between them.

Her toes still feel like icicles and she doesn’t know how to solve that. Even if she’s currently sharing a bed with Killian Jones.

It’s one thing she’d never imagined would happen when she agreed to do this, but apparently spending just a little bit of time with him has changed her into a kinder person.

Or at least a caricature of one.

“I’m quite comfortable,” Killian whispers. “Thank you for asking.”

Emma decides then to turn onto her side so she’s facing him. He has a wicked grin on his lips and his eyes shine bright even in the dark.

“It only took me a day,” he murmurs. “It’s hard to believe, really.”

“A day for what?” she grimaces, still trying to get warmer.

She slips her arms beneath the covers and pulls them closer to her chin. Her legs curl up toward her belly and she tries to put her feet below her bottom. It does nothing to aid in her problem of feeling as if she’s standing out in the snowstorm that currently surrounds them.

Killian drags his teeth against the flesh of his lower lip. “We’re sharing a bed. I knew you’d succumb to my good looks eventually.”

Emma rolls her eyes and jerks her arm against his chest, making him flinch and recoil, the bed squeaking under his movements.

“Quit beating me up, Swan,” he whispers. “I know you like me. You don’t have to keep abusing me to show it.”

Emma gives him a pointed look. “I don’t like you, Killian. I can stand you. That’s different.”

“Mm,” Killian’s smiling at her, dimples in his cheeks and a playful glint in the glow of his eyes.

“God, isn’t warm air supposed to rise?” she grumbles. She shivers as the wind outside gets louder and Killian just starts laughing. “What?”

“You know, darling, I’m right here,” he says in a tone she knows is intended to seduce. She rolls her eyes at him and jerks her feet against his leg, but then thinks better of it, instead sliding her cold feet between his warm legs. “Is that your solution, then?”

Emma hums happily. “Yep. It’s doing the trick, too.”

“Well, as long as you’re happy,” Killian sighs. He presses his hand over his eyes, showing off his wedding ring, and her heart actually flips at the sight.
In order to get her mind off of what they’re doing, especially as her feet are tucked in between his legs, she says, “Mary Margaret showed me pictures of their wedding today.”

Killian removes his hand and furrows his brow. “Really.”

Emma smirks at him. “Yeah. Nice hair.”

Killian groans and turns his face toward his pillow, his legs shifting against her feet as he moves. “I can’t believe she showed you. I should’ve had them burned, as you suggested.”

Emma can’t help but laugh quietly, her chest bouncing with each silent rumble of joy. She shakes her head slowly at him.

“God, Jones, no wonder you moved away. All of the women here must have known about your travesty of a hairstyle. They would have laughed at you for trying to get them to sleep with you.”

Killian takes a deep breath. “I’ll have you know that I was just as skilled at the art of seduction. Even with long hair. In fact, it was my lure, I think. I got lots of ladies with it.”

“Mhm,” Emma chuckles.

Killian just stares at her then, a disbelieving smile on his lips. He licks those lips of his and murmurs, “You don’t have to pretend you don’t like me, Emma. It’s okay.”

Emma rolls her eyes and digs her feet in deeper, intentionally jabbing him with her toenails so he jerks his legs toward her.

She lifts her eyebrows at him, challenging him. “I don’t like you, okay? I’m just doing this for you because of my kid.”

“Aye,” he says somberly. “I know.”

She knows he’s telling her the truth; that he understands that she’s only here for Henry’s sake, and it makes her breathe just a little bit easier.

Emma finds the look in his eyes terrifying, though, just a little too real, and she removes her feet from between his legs when her gut twists.

“He had fun today,” Emma says. “He really liked those lights.”

Killian grins. “Aye.” Her heart stutters and she sucks on her lower lip. “Tomorrow should be quieter. There’s a party at Granny’s, but we’ll see if it happens. Depends on the storm.”

Emma nods against her pillow and sticks her arm up under it as the other curls up in front of her neck.

Killian’s lying on his side facing her with his arms up under his pillow, too, and she doesn’t think he could look any more human than he does now, with his tired eyes and ruffled hair.

Considering what her day will look like tomorrow makes her uneasy, but she hums regardless.

“Do you like it here?” Killian asks suddenly, as a timid child might.

Emma shrugs her shoulder. “Yeah. It’s nice.” She yawns and blinks away the tears that form due to tiredness. “How’s it feel being home?”
Killian sighs heavily. “Like a ton of bricks on my chest, to be honest.” He slides his hand over his face and rolls onto his back. Emma watches him, as his hand falls to his chest, at the way he stares up at the ceiling for a moment before turning his head to look at her. “But… it’s better with you here.”

Emma almost wants to allow her heart to fall to her gut, to allow those butterflies their right to flutter, but she just laughs quietly instead.

“You have to stop trying to get me to like you, Jones, because I’m not changing my mind.” She decisively flips onto her other side, facing the wall, and murmurs, “If I wake up and you’re spooning me I’ll probably find a way to cut your arm off, by the way.”

Killian releases a sigh. The bed squeaks when he flips his body onto his side. “If the baby cries in the middle of the night should I even bother?”

“No.”

“As I thought.”

///

The baby wakes up at around four in the morning and his cry is a gentle sob.

Emma grunts at the sound and he turns in bed to make sure she’s getting up. She does, looking a glorious mess, her hair slept on and her eyes squinted as she steps around the bed toward the crib.

She licks her lips and murmurs, “Hey, baby boy. It’s okay.” Henry stops crying the instant he’s being held and she whispers, “Did you have a bad dream? It’s okay. I’m here.”

Her ability to soothe her boy is always admirable to him, but even more so as he’s watching it in the quiet of the very early morning, ripped from a dream to see it.

It’s beautiful, the way she smiles, and how Henry eases himself back to sleep after she gives him a bottle.

Killian’s mostly awake as he watches Emma lower her son back into his bed. She stays there for a few long moments, making sure he’s asleep probably, and then she folds her arms against her chest and shuffles back toward the bed.

The bed whimpers and creaks when she adds her weight to it again and she sighs as her head hits the pillow.

Emma goes to sleep in a matter of minutes as he watches her, as if she’d been asleep when she went to tend to Henry to begin with, and suddenly, without explanation, she starts to whimper and thrash her legs.

Killian furrows his brow as sadness overcomes him. He knows this feeling all too well. Nightmares are something he often wakes in a cold sweat from.

Her voice is what breaks him, though, as if she’s in pain, and Killian can’t bear to hear it, so he goes to her, wrapping her in his arms after he turns her onto her side facing away from him.

They’re very similar, he and Emma, and he knows he bit off more than he could chew when he dove into this whole thing.
He hadn’t known she would pierce his darkness with her smile or her laughter. He hadn’t known that her boy’d so easily melt him, the lad that coos and giggles at him.

Emma’s body is warm, but she shivers, and Killian rubs his hands down her arms as she seems to be calming from her dream. He pulls the blankets up higher and then her arms grab his, pulling him and holding him against her.

She smells like vanilla when he rests his head on her pillow just above her head. Her legs curve so easily against his that he finds it hard to breathe, much less understand how a woman so beautiful could be so maddeningly against him.

He’s never had a woman so forward about her feelings for him. Well, feelings in the negative sense.

Emma breathes easy and rests easier, and it’s a relief to him to feel that in her posture and in her heartbeat against his palm.

The position they’re lying in is comfortable. Probably too comfortable. The rise and fall of her chest as she breathes is enough to lull his eyes closed just as he thinks about rolling back over and allowing her the space she’d requested- the space she quite honestly deserves.

He falls asleep thinking about how he wishes that this feeling swelling in his heart might never leave him. That somehow, he’d be enough for Emma Swan and those great towering walls of hers.

That maybe this game would turn into something real.

That maybe it already is.

It’s easily the best sleep he’s had in ages.
Chapter 9

nine.

Emma wakes up to the warm feeling of being held.

It’s a good feeling, she initially thinks, because the warmth in question is gentle and cozy and warm.

Their legs are pressed against each other and she’s holding one of his arms against her torso, his palm pressing between her breasts against her heart.

She can feel him breathing slowly, evenly, clearly still sound asleep with his heart resting against her back.

And then it hits her like a cold shower. Killian Jones is the one sharing a bed with her. Killian Jones is currently spooning her like she told him not to.

Her eyes blow open wide and she panics for a few seconds, not knowing what to do.

The apartment is quiet below and the air is chilly, but there’s the distinct feeling of warm heat circulating. Mary Margaret and David must either be very quiet or it’s still quite early.

Emma bites down on her lip as she forces Killian’s arm away from her middle.

It’s too close. It’s too intimate.

She kicks at his shins and he suddenly jerks awake, his breath hitching as he pulls away from her. He turns onto his back and Emma pushes herself up so she’s sitting.

“Killian, what the hell?” she demands in a whisper-yell.

He winces up at her and grimaces. “You were having a nightmare and I tried to help you but you grabbed onto me and wouldn’t let go.”

She gives him a look as her fingers go through her hair to pull it away from her face.

“Killian, we’re not actually together, okay?” she hisses. “Understand that. I’m not… I don’t do relationships and I definitely wouldn’t do a relationship with you. Okay?”

Killian just stares at her blankly, so she feels compelled to elaborate, “I invited you up here because it was wrong to make you sleep on the cold floor. That’s all. It wasn’t an invitation to cuddle.”

Killian sighs. He takes his hand over his face and opens his eyes wider as he shifts upright to sit beside her.

He licks his lips before he says in a scratchy voice, “Emma, I’m sorry-”

“No,” she shakes her head. “Just… shut up okay?”

It’s started to feel overwhelming and Emma finds herself getting out of bed and fighting the tears burning in her eyes. This wasn’t supposed to get so real.

She doesn’t do relationships because they’ve hurt her so badly in the past and feeling even the
slightest bit comfortable in his arms when she woke up is the biggest slap in the face. She cannot allow herself to fall for him.

He’s a player. He doesn’t really care for neither she nor Henry. He brought them here for his own selfish bidding and he’s currently staring at her with a far different expression than she’s ever seen from him before. It’s almost as if she’s hurt him.

She can’t afford that. She can’t afford feeling things for a man that will only betray her when they get back to the city. She can’t afford allowing him to feel things for her when she’s the most unstable, unlovable person.

Emma curls her fingers into her palms. Her chest feels heavy, but she swallows her anxiety and her fears with a breath.

“We shouldn’t be together today.” Emma tells him quietly. She grabs her glasses from the dresser she’d placed them on and slips them over her ears. “I need space from you. From this.”

Killian averts his gaze onto the rumpled bed covers, and she folds her arms against her chest at the feeling of the cool air.

“It’s probably not going to be very possible,” he murmurs, finally daring to look her in the eyes. “We’re likely snowed in, love.”

Emma swallows thickly. “I doubt for long. This apartment is on Main Street. They’re probably going to get it cleared soon.”

Killian doesn’t look half as certain as she somehow managed to sound. She’s already starting to feel like she needs to go, to just break free from this place and be alone.

She can’t be around him when he’s brought up all of these feelings in her that she hasn’t felt in a long time.

He’s an ignorant ass who tried endlessly for two weeks to get her to sleep with him before ultimately tricking his friends into believing she’s his wife.

He’s always going to be this way. He’s not going to change. At least that much she’s learned about men. They don’t want happiness; they just want what she’ll do for them instead.

“I’m going to go for a walk or something,” Emma grumbles.

She decisively goes to her bag and grabs her clothes for the day before crossing the room to check on Henry. He’s awake, staring at her with a happy little smile that absolutely washes away all of the anger she’d once felt bubbling up inside of her chest.

“Hey,” she laughs softly. “You’re happy this morning, monkey.”

Henry bounces on his toes and she takes a deep breath before settling her clothes down on the floor in order to pick him up instead.

Her son immediately curls up against her, his head against her collarbone, and Emma leaves a kiss to his head. “Do you want to walk around? I know you love to walk at home.”

Emma goes toward her side of the bed and sits down so she’s blocking his path toward the stairs and then settles him onto his feet.
Henry sticks his fingers into his mouth and glances up at the bed. Then he starts toddling toward it as he says, “Dadda?”

Her heart drops at the sound and Killian doesn’t immediately react, obviously waiting for her. She glances up at him and sighs weakly, giving a relenting nod.

Killian crawls across the bed to lean over the side. “Boo!”

Henry lets out a delighted laugh, wobbling slightly on his feet, and Emma reaches out to steady him as he extends his arms toward Killian.

“You want up?” Killian asks in a whisper. “Alright. I suppose.”

Apparently, she can’t win already today. First Killian, now her own son.

Emma definitely feels the need to leave, especially when Killian lies on his side and Henry crawls around on the bed beside him. Killian tickles at the boy and he giggles happily.

It’s clear that Killian enjoys Henry’s company, and her son enjoys Killian’s, so she’s not going to rip them away from each other. She’s not that cruel.

But it still stings, watching the two of them from her perch sitting on the cold floor. She feels oddly empty, as if she’s lost everything, and her gaze falls to her pants.

Emma decides, as she listens to Killian’s happy low murmur, that it’s time to go clean up for the day, so she pulls herself back up onto her feet and grabs her stuff to go downstairs again.

///

Killian is only alone with Henry for but a minute when he realizes that Henry is in dire need of a diaper change. The boy smells when Killian lifts him up onto his lap and Killian grimaces.

“Good grief, Henry,” Killian sighs. “You smell a bit, don’t you?”

He decides he’ll change the boy, because Emma’s not here and he has his doubts as to whether or not she’ll stay long enough when she returns to do the honors herself.

It being that Killian has absolutely no experience changing a baby, he leaves Henry in his arms as he goes to his diaper bag. He digs out what he presumes are the basic components of a change, and then sets about undressing the lad.

Henry pees on him.

Killian feels as if he’s gone through a rite of passage.

“Oh, so that’s how it is, huh?” Killian asks, giving Henry a look. “First your mum. Now you. I can’t win, can I?”

Killian manages to get Henry out of his first diaper and into a new one after wiping him clean, and after he pulls Henry’s clothes back on, he grimaces at the dirty diaper in his hand.

“This needs to go into the trash,” he says in a low grumble.

He carries the diaper to the small bin in the corner and then hurries back to Henry, finding the boy eager to crawl around on the bed toward the edge.
“Woah there!” Killian laughs. He catches Henry in his arm and settles him on his hip. “Okay. That was quite the event.” It’s only at that point that Killian glances down at his shirt and sighs. “Well, you marked me yours. What would you like to do now, Henry?”

Killian hears the bathroom door downstairs open and he decides to settle Henry into his crib again before hurrying to change into a different shirt so Emma doesn’t know he’d experienced a full diaper changing event with Henry.

She climbs the steps slowly and when she reaches the top, she completely avoids him. He watches her set her things down by her bag and then she turns back toward him.

“I’m going for a walk,” she says in a quiet, steady tone.

Killian nods his head. He doesn’t want to push or pry, knowing full well that she’s not entirely on board with being here at the moment. If she’s completely finished with him, this whole thing could very well fall apart.

He’d known it was risky when he wrapped her in his arms earlier, but he hadn’t known she would react this way.

His heart aches, because all of a sudden he’s being hit with the realization that he actually has started to have feelings that he hasn’t had in many years. And it hurts knowing that she doesn’t even come close to feeling the same way.

He supposes it’s for the best, ultimately, because after this trip is through, they’ll head back to the city and go their separate ways.

Neighbors who annoy each other. Neighbors who hear every word and movement from their shared wall. Neighbors with a twisted history that nobody would ever truly understand, except for each other.

“What do you say we have some breakfast, hm? What’s Mummy brought for you to eat in that bag of yours?”

Killian glances down at the troublemaker grinning up at him from his crib, fingers clinging to the sides. “Ah… of course. Yeah.”

He meets Emma’s eyes just briefly before she nods her head and leans down to kiss Henry’s head. “I’ll be right back, monkey boy.”

And then she’s gone, stepping down the stairs carefully before grabbing her winter clothes, stepping into her boots, and heading out the front door.

Killian looks down at Henry as worry begins to pool in his stomach over whether or not Emma’s going to be all right.

One look toward the window behind the bed tells him that while the sun might be shining, it’s still snowing and cold.

He reaches into Henry’s crib to grab him and settles him on his side. “What do you say we have some breakfast, hm? What’s Mummy brought for you to eat in that bag of yours?”

Killian discovers some cereal that Henry seems to want, so he holds it while he carries the boy downstairs.

Mary Margaret’s standing in her kitchen, her eyes wide, and her brow creased with worry. “Is
Emma alright?”

He sighs softly and nods. “Aye. I’m afraid we got into a bit of an argument is all.”

Mary Margaret frowns at that and Killian sits Henry down on his lap while they sit at the table. He pours the cereal onto the table and lets Henry take as he pleases. It’s rather messy, feeding this boy, but he figures if Emma can do it at home, he can do it here, too.

“Well, I hope you can work things out,” Mary Margaret says. Killian glances up at her and finds her smile one rooted in concern. “I’m making hot chocolate. Do you want some?”

Killian has to smile at Mary Margaret’s kindness. “That would be delightful, actually.”

Mary Margaret chuckles. “Good. I was making some for David, but Graham called him and asked if he’d help shovel out the sidewalks. The storm has cleared up, mostly, thank goodness. We might actually have a party tonight after all.”

Killian smiles softly to himself as he stares down at Henry, who eagerly munches on his breakfast. The boy cranes his head to look up at him and smiles with cereal in his mouth, making Killian laugh.

“You, Henry, are growing on me every minute of every day,” he murmurs lowly. “Perhaps you can tell your mum I’m sorry for me.”

Henry babbles back at him and Killian has to wipe his chin with a napkin because of the mess he makes, but it’s all right, because at least he and Henry are bonding.

He cannot say the same about he and Emma. It’s like they took one step forward last night with their honest conversation, but suddenly they’re two steps behind again.

He hopes with everything in him that when she comes back, at the very least, she’ll be able to look him in the eyes and tell him she can stay. He needs her to now more than ever, what with his brother coming back into town and the week just barely begun.

It’s the only reason he’s willing to keep his distance and allow her the space she needs to dwell on everything that’s going through her mind.

///

The air is freezing cold, but Emma is bundled up warm. There are snowflakes trickling from the sky above, but with far less frequency than they had the night before.

The snow on the ground goes to the middle of her lower leg beneath her knee as she steps through it. Thankfully, much of the road has already been cleared, so traffic is free to go through town.

Not that anyone is. It’s still a little early in the morning and people are probably happier in their warm homes.

Emma trudges through the snow feeling quite miserable, and quite lost.

Her mind is telling her to run, but she knows she can’t get very far. She’s met far too many people and there are still a number of days remaining in this whole exercise of tolerance.

Feelings were never supposed to take root. Killian Jones is an insufferable human being and she doesn’t care if he’s gentle and warm in the morning: he isn’t her husband, he isn’t her lover, and he
never ever will be.

The thought that he could even possibly be thinking it himself is enough reason for her to be out here clearing her mind.

As she steps in the snow toward no place in particular, Emma finds herself thinking of her son, and how hard it has been for them over the year of his life. He seems happy here, with Killian, and even with the people they’ve met.

Her son is the reason she can’t trust herself with Killian, but her son is also the reason she’s here, so if she can manage to stay for Henry to have at least a little bit of fun, she can swallow her feelings and keep her head on straight.

Emma faces the cold harbor with her hands in her coat pockets. It’s not exactly picturesque, what with the ice and snow, but at least it’s a place to keep her attention while she considers what on Earth is going on in her head.

“Are you alright?” a voice breaks her from her thoughts.

Emma shifts, scrunching up her nose when she sees a woman, dressed in blue, with blonde hair falling over one shoulder, approaching.

“Yeah,” she says on a laugh. “I’m just… thinking.”

The woman hums.

“I come out here to think too.” Emma watches as she steps closer to her. Her smile spreads and she turns her attention out to what Emma had once been focused on. “It’s calm, isn’t it?”

Emma releases a breath. “Yeah.”

They stand in silence and Emma finds that she’s content not even knowing this woman’s name.

“I’m Elsa,” she finally says. “I’m new in town so I’m still learning everyone’s names.”

Emma turns to her and finds her hand extended. Emma shakes it. “Emma.”

Elsa nods her head. “It’s nice to meet you, Emma. Are you from Storybrooke?”

“No, I’m here visiting from New York City.”

Elsa’s eyes widen. “Really? That’s quite the trip.”

Emma laughs. She turns her attention to the horizon. “You’re telling me.”

Again, the two of them rest in silence, and Emma nibbles on her lower lip as anxiousness stirs in her chest.

“I came here for my son,” Emma says quietly. “He just turned one and I want him to have a better Christmas than he did last year.”

For a few lingering moments, Emma watches as snow trickles down from the sky before she turns to the woman standing beside her. “Can I ask you something, Elsa?”

Elsa smiles kindly. “Sure.”
Emma considers Elsa for a moment and then she considers her situation and breathes out heavily.

“Have you ever met anyone that you hated right away? Like you couldn’t stand them for breathing?”

Elsa laughs and shrugs her shoulders as she thinks about it. “I guess I have. Once or twice.”

Emma smiles and removes her hands from her pockets, instead fidgeting with them in front of her middle.

“I have that kind of a relationship with someone I’m close to. Except… I guess…” Emma frowns as her heart leaps in her chest. “Things have kind of changed in that I don’t hate him anymore and I think we’re friends. And I… I’m scared because I don’t want my kid to get hurt.”

Elsa just stares at her and Emma winces. “I’m sorry. You probably don’t care about all of this.”

Elsa’s eyes brighten. “No, no, it’s fine.” She smiles back at her. “My boyfriend says I have a great listening ear and that I give the soundest advice. He says I should be a counselor or something.”

Emma laughs with Elsa and then shakes her head.

“I was in a really bad relationship where the guy promised he loved me and told me he’d stay but the second things got too hard, he left. And I guess, with this person now, it’s like… do I even trust him? Can I?”

Elsa takes a deep breath of the crisp morning. “Well, I don’t know exact details, but… do you want to have those feelings again? Are you ready for that? Or are you afraid of getting hurt?”

Emma sighs and fixes her gaze back onto the horizon in thought.

“It’s hard, being a single mom. I work this really shitty job and I get paid close to nothing. I’m just trying to make things better for us.” She feels tears in her eyes and she swallows the lump in her throat. “Sometimes I wish there was someone who would be there just to be there, you know?”

Emma manages to look at Elsa. Her breathing is shaky and she reaches up to wipe at her tears as they find their way down her cheeks.

“But this guy… it’s so different,” Emma shakes her head. “It’s confusing. He’s a complete ass one minute and the next he’s staring at me like I’m some sort of miracle sent to him from God.”

Elsa laughs a little.

“My kid likes him a lot and I know he likes my kid, too.” Emma sighs. “And the thing is, I know he’s had a rough past like mine but he doesn’t talk about it.”

“Have you asked him about it?” Elsa asks.

“No. I don’t want to know if he doesn’t want to tell me.”

Elsa hums thoughtfully. “I see.” A tentative smile curls at her lips. “Maybe, if you’re not interested in a real relationship with him, it’s best if you just keep your distance.”

If only Elsa knew she has to spend every hour with him in order to appear happily married.

She doesn’t want to burden Elsa with any information that she doesn’t need.
Emma sighs softly. “Yeah. You’re probably right.” Her attention goes to the horizon again.

“So how long have you known this guy?” Elsa wonders.

Emma hesitates, because Elsa is a complete stranger, but as she stares over at her, she finds that Elsa probably wouldn’t go telling other people the details of her messed up situation.

“We’ve known each other for close to a month.” Emma says. “And things have been pretty consistent. We bicker and fight and he’s so annoying, but then this morning he did something different that made me realize things have been getting too real.”

“Is there something wrong with that?” Elsa asks.

“Well, yeah,” Emma blurts out, frustrated. “I can’t have feelings for a guy I hate.”

As soon as the words fall from her lips she realizes how wrong they taste on her tongue.

No, she doesn’t hate Killian Jones as much right now. She just thinks he’s impossible.

He’s an impossible idiot with the warmest arms she’s ever been held in and it isn’t fair that her heart would betray her like this.

“It doesn’t seem like you hate him very much right now.” Elsa suggests gently. “If you keep your walls up too high, you’ll end up scaring him off and losing his friendship for both you and your son, you know.”

The thought hits her like a ton of bricks. She swallows thickly and stares down at the snow around her feet.

“Yeah.”

///

Henry’s been running around the living room of David and Mary Margaret’s apartment as fast as his little legs will allow him for at least half an hour.

Killian has been chasing him for half of that, trying to get him to try to sit still when he falls to his bum, but he just gets back up again and insists upon running around crashing into things.

He hadn’t realized that playing with a one-year-old would be a never ending task and he feels like he can understand where Emma’s coming from with her frustrations day in and day out.

He manages to grab Henry and get him to sit still only when he removes a toy from one of Emma’s bags that is of great interest to him. Henry wants to sit in his lap, which is amazing in and of itself, and while he’s sitting there, Henry leans all of his weight against Killian’s chest.

“Are you quite finished?” Killian wonders. “Hm? Are you done having me chase you around?”

Mary Margaret’s on the telephone with David now, standing in the kitchen while she makes something for the dinner tonight. From what he’s heard, the party is still on.

And Emma’s been gone for an hour.

His worry manifests itself in the deep knit of his brow and the tightening ache in his chest. It’s his fault that she’s gone now. More than anything, he just hopes she’s not freezing to death out in the cold.
Henry fusses and squirms in his lap until Killian grabs him by his sides to boost him up to stand on his thighs. “What’s wrong, Henry?”

Henry just starts to grab at Killian’s face and he sighs. “I know. I miss your mum too.”

In that instant, the door suddenly opens, and Emma steps inside. Killian’s eyes widen slightly and he rises, tucking Henry against his hip.

“Mama!” Henry says her name a few times as she shucks her outer clothes and sighs.

“It’s very cold,” she laughs.

He’s relieved to hear her laughter, but keeps his distance by not saying anything.

Emma hangs her coat on the coat hanger and then removes her boots, settling them against the wall. She looks a bit flushed and cold as she rubs her hands together.

Emma crosses the room to him and smiles warmly at her son, gladly accepting him from Killian’s hold. He watches as Emma gives Henry kisses, her laughter continuing before she presses her lips together in a soft line and stares up at him.

“Listen,” she says lowly.

Killian glances over at Mary Margaret, who laughs at something on the phone, and then gives Emma his attention, turning his body toward her.

“I’m here for Henry, and maybe a little bit for me, because I’ve spent a lot of time wandering around searching for something that feels like home and I haven’t found it before we came here with you.” Emma holds his gaze and her eyelashes flutter against her cheeks. “I’m not here for you, but I’ll help you, because these people care about you and I know you feel like you’ve failed them by not doing anything with your life.”

Killian drops his gaze to the floor at her words. They sting. But she’s only telling the truth.

“We just can’t keep pretending we’re that happy couple when we’re alone,” Emma finally says in a whisper. Killian meets her eyes again. “Because we’re not. We’re just neighbors.”

He swallows thickly. “Aye. I suppose we are.”
Chapter 10

ten.

Killian has been gone for a few hours helping with the big town sidewalk clean up adventure with
David and the officer she’d met at Granny’s, who apparently is the sheriff, Graham.

It’s fine by her, because ever since their quick talk about boundaries in regards to their fake
relationship, he’d seemed moody and frustrated. It serves him right, to be honest, because he’s the
one that pushed too hard.

It doesn’t help her feel better, though, because without him here, watching Henry or bickering with
her in hushed whispers, she finds that there’s something missing.

This is his town and his friends. She’s just here because he brought her.

Emma’s sits up with Henry in Mary Margaret’s living room while the woman busily goes about
preparing something for tonight’s special dinner at Granny’s.

From what she’s been able to pick up about this dinner, it’s completely casual. People are
apparently encouraged to wear their ugly Christmas sweaters, to bring whatever they’d like to eat
and drink, and there’s just a lot of community to be had.

It’s apparently a tradition that’s stood ever since Granny opened her diner years ago, but Mary
Margaret, in her position as the town’s most valuable volunteer, has helped craft it into what it is
today.

“Emma?” Mary Margaret asks, finally taking a moment to sit down on the sofa beside her after
they have lunch. She presses her hands against her belly and sighs heavily.

Emma looks away from her son, who stands up beside the coffee table, gripping onto both it and a
favorite toy of his.

“Yeah?”

Mary Margaret smiles softly. “I just remembered that David’s present is waiting to be picked up
and I have so much going on.” The woman shakes her head. “So I was wondering, if maybe, you’d
be willing to go get it?”

“Oh, um… sure,” Emma smiles back. “I was kind of hoping I’d get to explore town a bit today
anyway.”

Mary Margaret nods her head. “Well, it’s at Gold’s Pawn Shop, at the very end of Main Street. Just
tell him it’s Mary Margaret’s gift for David. It should already be wrapped and ready to go.”

Emma nods slowly. “Okay.” She stands up and grabs Henry from the floor, earning a confused
noise from the boy. “We’re going to go exploring, baby boy. Do you want to go see the snow?”

Emma sits Henry down on the couch to dress him for going outside and then pulls on her own coat
and steps into her boots.

Mary Margaret’s playing with Henry when she turns back around and she can’t help but smile,
because the woman is so ready to be a mother.
When Emma was as pregnant as Mary Margaret is, she didn’t even think she could take care of herself, much less a little life.

And yet, here she is.

Emma approaches the couch as she adjusts her beanie hat and Mary Margaret laughs with Henry as she dances her fingers up his belly.

The woman looks up at Emma with a sweet smile on her lips. “Emma, he’s such a good boy. How did you do it?”

Emma shakes her head and laughs as she lifts her son from the couch. “Honestly, I don’t know. He’s always just been good. He can be fussy sometimes, and I know he’s only one so there’s plenty of time for this all to go south, but even when he cries it’s not severe.”

Mary Margaret looks down at her belly and rubs it. “Well, I hope we’re just as lucky as you and Killian got with Henry.”

Emma’s heart sinks just a little at the mention of Killian and she manages to smile when her new friend looks up at her.

“I’m sure your baby will be beautiful and wonderful. You and David are really good people.”

Mary Margaret’s eyes sparkle with tears and her smile becomes forced as she rises to her feet. “I hope you don’t mind hugs, because you’re getting one.”

Emma laughs when Mary Margaret wraps her arms around her, and just for a few moments, she allows herself to enjoy it.

“We should go,” Emma says when they pull apart.

Mary Margaret nods her head. “Yes. You should. Thank you for doing this for me. I would, but… this week is just chaos and I’m feeling so pregnant right now.”

Emma laughs. “It’s fine. I’m excited to check out the rest of town.”

///

Killian’s teeth dig into his lower lip as he squints an eye in focus.

He pulls his arm back and launches the dart toward the board, a low chuckle rumbling in his throat when it hits the dead center.

He spins, his eyebrows dancing as he grabs his beer bottle and faces his friends. “Beat that one, Scarlet.”

Will rolls his eyes. “Gone six years and you come back a completely reformed man except when it comes to playing darts.” Scarlet bumps shoulders with him intentionally. “You’re still an idiot.”

Killian hums. He has a sip of his beer and props himself up on the counter beside Robin, who laughs at him.

“So,” Robin says. Killian turns to him, lifting an eyebrow in question as he downs another sip. “How’s Emma enjoying it here?”
Killian sighs as he settles his bottle down on the counter and he licks his lips. “I think she likes it.”

“Yeah? Well, that’s good to hear.” Robin says on a smile. “Are you going to bring her to the party tonight? I’d love to meet the woman that changed the drunk I used to know. And your boy.”

Killian’s heart sinks and he averts his eyes, staring instead at the television in the corner of the bar. It’s a bit fuzzy, but it plays ESPN on low volume while the bar’s radio takes over the speaker system.

“Yeah,” Killian says simply. “I’m not sure we really have a choice in the matter. Mary Margaret seems to want to give Emma the full Storybrooke Christmas Package.”

Robin and Will both laugh. Will tosses the dart and it just barely misses the center, making Killian smirk as Will turns back toward them.

“Shut it, Jones.”

Killian lifts his bottle to his lips. “I didn’t say anything.”

“You were going to. I know you.”

“Mm.” Killian hums against the lip of the bottle. He finishes off the drink and settles the empty bottle on the counter.

“You’re being awfully coy today, Killian,” Robin teases, nudging him in the arm. “Trouble in paradise, perhaps?”

Killian scoffs. If only he knew.

He’d gone to help David with the sidewalks after Emma informed him that their relationship away from his friends and family is to remain strictly professional. The workout had helped him just a little with the unexpected ache in his chest, but the beer has definitely put a better damper on it.

He hadn’t known just how much he wanted a real relationship until that moment, standing in David and Mary Margaret’s living room, with Henry on Emma’s hip and Emma’s voice so low while she all but told him that things are going to be vastly different.

One night stands don’t really hold a flame to the way he’s felt around Emma Swan and her son. With the two of them, he feels something new. Something that’s hurt him in the past, but something he’s yearned for for a while now.

He knows that he wants her, but it’s mostly for companionship. There’s a fire between them. They’re both broken individuals with pasts unshared, and every time he looks at her, he just wants to know.

It’s a peculiar thing, feeling like he’s falling for her, because he hasn’t allowed himself the pleasure of falling in love for quite some time.

“No, there’s no trouble,” Killian insists, but he doesn’t sound half as convincing as he’d tried for. He turns around and sits on a bar stool.

Robin goes around the bar and leans forward, settling his palms on the edge of the bar while he lifts both eyebrows. “All right, then. Out with it.”

Killian’s jaw hangs open as he considers what he should tell, because Robin won’t let up until he
Will settles down on the stool beside him and Killian takes his fingers through his hair. “Uh… well, it’s… I did something that she didn’t quite like is all.”

“Ah,” Robin nods his head. “We’ve all been there, mate.”

“Jones is in the doghouse,” Will chuckles.

Killian gives his friends a hard look. “I’m not- bloody hell, would you stop laughing at me? I’m not in the doghouse.”

“Trust me, Jones, you are.” Robin states. “Any man that looks like that and wonders why his wife’s mad at him most certainly is in the doghouse.”

Killian shakes his head.

“The only way out of it is to apologize,” Will adds. “Tell her she’s completely right, even if you know she isn’t.”

Robin shrugs his shoulders and frowns slightly. “Well, unless you’d like to never be intimate with your lady again.”

Killian cringes, holding his hand out. He doesn’t like his friends thinking of him and of Emma in that way at all. “Okay, alright.”

“I’ve seen your wife, Jones,” Scarlet tilts his head to the side, a smirk filling his lips. “She’s a bloody ten if I’ve ever seen one.”

Killian swats the back of his head. “Shut it, you. Don’t talk about my wife when you’ve got yourself one of the loveliest women in Storybrooke.”

Robin nods in agreement. “Jones is right. Belle is very lovely.”

“Alright!” Scarlet says defensively. “I know Belle’s lovely. She’s gorgeous.”

There’s a look on Will’s face that makes Killian narrow his eyes at him. “Are you having problems with Belle, Scarlet?”

“What?” Will scrunches his face up. “No.”

“Ah, I think you are!” Robin jeers, chuckling. “What’s the problem this time, mate?”

Will tilts his head back and forth for a few moments. “She wants a baby. I don’t know if I’m ready yet. Thankfully we’ve only just started discussing it.”

It being that Robin is the only one who can technically talk about this, Killian keeps his mouth closed.

“Well,” Robin shakes his head. “My Roland was a completely happy accident, so I don’t know what to tell you, really.” Killian makes the mistake of meeting Robin’s eyes. “Jones, you and your lady must have had some conversation, right?”

Killian holds his mouth open for a few long seconds as he drags out, “Ah…”

He stops, turns to Scarlet, and claps him on the shoulder. “You’re not ever truly ready, mate. Trust
me. When I met Henry the first time…” He pauses and smiles a little at the memory he has of the boy completely driving his mother up the wall with his tears. Until he knocked on the door. “It all changed. I saw him and I knew I would give him anything if he needed me to.”

Will narrows his eyes at him. “Huh.”

Robin just smiles in agreement. “Killian’s right. But if you’re not really ready, then tell your wife that. There’s no use getting her hopes up about it.”

A brief moment of quiet settles over them and Will drags his hands over his face. “Gods, okay. You’re right.”

Killian pats his back and grins. “If I can get through what’s going on with myself and Emma, I think you can handle this.”

///

Emma sighs as she enters Gold’s Pawn Shop. It’s cold outside, but the warm air of the store immediately wraps around her like a blanket.

Her eyes widen as she scans the room. Everywhere, there are trinkets and valuables, and Emma finds herself drawn to a glass mobile with unicorns dangling from the ends. She stares at it for a few moments before the sound of footsteps jerks her back in line.

Henry’s babbling in her ear as she steps toward the main counter, and the man that stands there is a little bit older, with a cane to help him walk. He doesn’t smile and he’s dressed in a tight suit.

“Hi,” Emma breathes. “Um. I’m picking something up for my friend Mary Margaret. It’s a gift for David.”

The man finally cracks a semblance of a smile and he nods. “Ah. Yes. The sword.”

He turns around and pulls a box down from a shelf. It’s a rather large box, much larger than she could have ever anticipated, and even the man struggles with it.

He settles it down on the countertop and Emma swallows when she meets the man’s eyes. He seems to be curious about her, studying her as if he’ll be able to figure her out.

“I’m not from town,” she informs him in an attempt to get him to stop studying her like he’s some fortune teller. “I’m from New York. I’m just here with my husband for Christmas.”

It rolls off of her tongue so easily that she has to curse herself for it.

“Ah,” the man nods. “I know most everyone in Storybrooke and I wondered why I didn’t know you.” He pulls on a smile. “Mr. Gold.”

Emma smiles back and shakes his extended hand. “Emma.” She releases his hand and when he continues to just stare at her, she adds, “Jones. Killian Jones is my husband. You probably know him.”

Emma adjusts Henry on her hip when he drops a little too low. She sees something in Mr. Gold’s eyes flicker, and then he says, “Of course.” Gold grits his teeth and shakes his head. “Your husband and I have a complicated history.”

She gets nervous all of a sudden, hearing his words, seeing the look in his eyes, and she shakes her
head slowly.

Killian’s history gets more and more confusing and wild with each passing day. She finds that she’s curious to know more, but at the same time not ready. It’s Killian’s story, after all, and at the moment, she’s not willing to go there with him.

“It’s in the past,” Gold resolves quickly. He pushes the box toward her and glances at Henry on her hip. It’s an action that makes her want to hide her son and never return to this store. “Are you certain you’ll be able to take this?”

Emma grabs the box and hums after tucking it under her arm. It’s so heavy and her words are definitely lies when they tumble from her lips. “Yep. Yeah. Of course.” She pulls on a smile and nods at the man. “It was nice meeting you.”

“Likewise, Mrs. Jones.”

The words make her heart skip a beat and she quickly turns around. She only takes four steps before she has her first near-slip in the snow outside.

“God, Mary Margaret, why didn’t you tell me it was a freaking sword?” Emma mutters under her breath while she looks down at her feet.

She takes a few cautious steps forward. She releases an easy breath. “Okay. Just one step at a time.”

Emma takes one more step. And then she rams straight into someone with the box.

“Oh, crap. I’m so sorry,” she says, looking up to find a man standing there all bundled up.

He has eyes as blue as Killian’s and he shakes his head when they meet hers.

“No, no, don’t apologize on any account. I’m the one who wasn’t looking out for where I was going,” he says in an accented voice. He smiles at her and at the boy on her hip. “I don’t believe I’ve met you before.”

Emma laughs and her breath is white in the air between them. “Yeah. I’m not from here. We’re just here for the week.”

“Ah,” the man says on a nod, still smiling at her sweetly. She hears a ringing and the man closes his eyes briefly. “I’ve got to run. My girlfriend is having serious car trouble and I’m afraid she’s somewhat impatient with me since our trip out of town took a little longer than anticipated. I apologize for quite literally running into you, love.”

Emma shakes her head at him. “Oh, no-”

The man steps up to her and smiles at Henry. “You’ve got a sweet lad.”

Emma furrows her brow slightly. “Thank you?”

Henry mumbles in his baby voice in a mimicking fashion.

Emma sighs as she stares at him. “Okay, monkey. Mommy’s an idiot. We need help if we’re ever going to get this box back to Mary Margaret.”

Emma settles the sword down in the snow and pulls her phone out of her pocket. She reluctantly finds Killian’s number and stares at it for an obscene amount of time.
If she calls him, it means she’s willing to extend a branch. And she’s not.

But it isn’t like she knows everyone in town like he does, so she has no real choices in the matter.

He picks up after two rings.

“Swan!” he greets. She hears a lot of noise in the background. She isn’t sure where he could be, but he sounds suspiciously as if he’s at the bar.

“I need you to come help me with something.”

He hums on the other end, genuinely curious. “What’s that, love?”

Emma sighs. “Mary Margaret asked me to get something for her from Gold’s Pawn Shop and it’s a freaking heavy box and I have Henry. I need you to come help me with it.”

Killian is quiet for a few moments. “Are you certain? I can send someone to help in my place.”

Emma drops her shoulders and scoffs. “You would never do that.”

“I would.” She hears him moving away from the noise and she thinks he must step outside because it’s suddenly much quieter. “Because I don’t want you to think I’m pushing you too hard.”

She rolls her eyes and bites out, “And since when would that matter to you, Mister One Night Only?”

“Since earlier this morning when you told me I’m your neighbor.”

Emma hears the tension in his tone. She doesn’t understand how on Earth she could have offended him, because things between them haven’t exactly been perfect, and it’s not like they’re in love, either.

“Killian,” she groans. “Just come help me. I don’t want to have to pretend with some stranger. If you come at least I can be angry with you.”

“Where are you?” he asks quietly. She hears his boots crunching against the snow and then he opens a car door.

“Like five feet away from Gold’s shop.”

He sighs and something shifts, like the sound of him boosting himself up into his truck. “I’ll be there in two minutes.”

Emma sighs. “Okay.” She hangs up and stuffs her phone away, then bounces Henry on her hip a little. She wipes at his nose with her sleeve and he giggles at her. “What’s so funny?”

Emma presses a kiss to his forehead. “When we get back you can have a nap, okay?”

Her son leans against her, his little voice a low murmur, and she strokes a circle into his back as she waits for help to arrive.

Killian pulls up with his truck and Emma manages to smile at the sight of him. Despite being at odds, she thinks it’s kind of nice that they can still manage to deal with each other.

He opens up his door and hops out, leaving the truck running.
“That was like five minutes,” she says when Killian grabs the box from the snow.

He snorts. “Well, anything to help my lovely wife.” Emma gives him a look and he rolls his eyes. “I’m teasing you, darling.”

“Mm,” Emma hums. “Maybe save the flirting for later when we’re being watched.”

Killian hoists the box into the back seat of his truck and holds his arm out. “Would you like a ride?”

Emma stares at him for a few long moments. She’d like for him to just take the box to Mary Margaret’s and allow her to do what she wants instead, but then Henry whines and she nods. “Yeah. Henry’s kind of tired.”


Emma sighs heavily when her son twists in her arms to face Killian. Killian just smiles at her son and extends his arms. They trade off and Killian’s fingers work their way up Henry’s belly as he kisses his nose.

“I don’t know why he keeps calling you that.” Emma says quietly.

Killian shakes his head. “It’s alright. He doesn’t know any better.”

Emma goes around the truck and sits in the passenger’s side while Killian settles Henry into the car seat.

As soon as Killian starts to drive, he says, “The party is in about two hours. When we’re there, I… I realize you don’t entirely like me quite as much right now, but I need your help.”

Emma nods in understanding. “That’s what I signed up for when I agreed to come with you.”

Killian glances over at her for a moment and then back at the road as he pulls the truck up to the apartment building.

“Aye. I know. I just… my brother is likely going to be there tonight and I’m worried that he’ll read right through the situation. He’s quite perceptive and he knows me even better than I know myself.”

Emma stares back at him for a few moments. “Aren’t brothers supposed to… I don’t know, love each other? Support each other no matter what?”

Killian hums. He looks forward and she sees his jaw clench tightly.

“Liam’s always been… much, much better than I could ever be. He sets the standard fairly high and I’m afraid of letting him down.” Killian turns back to her. “I understand if you want to leave. I’m… a bit of an idiot for ever thinking this was a good idea. And after what happened this morning, I think I owe it to you to allow you the choice.”

Her heart aches for him, because he’s so nervous. She hasn’t seen him like this before.

And to know that he’d be willing to give it up for her sake is enough cause for her to never be angry with him again, but instead she just takes it in stride. It’s a new layer to Killian Jones, a layer of compassion and of regret.
She’d once thought he could never comprehend such feelings, but she sees it in his eyes when he looks at her now. He regrets the way things have changed between them, and he wants to make things right again.

“No,” Emma sighs, shaking her head. “I kind of understand where you’re coming from.” She searches his eyes. “And we’ve already come far enough. May as well finish the week out.”

Killian nods. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure.” Emma insists hardly. She looks back at her son in his car seat and smiles softly. “Besides, at least he likes you.”

“Yeah,” Killian says, though his eyes are telling her that he doesn’t believe it.

Her eyes fall to her lap and she feels a twist in her gut. She doesn’t want things to get out of hand. That’s her only problem with pretending with him, because he seems to be feeling much more than she is.

“We need to get him some presents,” Emma murmurs. “It’ll look bad if we don’t.”

Killian glances into the backseat with her and nods his head. “Well, I’ll pay if you want to go shop while he’s napping.”

Emma arches an eyebrow at him. “And leave him with Mary Margaret?”

“I don’t see why not. She’s about to become a mother. She should have no problem saying yes.”

Emma bites on her lower lip. It sounds like a date. But she won’t let it be.

“Okay.”

///

There’s a toy store in Storybrooke that is a joint children’s clothing store.

Killian admires Emma as she studies the toys. Seeing her like this is very interesting, especially after the latest turn of events in their relationship.

He understands that things aren’t going to somehow get better overnight for them and their private relationship, but it doesn’t mean he’s not willing to try. He sees this as a step in the right direction, her allowing him to take her shopping for her son’s Christmas gifts.

At least she’s not storming around like she had been earlier that morning.

“What about this?” Killian asks, lifting a toy phone from the shelf and putting it to his ear after triggering a high-pitched song with a press of a button. “Hello? Is Emma there?”

Emma rolls her eyes and laughs. She grabs a toy phone for herself. He watches with amusement when she puts it against her ear.

“I am.”

“Well, hello, Emma. This is Killian. How are you?”

Emma shrugs her shoulders. “I don’t know. It’s been a weird day for me.” She pauses and stares at him intently. “I think it’s getting better, though.”
And yet another step in the right direction. Her eyes crinkle when she smiles and he thinks his heart might beat straight out of his chest.

“You’re rather pretty,” Killian says, getting the look he’d been searching for- the one where she blushes and rolls her eyes as if it doesn’t affect her. “Are you… you’re not single are you?”

“Sorry.” Emma cringes. “I’m kind of playing someone’s wife at the moment. I can’t go out with you.”

Emma settles her phone down on the shelf and moves up the aisle, stopping to play with a toy cash register for a moment.

“I don’t know what to choose for him,” Emma sighs. She nibbles on her lower lip. “Do they have those big Lego’s? The ones that are for little kids?”

“I don’t know that he’s the right age for that yet, love.” Killian says, lifting an eyebrow. He comes up beside her and plucks up a rather large plastic train set that promises to be both loud and endlessly exciting. “What about this? Could you see him playing with trains?”

Emma studies the item in his hands and shrugs. “Yeah.”

Killian nods. “Okay. That’s one gift. We should get him something else.”

Emma puts her head on her shoulder, her eyes wide as she stares at the price. “Killian. That’s way too expensive. I can’t ask you to--”

“I want to,” Killian insists. “It’s for Henry. He’s my friend.”

Emma’s expression is weak and she sighs through her nose. “Fine.”

He grins. “What about… this?” Killian walks with her toward a shelf devoted to stuffed animals and plucks up a particularly soft puppy dog. “He might like this, right?”

Emma takes the dog from him and he smiles to himself when she cuddles with it, her cheek pressed against the toy’s fur. “It’s really soft. Yes. He will love this.”

He watches as Emma moves down another aisle on her own and follows her when she says, “Oh!”

Killian finds her holding up toy tugboats that must belong in the bath. Emma’s eyes are bright and she laughs. “Henry used to have some toys like these for the bath but I think they got lost somehow when the babysitter came over.”

That’s all the explanation he needs before he plucks up a few and cradles them in his arm with the toy train box.

Emma doesn’t look back at him, instead moving forward, and she decisively pulls a box down that depicts a game of drop the ball down the hole and watch it slide. It seems like something that might make Henry quite pleased.

“When Henry was a baby, it was hard to imagine this day,” Emma says suddenly. “Buying all kinds of toys for him to play with. He’s growing up so fast.”

When Emma looks up at him, she seems breathless, her eyes shining on the verge of tears. He feels sorry for her, and for everything she’s been through, even though he knows nothing about any of it.

“You’re a good mother,” he tells her lowly. “Henry adores you.”
Emma smiles a little. “Yeah, well, I work too much and he spends most of his time with a sitter.”

“You’re doing what you can,” Killian tells her. “You’re working and studying and you’re trying to provide him with a good life. That’s the marks of a good parent. Something you and I both know very little about.”

Her gaze becomes softer and she drops her shoulders as her lips part. “Yeah. I guess so.”

It’s then that the shop employee comes to them with a big smile on her lips. “Oh, well if it isn’t Killian Jones.”

Emma’s attention falls away and the moment goes right with it.

“Hello, Tinkerbell.”

The blonde laughs and shakes her head. “You’re never going to let go of that, are you?”

Killian cracks a grin. “It’s not my fault you dressed like a fairy for Halloween ten years in a row, love.” Tink looks at Emma and at the toys in their arms and before she can say anything, Killian clears his throat. “This is my wife, Emma. We’re looking for some gifts for our boy.”

The look on her face is shock at first and she gasps. “You’re married? And you have a son! This is so exciting. I’m so glad you’re here.”

Tink wraps Emma in a sudden embrace and then comes to him to do the same thing. “So you’re here for Christmas, then?”

He nods when Tink starts to gather up their toys and settles them into a basket she’d brought over.

“Aye. Just for the week. We live in New York now.”

Tink smiles and nods. “Well, I hope to see you around. You’re coming to Granny’s tonight, right?”

“Aye,” Killian affirms. He stares at Emma, whose attention is on him. “We’ll be there.”
Chapter 11

eleven.

Emma’s only goal for the party at Granny’s is to not lose her head. She and Killian have gotten a little bit closer over the past day, despite a hiccup or two causing some minor setbacks, and while tonight should be relatively fun, she’s already anticipating at least some uncomfortable shifting.

Emma sits on the bed upstairs at the loft with Henry on the bed. He’s playing with one of his toys and chattering with her as she pysches herself up for tonight’s study in patience and acting for all of Killian’s friends and family.

A pair of feet hit the ladder and she isn’t surprised to find Killian emerging from the downstairs, a breathless sigh escaping his lips as he lifts his eyebrows at her and sucks on his lips.

He goes to his bag and digs through it, popping up with two ugly sweaters in his hands. He holds them up to her.

“Alright, Swan, what’ll it be?” he asks. “The reindeer or the snowmen?”

She tilts her head at the options and narrows her eyes slightly at him. “You do know I probably won’t fit either of those.”

Killian winks at her. “I wasn’t proposing you’d wear one, but if you want to…”

Emma’s eyes widen as her mouth falls open. She shakes her head. “You’re unbelievable.” He shrugs his shoulders and shakes his hands at her, trying to get her to choose. “Reindeer.”

He nods his head. “Excellent choice.”

He tosses the sweater at her and she gives him a hard look as he shrugs the remaining sweater on over his head.

She’d be lying if she said she wasn’t looking at the line of skin that appears at his navel when his shirt shifts upward, at the thick patch of hair that lies there, or the way his muscles seem so toned even in the midst of the winter.

The thought of Killian Jones working out makes her blush and she covers it up with the fabric of the sweater as it slides over her head.

She’s right. It doesn’t fit her.

But Killian just grins at her and lifts his eyebrows. “You look fantastic.”

Emma hums. “Okay, buddy. Is Mary Margaret ushering us out the door yet?”

Killian settles himself down at the foot of the bed, reaching in to play with Henry. “She’s actually in the midst of yet another bathroom break.”

Emma laughs. She slides the long sleeves of Killian’s sweater up toward her elbows and licks her lips as she tucks her hair behind her ears. “That third trimester is full of those.”

Their eyes meet over the top of Henry’s head and Killian smiles softly at her. She can tell he’s nervous for tonight. He has been for hours.
“Are you ready for tonight?” Emma wonders gently. Her palm falls to the quilt on the top of the bed and she drags her fingers along the patterns in the fabric.

Killian exhal es heavily. “I don’t know that I ever truly could be ready to see my brother after all of these years.” Emma watches his eyes light up when Henry crawls up to him and insists upon being held. He complies quickly. “He’s going to probably ask you things. Check to make sure you’re…”

He sighs and shakes his head. His fingers are busy on Henry’s side and he has his gaze set on the baby for a long few moments before looking at her again.

“I take my coffee black. I like action movies, but my favorite films are ones with heart.”

Emma settles her hands in her lap when she realizes what he’s doing. He’s opening up to her. Right now. Regardless of the fact if she’s ready or if she actually wants him to.

“I’d rather go sit in a bookstore and read over just about anything.” He shakes his head. “When I was… six, I found my father’s razor in the bathroom and I accidentally nicked myself. Right here.” He points to the scar beneath his eye and breathes a soft laugh. “My father was pissed. Liam covered for me, though.”

Emma nods, smiling at the idea of the memory he’s having.

Killian looks down at Henry and takes a breath. “When I was young, Liam taught me to sail. It was our favorite thing to do after our father left.” He drops a kiss to Henry’s head. “When I was fourteen, I had my first official girlfriend. She was in my class. Her name was Rachel. Also was my first kiss.”

Emma laughs when he gives her a look of disgust. “No good, huh?”

“Terrible,” he says, chuckling. He stares at her, his smile slowly fading as he continues. “My mother passed away when I was two years old and I don’t have any memories of her. She was very sick.” Killian takes a deep breath and glances down at the quilt on the bed for a moment. “When I was in high school, I decided that I wanted to be on the football team and I ended up getting hurt during our first practice, so I never played again.”

Emma hums. “What did you do instead?”

“Cheerleaders, mostly,” he teases with a twinkle in his eyes. He shakes his head. “No, instead I worked and I was part of the school paper.”

She nods and narrows her eyes at him skeptically.

“I had quite the way with words, love,” he says. “Still do, might I add.” Killian pauses again. “David was my best friend. Since grade school. We did pretty much everything together. And Robin was kind of our secondary friend. He moved into town during junior year so we didn’t have much time to spend with him. We all decided to go to school together and while we were in college, we made our very own brand of beer.”

Emma lifts her eyebrows at him. “Really?”

“Aye,” Killian smiles. “Dave thought it was so brilliant that when we came back from school he got us to buy the bar in a three way split. Though, to be fair, with the proceeds from the beer, we had quite a bit in savings.”

She laughs in surprise. She definitely could never have guessed *that* about him. “Wow.”
Killian shrugs his shoulders. “We were young.”

“But you wanted to be a lawyer.”

He softens and nods. “Yeah. I suppose I thought I could just put it on hold. When we bought the bar I didn’t think I’d be leaving so soon.”

Emma opens her mouth to ask about what happened, feeling just a little more connected to Killian thanks to his sudden bout of honesty.

But then Mary Margaret’s anxious voice calls out, “Emma? Killian? We’ll be late if we don’t leave now!”

Killian turns his head toward the downstairs. “We’re on our way!”

When he turns back to her, he smiles, and Emma smiles in turn. She watches as he lifts her son into his arms as if he’s done it every day of his life, and then she shifts herself off of the bed, allowing the baggy sleeves of Killian’s sweater to hang past her hands.

Emma grabs the diaper bag and drapes it over her shoulder while Killian carries Henry and they both nod at one another before descending into the Nolan’s living room.

“You’re too cute with your Christmas sweaters! I love it.” Mary Margaret says once they’re on the floor.

The woman herself is no better, with a huge Santa sweater and Santa hat. She smiles warmly, her palms settled over top of her baby bump.

“David!” she calls out. “Come on, honey. I can’t be late.”

Emma turns in time to see David hurrying out of his and Mary Margaret’s bedroom. He’s also dressed up, as Santa, complete with boots and a white beard, and he sighs heavily.

“Mary Margaret, do I have to be Santa?”

Mary Margaret frowns. “Honey, we talked about this. If you don’t do it, I’ll have to give the job to Leroy and he’s… the kids hate him.”

David pulls his beard down below his chin and sighs again as he grabs a crock-pot sitting on the counter. “Okay. Let’s go before I change my mind.”

Mary Margaret giddily claps her hands. “Thank you, Sweetheart. I know it’s not your favorite part of the party.”

David just grumbles as he trudges forward. His wife has to help him put on his coat, and after they’re all bundled up to walk to Granny’s, they do just that.

And it’s not bad.

At first, it’s a little empty because they’re the first to arrive, so there’s a lot of quiet. Emma ends up standing by Killian at the counter where the food is, snacking with him while they people watch.

Mary Margaret is frantic to make sure everything is perfect, so she and Killian lift eyebrows over her for a little while, before one of his friends comes into the diner with his wife and son.

“Emma,” Killian smiles at her, adjusting Henry on his hip. “This is Robin. I want to introduce
Robin, it seems, is just as anxious to meet her, because they meet in the middle, and he has a huge grin on his face.

“Emma. I have heard so much about you in the past day you’ve been here. I’m Robin. This is my wife, Marian, and our son, Roland. He’s just about to turn five.”

Emma finds them to be a sweet family, completely honest and kind, and she giggles when Roland wants to shake her hand after his parents do.

“It’s nice to meet you, Roland,” she says, leaning down so she’s at eye level with him. “I’m Emma.”

Roland’s little cheeks dimple and he nods his head. “Hi Emma. I’m Roland.”

She laughs. “It’s so nice to meet you. I have a little boy, too. His name is Henry.” Emma glances up at Henry, who sits content on Killian’s side.

“Hi Henry!” Roland chirps, bouncing up, as Emma stands upright again.

Killian and Emma both look at Henry. Killian takes Henry’s hand and waves it at Roland.


Henry surprises her, saying, “Hi.”

She and the adults gathered chuckle. Both Emma and Killian lean in to kiss his cheeks at the same time and he squeals happily, clapping his hands together.

Emma meets Killian’s eyes as they pull away and her breath catches in her throat at the look that resides in them. Clearly, it was unintentional, but their shared moment as a family is making this realer by the second.

Every passing moment they seem to share feels that way, and while she’d been against allowing him to mean something to her earlier today, as she stands beside him while he and Robin talk, she can’t help but feel softened.

He’s been honest with her. He’s allowed her space. He’s given her chances to get out of this, as if he’s become some better version of himself overnight.

She knows it’s probably too good to be true, because he’s Killian Jones, a man who had spent two weeks flirting with her while he was bedding other women in his apartment next door.

But things have changed. For both of them.

Maybe it’s the magic of Christmas. Maybe it’s the small town intimacy that’s made them new.

Emma realizes that this is happening far too fast, and that those walls she’d put up were there for a reason, so she reminds herself that when they’re alone, she’ll have to make sure he knows that what happens when they’re in public means nothing.

Even though it feels like it means everything.

After she and Robin’s family have been introduced, Will and Belle come into the diner. Granny wants to shower the couple with kisses, and Will groans when Granny even hugs him, something
that makes Emma laugh quietly.

Mary Margaret claps her hands together as the room fills up. By this time, Emma has met far too many people and has learned far too many names to remember, and Henry has remained quite well behaved, much to her delight.

“May I have your attention?” Mary Margaret asks. “Hi. So, I just want to thank everyone for coming to the town Christmas party. I know there’s not a ton of space, so if you want to filter in and out as you wish, feel free. We have some games planned, but in the meanwhile, you’re free to take pictures with Santa or have some food. Merry Christmas, everyone!”

The room erupts into cheers momentarily and Emma gazes up at Killian when his voice lifts happily. He meets her eyes with a grin on his lips and he leans in to whisper, “We should take pictures. Henry would like that.”

Emma hums. “Yeah. Let’s do that.”

Killian lifts his eyebrows at David when they approach him where he’s sitting and he wears a teasing grin on his face. “Hello, Santa. Would you like to grant my boy a wish?”

David glares at Killian just a little and extends his arms toward them. “I’m humiliated, but yes. I’d love to.”

Killian settles Henry into David’s lap and they both pull their phones out so they can get pictures. Henry is fascinated with David’s beard. He keeps pulling at it and babbling nonsense.

“What would you like for Christmas, Henry?” David asks.

Emma settles her phone down and instead watches her son.

This is one of those moments she’d been hoping for. One filled with joy and light. One where she isn’t worried about her walls or keeping her guard up. One where she’s not thinking about Neal or about all of the rough things in her past.

This is good.

She glances up at Killian as David continues to chat with Henry and finds that Killian’s expression is awestruck, as if he’s so incredibly moved by the sight of her son sitting with the Santa version of his childhood best friend.

He lowers his phone and slips it into his pocket, and then he stares over at her, and she thinks, maybe, he’s not half as bad as she’d originally thought.

Her fingers twitch by her sides and she starts to realize what she’s thinking and how crazy it is, so she turns forward and forces herself to smile at her son as he’s saying her name.

“Say thank you to Santa, monkey.” Emma says, reaching down to grab him from David’s lap.

Henry just blows David a kiss and she laughs, brushing her lips to his cheek.

“Thank you for visiting me,” David says in response. “Merry Christmas!”

Emma feels Killian’s hand on the small of her back as he guides them back away from the Santa station. She turns to look at him and swallows the tension in her throat, about to say something to him, but the moment dissolves when Tink comes up to them with a big smile on her lips.
“Is this the little one?” she wonders.

Killian and Emma both laugh together and nod. “Yes. This is Henry.”

Tink reaches out to tug on his toes and Henry burrows close to her in an attempt at getting away from her.

“Oh I get it.” Tink nods. “Well, it was nice to meet you, Henry. Your daddy and I used to be… really good friends.” Tink smirks when she looks at Killian.

Emma’s heart stutters as she looks up at Killian too and she finds his mouth hanging open just slightly while his tongue wets his lower lip. She rolls her eyes and nudges him in his side so he’ll stop drooling.

So, she wasn’t right to think he’d be different now that they’ve started getting closer. It justifies a change in attitude toward him for her.

“We were,” Killian drawls, staring at Emma pointedly. “Back in high school. When I was young and naive. Without a moral compass. And now that I’ve found you, my love, I’ve no regrets in regards to where life has brought me.”

“Aww,” Tink sighs. “You’re such a sweet family. Congratulations, Killian. You know, when you left, I thought for sure I’d read about you in the obituaries.” Killian’s expression is hard and he clenches his jaw. “I’m glad that’s not the case. I’m glad you have something to live for now.”

Killian pulls a smile and tips his head lowly. “Aye.”

“Dada,” Henry says suddenly, dragging Killian straight out of his low stupor and spreading a grin across his face instead.

Emma sighs and shakes her head as soon as they make the transfer of her son. “He’s really attached to you.”

Killian gazes at her son for a few moments, settling his palm over Henry’s belly. “Well, that’s more than alright with me.”

Emma nearly forgets that Tink is still with them, watching their every move, until she clears her throat.

“I’ve got to go,” she says. “But it was so nice seeing you again. Merry Christmas.”

Both Emma and Killian repeat the phrase to her and Emma licks her lips, craving something to drink more than she ever has before.

“I’m gonna go see if Granny has anything other than eggnog out yet.”

Killian nods his head. “Alright.”

She barely reaches the counter when she’s approached by the waitress from the other night, Ruby, who lifts her eyebrows at her and bites down on her lower lip.

“So how’d you do it?” she asks right out of the gate, without any formal greeting.

Emma gapes at her in confusion as she grabs a paper cup to fill it with hot water and a packet of hot chocolate. “What-?”
Ruby tilts her head back toward the center of the room, where Killian stands when she looks.

“How’d you get him to settle down? After everything that he went through with *everything…* nobody thought he’d make it. Nobody thought he’d ever come home again.”

Emma brings her attention to her hot chocolate and focuses on stirring the mix into the hot water for a few moments.

“Uhm… I don’t know.” She finally laughs. “I guess… love makes people different in some ways.”

Ruby hums. “You’re telling me.” She shakes her head. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so happy. Even when things were good. He wasn’t ever like this.”

Emma doesn’t know what to say, so she just nods her head slowly and lifts her hot chocolate to her lips while she stares at Killian. He’s talking with someone she hasn’t met yet, but he’s happy, throwing his head while he laughs, and his eyes seem impossibly bright.

Occasionally, he’ll look at Henry on his hip and he’ll adjust his little sleeves or leave a kiss to the crown of his head.

“He must have really wanted that baby,” Ruby mutters from right beside Emma. She turns to look at the woman, finding her staring just as she had been. “God. He’s a *new man.*”

The front door opens, as it has been on and off for a while now, but this time, it’s different, because suddenly, Killian’s attention jerks away from who he was talking to and instead he seems stiff as he faces the front door.

When Emma drags her eyes away from her neighbor, she finds two people entering the party. Both of whom she has seen before.

Elsa, with her smile tentative, and the man she’d run into outside of Gold’s shop. Both of them smile and wave at people in the room, and Emma sees the moment the man meets Killian’s gaze.

His smile immediately falls into a shocked expression, his eyes wide as he shakes his head.

“Killian?” the man asks. “What in the devil are you doing back in town? Without telling your own brother you’d be coming for Christmas, no less.”

Her heart skips a beat as realization finally clicks into place. **Liam.**

“I… apologies, Liam,” Killian says, shaking his head. “I didn’t think you’d miss me that much.”

Emma finds herself wandering toward Killian, feeling as if she needs to stand by his side for support.

Killian looks at her when she comes to his side and it appears as if he’d like to run more than anything, as if this reintroduction is already going far worse than he could’ve imagined.

On a whim, she finds his hand at his side and takes it into hers. It makes his eyes widen for a moment, but she just clears her throat and turns her attention to Liam and Elsa, who now stand before them.

“Liam,” Killian says on a breath. “This is my wife, Emma, and our son, Henry.”
Elsa meets Emma’s eyes then and she can see her calculating, considering the conversation that they’d had, and suddenly, Emma feels anxious. Will she say something? Will she spoil this whole thing that they’re currently working on? After all, she is Liam’s girlfriend.

Liam looks at Emma and then at Henry and back at his brother. “You’re married.”

Killian meets her eyes and she squeezes his hand in silent support. He nods his head, a sly grin on his lips when he turns back to his brother. “Aye. Well, as long as she’ll have me we are.”

Liam laughs and Emma releases Killian’s hand so she can offer a hand to Liam. “It’s nice to meet you. Killian really looks up to you. He talks a lot about you.”

Liam gets a little blush in his cheeks and laughs as he shakes her hand. “It’s impossibly good to meet you, Emma.”

She nods her head and then Killian’s being introduced to Elsa and all she can think is: she needs to sit down.

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Killian doesn’t have to wait long for the inevitable interrogation to begin.

After Emma excuses herself to the bathroom and Elsa finds a friend to talk to, Liam sits him down in one of the booths in the back of the room.

With Henry in his lap, slowly being eased into sleep, Killian feels just a little bit stronger about this at least.

“So how long have you been together with your wife, then, Killian?” Liam asks, as if it’s just a normal conversation between brothers who haven’t been apart for six years.

Killian takes a deep breath and smiles. “Ah…three years. It was a bit of love at first sight. We could hardly wait to get married and settle down.”

Liam studies him for a few moments with a smile of his own. He looks down at the sleepy baby in his arms and shakes his head. “She must be some woman, then. If she managed to get you out of that impenetrable depression.”

For a moment, Killian thinks Liam might not completely believe him. He narrows his eyes slightly in a policing manner, as if he’s trying to get a better read on him.

“Aye,” Killian nods. He swallows the lump forming in his throat. “Emma’s… she’s everything. She’s brilliant and beautiful and she can be as stubborn as an ox, I tell you, but… every day with her is a reminder of how lucky I am that she moved into my building.”

Liam hums, a soft smile on his face. He has a sip of his cocoa and leans forward slightly. “I just find it… odd, Killian. You were gone for six years and suddenly you’re here with a wife and son.”

Killian’s heart skips a beat and he feels the blood drain from his face as he glares at his brother. “It’s not that strange, is it, brother? Me finding a home away from this place? The place that tore everything from me?”

Liam sighs. “Aye, well, I’m just saying that she seems lovely, but she doesn’t seem like your type.”
Killian looks away from the table and sees Emma leaving the bathroom. When she spots them, a gentle, pleasant smile fills her lips, and she drifts toward him like it’s some dream.

“Hey,” she says breathily, settling into the booth beside him. “There was a line for the bathroom, if you can believe it.” He laughs at the look on her face and she glances down at her son. “He’s sleeping. Good. I was worried about that.”

He nods. “Aye. Well, Uncle Liam must’ve worn him out with all of this chatter.”

Killian glances across the table at his brother, who rolls his eyes. “I’m not that much of a bore, brother.”

Killian can see Liam staring at Emma, as if trying to decipher her, and he can sense that Liam doesn’t believe them in the way his eyes narrow slightly.

Emma laughs softly and he feels her shift closer to him in the booth, much to his surprise. “I’m sure you’re not half as bad as Killian when he’s droning on about his casework.”

Killian scoffs, offended. “You don’t like hearing about my cases, love?”

It’s flawless, how they fall into this banter, and he’s proud that Emma would even be as talkative as she is.

He meets Emma’s playful eyes and shakes his head at her slowly when she just lifts her eyebrows and laughs.

“I like hearing about them, but not when you’ve been gone all day,” she says simply.

Her eyes caress his face and for a moment, he thinks she might kiss him, but he turns instead to his brother and sighs contentedly when her head hits his shoulder.

It’s hard, sometimes, to distinguish whether or not a moment shared between them is for play or for real. He likes to think, as he’s brushing his lips against the top of her head and holding her son closer to his body, that maybe this is real.

“So, Emma,” Liam speaks up. “What do you do?”

Emma removes her head from his shoulder and he watches her lick her lips. “I’m an artist. I don’t paint a ton right now, because of Henry, though.”

Killian smiles proudly at her. “And you do a brilliant job of it, darling.”

“Thanks, honey.”

She stares at his brother and Liam smiles a little as he traces the rim of his cup with his rough fingers.

“Well, we’ll have to get together while you’re here. Elsa and I have been renting this cabin on the edge of town while we wait for our dream house to be built. It’s very private and very large. It’s out by the river. It might be nice if you stayed with us.”

Killian turns to Emma and he can tell she’s uncomfortable by the idea in the way she stares back at him.

“Ah…” Killian shakes his head at his brother. “Perhaps we’ll come by for Christmas Eve or something. We’re staying with David and Mary Margaret. They’re pretty set on hosting us.”
Liam hums skeptically, but Killian glares at him.

“Well, alright. It’s a fair compromise.” Liam smiles at them.

It’s clear that his brother doesn’t find Emma the most delightful of people, in the way he averts his gaze and downs the rest of his drink.

Killian clenches his jaw and turns toward Emma, pressing his lips to her temple in a gentle kiss.

“Sweetheart, would you like to see if we can’t win the raffle?” he lifts his eyebrows playfully and Emma laughs at him through her nose.

“Yes. Sure.”

She grabs his hand when he’s at the edge of the booth and he can’t help but feel his heart race when he stands beside her with their toes touching. Emma licks her lips and tilts her head.

“Come on, you dork,” she teases lowly.

When they’re far enough away from Liam, she raises an eyebrow and releases his hand.

“What’s with all of the kissing?”

Killian gives her a wry look. “What’s with all of the hand holding?”

Emma sighs softly. “I- it was only because your brother-”

He cracks a grin and nods his head. “It’s fine, Swan. My reasoning is the same.”

He can see relief in her eyes and she sucks in a breath as she glances over at the booth from which they’d come. “Well, he hates me, so I hope we’re selling this at least.”

“He doesn’t hate you,” Killian shakes his head. He shifts Henry on his hip. “He’s just protective.”

“Mm,” Emma hums. She lifts her eyebrows and shakes her head. “I guess it’s good I only have to deal with him for a week, then, huh?”

Killian chuckles. “Aye. It’s a good thing.”

And yet, for some reason his heart breaks just a little bit.

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Emma doesn’t get to talk to Elsa one-on-one until the party is half done.

It’s after one of the ridiculous party games that Mary Margaret has them all play, though with a sleeping baby, Emma and Killian both opted out, instead just watching the games with laughter shared between them in their quiet corner.

It’s kind of nice, she thinks, being friends with Killian Jones. He makes her laugh and he helps make her feel like she’s important to him.

Things have gotten complicated, with the addition of his brother to the mix, and she’s tried her hardest to make sure she appears the doting and loving wife with every choice of words and action.

She thinks she must be doing a good job, because things haven’t come crashing down.
Yet, at least.

Elsa still knows the truth. Or maybe Elsa hasn’t placed every piece together yet.

It’s the only reason Emma corners her out by the bathrooms when she leaves the party to stand in line.

“Hey, Elsa,” Emma manages to smile at the woman.

Elsa’s eyes widen at the sight of her. “Emma. Hi.”

Emma can see the questions forming in her eyes, so before she can say anything, Emma shakes her head and sighs, “I know you know something’s going on. I can explain.”

Elsa presses her lips together and shakes her head. “Don’t. It’s fine.”

There’s something comforting in the way Elsa stares at her, with genuine caring that Emma hasn’t seen very frequently in her life.

“I’d really rather not know. I won’t tell Liam, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Emma’s heart rests and she breathes deeply. “Yeah, actually, um… please? I can’t screw this up for Killian and for Henry-”

Elsa shuts her up with her hand pressed to Emma’s arm. “I won’t say a word. You confided in me because I was a stranger with nothing to gain.” Elsa removes her hand and smiles sweetly. “I’d love to be friends, Emma.”

*Friends.* Emma doesn’t know what that word means. She hasn’t ever really had a friend before. And all of a sudden, here she is, with all of these people wanting to be her friend.

Her eyelashes flutter against her cheek as she holds her mouth open in wait. “Um… yeah. That would be…” Emma pauses and nods. “I would like that.”

Elsa nods her head. “Me too.”
twelve.

Giving Henry a bath is generally a challenge. Typically, he’ll sit in the water and splash around with his toys while Emma scrubs him down and pours water over his head, but sometimes he likes to splash Emma and get her in on the fun.

Even if it’s kind of cute, it’s also quite the pain.

Which is why Emma pulls Killian into the Nolan’s bathroom with her after telling them they need to get Henry ready for bed.

He’d woken up towards the end of the party, crying for her from Killian’s arms, and she’d had to hold him while kissing the side of his head in order to soothe him enough to bring him back to the Nolan’s apartment.

“If you wanted to get me alone, all you had to do was ask,” Killian lifts his eyebrows as soon as the door is closed.

She gives him a look. He’s pathetic, really.

No matter how good he is sometimes, no matter how kind or sweet he can be, she’s always reminded in these quiet moments between them of why she’d brought up her walls to begin with.

“Henry needs a bath to sleep,” Emma informs him lowly, completely ignoring the flirty way about him.

She hands Henry off to Killian so she can turn the tub on. Emma waits until it’s warm enough and shuts the water off.

Turning to the bathroom sink where she’d set down Henry’s shampoo and the few toys he does have for bath time, she nods and pivots back to Killian.

“Okay,” Emma says, smiling at Henry on Killian’s side.

Killian shifts Henry so he’s holding him in front of his chest, his legs draped over the side of his strong arms propping him up from beneath.

Emma works him out of his clothes and then settles her son onto his feet on the rug before the tub.

“Are you ready for a bath, monkey?” Emma asks.

He buzzes his lips together, making a noise that she mimics back to him, much to his delight. He claps his hands together and she kisses his head because of it.

She drops to her knees and smiles when her son grins at her, showing off the few teeth he has while he puts his fingers by his mouth. She tickles his bare belly and he giggles happily.

She shucks off his diaper and then scoops him up, settling him down into the tub.

“Yay!” Emma cheers when Henry throws his arms up excitedly.

Emma turns to look up at Killian. “Can you hand me the shampoo?”
She waits patiently for Killian to grab the items she’d set out, and she watches as he gets down onto the floor beside her.

She settles Henry’s toys into the tub with him and he immediately starts to play happily, babbling to himself while Emma takes the shampoo into her hand and squeezes a drop into her palm.

Being as close as they are on the rug, Emma turns to Killian and they brush arms as soon as she scrubs the shampoo into Henry’s hair.

“Can you grab the showerhead and spray him down while I clean the rest of him?”

Killian shrugs. He grabs the showerhead and turns it on after testing the temperature on his hand, something Emma finds just this side of obscene, what with them both in tee shirts so his arm muscles show off.

She averts her gaze, instead focusing on getting Henry clean as fast as she can, so that maybe he’ll be willing to go to sleep soon too.

Killian does a good job, showering Henry without getting the water in his eyes. He actually thinks to shield his face with his hand, earning him a genuine smile from her.

All goes well until Henry decides to splash the water around, spraying the both of them who only want to get him clean, and Emma groans a little.

“Henry,” she sighs. “We’re trying to help you here.”

Killian just laughs. “Swan, maybe it’s just his way of asking you to loosen up.”

Emma gives him a hard look. “I’m loose.” He hums skeptically. “I’m just trying to make sure he gets clean so we can get him to bed in decent time.”

Before she can even get the end of her sentence out, Killian points the showerhead straight at her and she squeaks out of unpreparedness, her jaw falling open as she stares at him. She’s dripping wet, from the top of her head to the base of her knees.

Well, if he’s going to play this game, this means war.

She reaches out to twist the showerhead toward him and he laughs at the action, stopping when the spray gets him, too.

He’s just as drenched as she is, and Emma tries her hardest to keep her eyes off of the way his shirt clings to his chest or how his hair flattens and drips. At the way his cheeks flush just slightly and how his pupils dilate when he licks his lips to clean them.

“Swan,” he growls lowly, his gaze turning into that of a predator on the prowl.

Her fingers clamp around his wrist to keep him from spraying either of them, or the poor Nolan’s bathroom, and she lifts her eyebrows at him in warning.

“You started it,” she tells him, smiling despite how she wants to hit him for getting her with the tool she’d offered him in trust.

Killian’s head tilts to the side and he reaches up with his free hand to touch her wrist, the flower tattooed over her skin that’s turned toward him. His fingers caress her there as he studies the design with slightly narrowed eyes and parted lips.
Her skin feels tender under his examining touch, and she swallows thickly as she studies the way water trickles off of his head and onto his soaking wet tee shirt instead. She notices some ink on his extended arm, too, and the fingers of her left hand turn his arm toward her so she can see the image of a heart with a name, *Milah*, under it in cursive, swirly font.

Slowly, her eyes trail back up to his and she finds him staring back at her with heavy emotion in his gaze. His thumb swipes over the flower on her wrist and he swallows thickly.

She feels a question on the tip of her tongue, but she can’t manage to get it out when they’re both sitting here, soaking wet, touching each other’s tattoos as if it’s completely normal for two people to do this in the bathroom of their friend’s apartment.

The intimacy of the moment must catch up with the both of them at the same time, because suddenly, they jerk apart and Killian shuts off the cooling water while Emma finishes scrubbing off Henry’s toes.

They work in unison to get Henry wrapped in a towel, with Killian holding the boy against him, and the only noise in the room is the sound of the tub draining while Henry quietly murmurs.

Emma grabs the bath time supplies and turns to find Killian holding out a towel for her. She takes it without needing him to say anything and he tips his head for the door.

“I’ll go grab your clothes if you’d rather dry off here. No use making multiple trips if we’re both soaked to the bone.”

She holds open her mouth, shocked that he’d be thoughtful, and nods her head. “Okay.”

Killian leaves her then, shutting the door behind him, and she can hear him apologizing as he trudges through the apartment for the upstairs.

Emma smiles softly to herself as she attempts to dry herself. She turns to the mess on the floor and drops to her hands and knees to ensure that it’s mopped up with her towel.

She doesn’t know if this night could get any further away from what she’d envisioned for their time in Storybrooke, but she has a feeling it might. With all of the acting she’d had to do at the party clouding her judgment, she’d allowed herself to slip up with him.

It’s a mistake. She knows it is. But she can’t help it when lines keep getting blurred and she keeps forgetting how badly she’s supposed to hate him.

She doesn’t hate him, and that’s the thing.

Emma sits on top of the toilet with her chin in her palm while she waits for Killian to return and it only takes him a little while to knock on the bathroom door.

She goes to answer and finds Killian standing on the other side of the door in his nightclothes, though his hair is still dripping wet. He holds her clothes in one hand and her bathroom bag in the other.

A nervous little smile curls at his lips when he says, “I figured you might like to get ready for bed.”

Emma nods and manages a smile back at him. “Thanks.”

He hands her things to her and she doesn’t miss the spark she feels when their fingertips brush, or
the way he seems to linger with uncertainty at the door.

“Henry’s book is in his toy bag.” Emma says quietly. “If you want to read to him. He goes down
easier that way.”

Killian nods, grinning. “Alright.”

They stare at one another for a few moments longer before Emma closes the door and sinks back
against it.

She’s sure it shouldn’t be like this. She shouldn’t suddenly be seeing this man as a potential
partner.

He’s a player and he can’t cook for crap and he’s a pathological liar.

But then again, she’s following along with him, so maybe she’s just as bad as he is. Or maybe he’s
not as bad as she keeps trying to justify he is.

Either way, Emma closes her eyes and shakes her head. She’s not going to let this get out of
control. It’s not hard to say no and it’s not hard to make sure he stays away from her in private.

It takes her a few minutes to get ready for bed and she walks out of the bathroom wearing her
glasses with her wet clothes in her hands held out before her.

Mary Margaret’s standing in the kitchen, having a sip of water, and she smiles at her. “Hey. Thank
you for coming tonight.”

Emma shakes her head. “It was fun. You did a great job hosting.”

Mary Margaret blushes and shrugs her shoulders as a smile overpowers her face. “Thank you.”

Emma laughs a little and tips her head upstairs. “I should go make sure Henry’s asleep. Good
night.”

“Good night,” Mary Margaret whispers.

When Emma gets to the top of the stairs, her heart skips a beat to find Killian sitting up against the
bedframe, his eyes closed, with Henry curled up in his lap, sound asleep. His favorite book is in
Killian’s hands, as if he had been reading it, but apparently the excitement of the day got to him.

Emma settles her things down and then goes to the bed, leaning over to lift Henry into her arms
after just staring at the two of them for a few lingering moments.

It’s impossibly sweet, the sight of the two of them. Killian Jones tamed into not only sleep, but
sleep with a baby in his lap. He seems so different like this.

Henry fusses softly, but cuddles against her when she scoops him up into her arms, and Emma
presses a soothing kiss to his head before she lowers him into his bed. She covers him with a
blanket and hands him his stuffed bear.

“Good night, Henry,” she whispers.

Emma crosses the room, shivering because apparently this apartment is just cold constantly, and
finds Killian’s bag open, one of his sweaters sticking out.

It's tempting.
She nibbles on her lip for a few moments before pulling it out of his bag and sliding it over her head without any thought to the matter. It’s just as warm as she imagined and the sleeves are way too long, but it’s fine by her.

Killian’s still asleep when she turns back to the bed and she goes to him so she can grab Henry’s book from his fingers. He releases it and then stirs, his eyes blinking open as he licks his lips.

“Fell asleep,” he grumbles, dragging his hands over his face.

Emma laughs quietly and sets Henry’s book down on the dresser. She heads around the bed to her side and peels back the covers before removing her glasses and climbing in.

The bed squeaks and whines, not surprising her one iota, and by the time she’s lying on her back, Killian decides to get off of the bed and dig through a chest by the wall. He removes a few pillows and returns to bed without a word.

Emma watches as he settles the pillows between them, like a wall, and then Killian lies down on a heavy sigh. His hand presses over his eyes and he takes another loud breath.

“You okay?” Emma asks, feeling like she should say something.

Killian turns his head toward her. “Aye. I’m just… thinking about Liam.”

Oh.

Emma looks up at the ceiling. She settles her hands, covered by the ends of Killian’s sweater, over her middle and takes a few breaths.

“He doesn’t believe that I could find happiness after what happened.” Killian murmurs. “He thinks you’re too good for me.”

Her heart skips a beat before she stares back at him again and she smirks at him. “Yeah. He’s right. I am too good for you.”

Killian snorts and stares up at the ceiling. “When you moved in next door, I truly wanted to be friends, you know. There was something about you that was impossibly magnetizing and your boy, he stole my heart that day I stood in your doorway asking for your number.”

Emma’s eyes close as she thinks about that day, the day after she’d moved in, when Killian came to her door wondering if he could help her with anything. Henry had been fussy, likely because of her being stressed out, and she’d had him sitting in the kitchen when her neighbor decided to stop in unannounced.

That day, he hadn’t been trying to get under her skin or into her pants. No, he was more like he is now, gentle and reserved.

Killian had smiled at her son and it had been enough to get him to stop crying.

“I think… Henry’s the reason I kept stopping in,” her bedmate whispers. “I wanted to see if I could make him smile. I wanted to see how you were doing with him. If you’d let me help you with anything.”

Emma laughs through her nose and Killian’s quiet again.

“You’re ridiculous,” she tells him, turning her whole body onto her side facing away from him.
As she closes her eyes and sleep begins to take her under, she hears his voice, soft and honest, “Good night, Emma.”

///

When Killian wakes up, it’s to the feeling of Emma stirring restlessly. She whines and whimpers in her sleep, her limbs flailing, and he aches for her, just as he had the night before.

She surprises him when she wakes up. Her eyes blow open wide and she starts shivering and breathing deep. Her tongue wets her lips and she turns toward him, as if she needs to remind herself of where she is.

Killian’s brow creases as he stares over the pillow wall at her. He reaches over to slide his hand down her arm until he finds hers. “You alright?”

Emma nods minutely, though as he stares at her, he sees a scared little girl blinking back at him. “It was just a bad dream.”

“Do you have nightmares every night?” he asks quietly.

Emma doesn’t respond. She just stares at him.

And then she pulls the pillows away and tosses them off of the bed before doing the wildest thing imaginable.

She shifts toward him in the bed and curves her back against his chest. Her fingers yank his arm up against her until his palm is settled between her breasts where he can feel her heart beating. “Don’t take this the wrong way,” she pleads in a whisper. “Just… hold me for a little.”

Killian’s head swarms as she lies there against him. Her hands grip his arm tightly, as if begging him to not let go.

“I have a recurring nightmare,” she whispers. Her voice trembles and he can feel her body still tense, as if she’s remembering. Her fingers clutch onto him tighter and she releases a shaky breath. “About Henry’s father. He’s always taking him from me and I can’t do anything about it.”

He hears her breath catch and his thumb swipes a gentle, soothing circle against her.

“He sounds like an awful creature if he hurt you this badly,” Killian says, his tone edging on the anger he feels in his chest. “I’m sorry.”

Emma shakes her head wordlessly. “I fell in love with him when I was seventeen years old, so it was hard for me to see how wrong he was for me. How badly he hurt me. I forgave him for something huge and he just… he took advantage of that for years.”

She’s crying now, he can hear it in her voice, how it trembles, and he closes his eyes as he buries his face in her hair. He leaves a kiss to a spot behind her ear and holds her closer to him.

She doesn’t fight him, just curls in deeper and breathes out shakily.

It would be surprising, but he’s found that just about everything about Emma Swan is a surprise.

“He’s gone now,” Killian whispers. “Just breathe, Emma. He can’t hurt you. You’re… bloody hell, you’re strong. So strong you scare me, to be honest.” He hears her laugh just a little and he kisses the spot behind her ear again. “Just breathe.”
Emma follows his lead, breathing in deep as he coaches her, and exhaling just as heavily, and by the time she stops shaking and crying, she’s asleep in his arms yet again.

Bloody hell.

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Emma opens her eyes to the sound of Henry’s little voice babbling for her.

She sighs as she comes to life, feeling nothing but Killian’s warmth behind her. It’s comfortable, so she arches back against him for a moment and clings to the arm on her chest.

It’s getting to be kind of insane. They’ve shared a lot between them and she actually let him hold her after her nightmare. Letting him get this close to her is dangerous.

Emma rolls away from him and instead stares at his sleeping form, at the way his hair falls against his forehead. He seems boyish in his slumber, an innocence that’s been broken with heartache that he bears in his smirks and twinkling eyes that keep secrets locked away.

He breathes in sharply through his nose and mumbles, “Are you watching me sleep, Swan?”

She rolls her eyes when he opens his. “No.”

“‘S okay,” he says thickly. He smiles wryly. “I’ve heard I make a cute sleeper.”

Emma snorts. “Of course you think that.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Killian furrows his brow.

“It means I don’t think you’re cute.”

Killian hums skeptically. “Darling, you don’t need to throw up your walls every time things get too serious between us. I know you think we’re impossibly different people, but I assure you we’re quite similar in more than one respect.”

Emma stares at him, trying to see past what he might be saying, and her heart feels heavy. “I have my walls for a reason. To keep from getting hurt.”

He searches her eyes for a few moments. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Yeah, well,” Emma averts her gaze and tugs at the sleeves of his sweatshirt. “You can say that as much as you want but it doesn’t mean it won’t happen.”

She forces herself out of bed and goes to her son. He smiles at her and she grabs him easily. When she returns to the bed, she sits him down in her lap, but he wants to crawl, so she sighs reluctantly and lets him.

To no real surprise, he wants to cuddle with Killian.

Killian’s eyes are only halfway cracked, and his smile is as sleepy as his bedhead.

“G’morning, lad,” he whispers kindly. He takes his fingers over Henry’s hair and allows Henry to put his fingers on his face.

Feeling dejected, Emma gets out of the bed again and goes to find her clothes to change.
As she’s heading down the stairs without explanation to Killian, she hears him murmur to Henry, “Tell your mum I just want to be friends, Henry. Tell her I want to know who she is without those walls sky high.” He pauses and sighs. “She’s so beautiful.” Again, he pauses. “Inside and out.”

And in that moment, Emma decides to be wary, but, more importantly, she decides that Killian Jones doesn’t deserve to be completely blocked out of her life and from her heart.

She’s not sure if that’s a good thing or not, but she’s willing to see for sake of her son and for sake of the kindness she keeps inexplicably seeing in Killian’s eyes when they’re alone.
“Welcome to Storybrooke’s Annual Snowman Building Competition!” Ruby’s cheerful tone sings. Her tone reminds Killian of those old Granny’s Bed and Breakfast commercials they’d show on local broadcast channels.

There’s a crowd of people standing in front of an open field at the elementary school, a pristine landscape carefully maintained by Leroy and his crew of brothers that he and David privately call the Dwarves due to their stature.

The morning had gone well, surprisingly, with breakfast shared with the Nolan’s. Emma had smiled at him and kissed his cheek when he offered her a hot chocolate. They sat together and she didn’t squirm away.

Despite her earlier reservations about her walls, she has decisively made herself comfortable with him. He can only hope it extends to their private relationship, too.

Now, as they stand amongst the excited contenders, she has an excited, breathless look on her face. She’s holding Henry in her arms and she looks happy, with a smile filling her cheeks.

She’s dressed warmly, with a hat covering her pretty golden hair, and white mittens shielding her fingers from the elements. She has her favorite red coat on over her sweater and jeans that hide beneath her boots.

There’s a gentle snowfall this morning, falling to the Earth and sticking to her head and shoulders.

He hardly pays any attention to the rules as they’re being discussed because he’s more interested in the way Emma’s eyes shine in the morning sunlight, or how she sometimes looks at Henry and tickles him until he giggles and buries his head in her neck.

“You have half an hour to build your perfect snowman,” Ruby reads from the paper in her hands. “And you’re only allowed to team up with one other person, so choose wisely. After your time is up, the panel of distinguished judges… Leroy, Granny, and myself, will come around and we’ll have a look at the submissions.”

Everyone gathered lets out a collective cheer and Killian chuckles, adding a whistle to the excitement.

Ruby grins. “There are three prizes, as always, but the first place winners will receive a hot cinnamon apple pie from Granny’s!”

More cheers from the gathered make Killian lift his eyebrows at Emma, who just appears to be
soaking the event in as it is. He can only imagine how she feels about this whole thing.

She presses a kiss to Henry’s head and adds her voice to the cheers. It’s something that makes his heart leap triumphantly.

“Okay! Let’s get into our teams and we’ll get started at the strike of the hour!”

People begin to pair off and Killian looks to Emma with a lifted eyebrow. “So, what do you think, love? Will you be my partner?”

Emma laughs. Her teeth rub over her lower lip for a moment. “Please. You couldn’t handle it.”

He barks a laugh, swaggering toward her as she positions herself facing him. He smirks at her playfully. “Perhaps you’re the one who couldn’t handle it.”

They stare at one another for a few moments, with intensity unparalleled, and then Emma nods her head once. “Alright. Let’s do it.”

Mary Margaret decides to stand off to the side with the hot chocolate table while David pairs himself off with his mother, Ruth. It’s kind of nice, Killian thinks, and he smiles when he realizes what David’s decided to do.

Emma hands Mary Margaret the baby when they realize that building a snowman won’t be as effective without her two hands and she takes him eagerly.

As he and Emma decide upon a spot in the open field, he finds his brother and Elsa standing close by. Late, as ever, which makes Killian curious, because once upon a time, his brother was consistently on time and never ever tardy.

“Brother!” Killian waves at him, smiling as he settles a hand on Emma’s back. Emma waves, too, and he silently thanks her for being on her toes.

Liam turns to face them and a smile fills his lips, though Killian can see how hard his eyes are. “Oh, hello, little brother!”

“Younger!” Killian calls back, but Liam ignores him.

“I have to warn you that Elsa and I have been practicing our snowmen building, so we’re likely going to beat you out for that apple pie.”

Killian laughs. He turns to look at Emma, who widens her eyes and breathes out a laugh once. “Wow,” she says.

Killian turns back to his brother. “Well, you talk a big game, don’t you Liam?”

Liam shrugs his shoulders and turns to Elsa, who appears apologetic. She smiles and tugs on Liam’s sleeve. “Liam, it’s for fun. We don’t need to make a big deal out of it.”

Killian turns to glance at Emma. She smiles up at him hopefully. “I suppose you’re right,” Liam says.

The clock tower chimes on the hour and Killian laughs when Leroy gets out a megaphone, bellowing out, “It’s time!”
Emma squeaks when he turns to her rapidly, a grin on his lips. “Alright. Big base?”

“Big base.” She confirms on a nod.

He drops to his knees in the snow and determinedly clumps a ball together in his hands. “What do you think, Swan? Good?”

Emma laughs, shrugging as she too falls into the snow to start forming another snowball.

They work in a quiet companionship as they slowly build their perfect snowman. Killian grins when he gets the base wider than the width of a nearby tree and turns breathlessly toward Emma with his eyebrows lifted.

“What do you think, love?”

Emma blinks up at him and grins at the sight of the snowball. “We’re basically going to win.”

He laughs. “You really want that cinnamon apple pie, don’t you, sweetheart?”

“You caught me,” Emma says breathily. She drops her hands against her thighs. “So what about this? Big enough for a middle?”

She gestures to her snowball and he cocks his head as he studies it. “Perhaps. Let’s try it.”

Together, they both go to the snowball, and bump shoulders intimately as they hoist it upright. They carry it to the base and both of them smile at the way it sits perfectly.

“All right,” Killian beams at her, throwing up his hand for a high-five. She gladly smacks his hand.

Glancing back, he finds that the other teams appear to have worked similarly to get their snowmen as big as can be. But he thinks that he and Emma truly have this in the bag.

Liam and Elsa are arguing when he sees them. It appears that they broke the head of their snowman before it could be put on top.

“One more,” Killian says, releasing a white puff of air when he sighs.

Emma nods her head. She gets into the snow and forms a snowball between her hands. She’s cute, he thinks, so determined, with her tongue between her lips.

She rolls the ball in the snow and then holds it up in her open hands. “Tada!”

He chuckles and gestures to the snowman. “Onward, then, love.”

He watches as Emma settles the head of their snowman on the rest of the figure and then they both stand back to examine it for flaws.

“I think it looks great,” Emma says, giggling a little at the way the snowman’s head sits crookedly on top of the middle.

Killian laughs, turning to her. “Yeah? You think?”

He licks his lips and then digs into his pockets for the accessories he’d brought with him. He hands Emma the sticks for arms and she bites down on her lip.

“You want me to do the honors?”
“Aye,” Killian grins.

Emma presses the first stick into the middle of the snowman on the side. The snow shifts just a little, but it remains standing.

She presses the other stick into the opposing side and that’s when it all comes crumbling down.

They both groan out of surprise and Emma puts her hands over her face. “Oh, no!”

Killian laughs and wraps his arms around her middle. He leaves a kiss to the side of her head. “It’s alright. We still have time. C’mon. Let’s keep trying.”

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It takes them forever to roll the middle and head again.

They keep laughing because of it and Emma keeps looking away from her handiwork to check on Killian, who looks a little more than handsome today with his coat, hat, and scarf combo.

Once, he catches her staring and just lifts an eyebrow and smirks.

“Okay, let’s see if this is the winning figure.” Killian says as he hands her the sticks.

Emma nibbles thoughtfully on her lower lip and nods her head in determination. She presses one of the sticks into the snowman and it stays. The second stick also remains in place.

“Yes!” she cheers, spinning on a laugh to face Killian.

They’re standing toe-to-toe and Emma can’t stop smiling at him. He’s grinning right back at her, clearly proud, but there’s something else beneath the surface of his giddiness.

Emma takes a deep breath and averts her gaze as she steps to the left of him.

“Allright. Uhm. I have…” Killian digs into his pocket again and pulls out buttons, mittens, a scarf, some rocks, and a hat.

Emma bursts out laughing at the sight of it all. “Okay, Mary Poppins.”

She takes the hat and scarf to put them on their figure, then grabs the mittens and says, “You can give him a face.”

They fall into a collaborative silence. Emma settles the hat onto the snowman as Killian puts the buttons on his chest. He works on the face while Emma puts the mittens on over the snowman’s stick hands.

When she steps back, Killian puts the final finishes on their piece of art and then joins her, tilting his head as he studies it.

“Is it missing something?” he wonders.

Emma folds her arms to her chest. “I don’t know. Is it?”

Killian digs into his pocket and removes a black eye patch, something that makes her laugh again.

“What’s that for?”
“He’s a pirate, don’t you know?” Killian teases on a wink. He puts the eye patch on over one of the rock eyes and then adjusts the hat before nodding and stepping back.

In silence, they study their snowman, and Emma turns to look at how others are progressing.

Some only have the base finished while others seem to be fighting over how to build or what to add. There are some still, like David and his mother, who are laughing and chatting rather than building anymore.

She’s glad to see that hers and Killian’s seems to be one of the best.

“Well,” Killian says on a sigh. “I hate to be the one to say it, Emma, but we make quite the team.”

Emma looks back at him and rolls her eyes as she nudge him in the side.

“How much time is left?” she asks him.

Killian crouches down into the snow and gathers up some snow, forming a ball in his hands. He shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders.

“Don’t know. Probably somewhere between ten and twenty minutes.”

Emma hums, eyeing the ball in his hands warily. She takes a step back and Killian cracks a grin.

“What are you doing?”

Killian lifts his eyebrows and then throws a snowball at her, making her gasp at him.


They both start to throw snowballs at one another, laughing and gasping the whole time. He throws one at her shoulder. She hurls one at his chest.

Their game dances around their snowman and Emma attempts to use it as a shield, but it’s only slightly helpful, it being that their snowman is about two thirds of her height.

Emma catches a glimpse of Liam out of the corner of her eye when she runs around the snowman to chuck a ball at Killian’s head as he crouches to make another snowball. Killian’s brother is staring at them, rather than working, as if he’s assessing the scene to find a hole in it somewhere.

Her fake husband groans, leaning over as if he’s in pain, and she decides to get closer to him with a worried furrow in her brow.

He surprises her when he reaches out to pull at her leg and she slips forward, collapsing straight down against him with a yelp.

Their chests heave as one and her eyes widen as soon as she realizes what’s going on. She’s pressed against him: head to toe.

It’s definitely not the most ideal situation to be in.

Emma boosts herself up onto her palms in the snow and breathlessly stares into Killian’s face. He’s panting for breath himself, a wince in the crease of his forehead.

“Truce?” he asks.
Emma laughs once, though she doesn’t move off of him. She just stares at his eyes, finding them far bluer than she’d thought they were, and she decides she likes the look of scruff in his cheeks, especially contrasted against the pure white snow he’s lying in.

Her smile fades when she finds herself staring at his lips and he must realize it, too, because he swallows and whispers, “Emma-”

“Time!” Leroy bellows into the megaphone. “Everybody back away from your snowmen! This means you, Arthur!”

Emma pushes herself off of Killian and extends her hand to him to help him up. He gladly takes it with an oof as he pushes himself to his feet.

They’re officially both quite damp thanks to the snow and Emma sighs because of it.

Killian’s looking toward Liam and Elsa, a wry grin on his lips as he murmurs low for her ears only, “I think we beat them.”

She hums at him. She’s not sure if she should encourage him on his quest to outdo his older brother.

It takes the judges half an hour of deliberating. Mostly because Granny has a lot of opinions and Leroy has just as many, if not more, but eventually, they’re all called to gather in front of the field again and Granny grabs the megaphone to put it to her lips.

“All right! Listen up. There were a lot of great contenders but there can only be three prize winners.”

A hush falls over the crowd. Emma feels nervous, oddly enough, because she and Killian worked quite hard at perfecting their snowman.

“Third place goes to…” Granny pauses. “David and Ruth! Congratulations, you win coupons to the diner! Good until the end of next year.”

The crowd claps kindly for David and his mother. They smile and laugh with each other. Silence falls upon the group again.

“Second place goes to…” This time, Granny pauses for what feels like at least three seconds longer. “Liam and Elsa! More diner coupons than you will know what to do with. And a stay at the inn whenever you need a getaway.”

Killian lets out a loud whoop and butterflies churn in her belly because Liam and Elsa’s wasn’t half as good as theirs.

She looks over at the couple to find them kissing sweetly and her smile falls for them when Liam narrows his eyes right at her.

Oh, God. No.

If she and Killian win…

“All right. Now, for first place and the piping hot cinnamon apple pie…”

Granny pauses for a full ten seconds. The tension in the air is palpable. Everyone thinks they’re going to win.
Emma just feels a nervous twist in her belly and her heart jumps when Granny finally says the words, “Killian and Emma with their pirate snowman! Congratulations you two. A very unique twist.”

Now, things between she and Killian have been tense in the past, but with the developments of them suddenly sharing things about themselves and actively cuddling in the middle of the night, Emma feels a stirring in her chest.

She turns toward Killian and her smile spreads as wide as she could possibly let it. She allows genuine joy fill her, from head to toe, because they did it and it hadn’t been easy. Hell, they broke their first attempt at a snowman.

Emma laughs and Killian does too. He’s admiring her with those loving, warm eyes of his, as if he’s thinking the same thing. He’s happy.

“We did it!” Emma laughs.

“Aye, love, that we did,” Killian beams warmly at her.

In all of her joy found within this moment of victory, she finds herself easily pressing up onto her toes, wrapping her arms around his neck, and pushing his head down so their lips meet.

His lips are soft, and it surprises her, but nothing surprises her more than the fact that Killian’s hands press against her hips and his fingers squeeze gently, not pressing for more, not willing her for less.

Emma feels his lips part against hers and she gasps against him, her fingers tangling in the hair below his hat. She almost wishes he wasn’t wearing it so she could dig her fingers into the silky smooth locks.

His tongue swipes against her lower lip and she releases a soft groan as their heads turn in unison. It’s too much for a celebratory kiss, but then she feels his arms wrap around her middle and he hoists her up against him and she smiles, her teeth clashing against his between gentle kisses.

By the time he sets her down on her feet again, she’s breathless and dizzy, so she pulls at his lower lip with her teeth and leans away.

It’s a rush of sound. People are clapping for them still and Granny’s saying something into the megaphone.

But all she can see is Killian.

He’s standing there staring at her with eyes blown wide and his lips parted as heaving breaths color the air between them. His fingers find her sides before he releases her completely and Emma’s slowly drop to her sides.

It was a kiss. A really, really, really good kiss. With Killian. With the guy she’s pretending to be married to.

She has no reason to panic when she considers the fact that this is just another part of the show, but she feels her stomach twist when she thinks about the look on Killian’s face—so completely destroyed.

To be honest, she feels the same way. She has a hard time coming back to herself as she feels Killian’s arm around her middle.
He doesn’t speak and neither does she. She doesn’t know what to say.

Liam and Elsa approach them and it’s only then that she pulls on a smile.

“Well, congratulations are in order, I suppose,” Liam says.

He’s staring at Emma again and she can sense that he’s still not completely sold by their win, so she settles her head against Killian’s shoulder.

Killian chuckles. “Thank you, brother. Yours was… interesting to say the least.”

Liam hums. The tension between the two brothers is back in an instant when Liam’s smile curls into more of a snarl and he flashes Emma a look of distrust.

“Perhaps we should celebrate. The pie is going to be a little too big for just the two of us to share.” Killian offers.

Elsa smiles and nods at Liam. “That would be nice.”

Liam instantly softens at Elsa’s touch to his arm. “Alright.” He nods at Killian and Emma. “Meet you at Granny’s in, what, an hour?”

Killian nods. “Aye. We’ve got to make sure Henry’s all right. He’s been sitting with Mary Margaret for a pinch too long.”

Elsa and Emma both laugh. Emma removes herself from Killian’s hold and turns to see her son running circles around the hot chocolate table.

“Oh, no,” she laughs. “Come on, Daddy, we have a baby to catch.”

Killian tosses a hand up at his brother. “We’ll see you in a bit.”

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“We need to talk,”

It’s the first thing Emma says to him as soon as they’re alone in the loft.

Mary Margaret and David had decided to go spend a few hours with David’s mother back at David’s childhood home.

Thanks to their impromptu snowball fight, he and Emma are both wet from the snow, and Henry needs some food and a changing, so they’re here to remedy the tasks all at once.

He sighs, his heart feeling heavy. “I’ve found when a woman says that, I’m rarely in for a pleasant conversation.”

Emma carries Henry to the couch and sits him down. She strips him out of his winter clothes and then steps out of her boots before shucking her coat and pulling off her hat and mittens with haste.

She stares at him when she’s through with fire in her gaze and her jaw clenched. Her arms fold against her chest and she swallows.

“Kissing was off the table.”

Killian gives her a weary look, tilting his head to the side. “Emma, you’re the one who kissed me,
if I remember correctly.”

She’s quiet for a moment, her gaze unfailing even in her anger. “Then we can’t do it again. It was a one-time thing. It didn’t mean anything.”

He nods once. “As you wish.”

His lips still burn from her kiss and he wishes he could go back to that moment, to feel her so warm and sweet against him.

Emma takes a breath. “Okay.”

She turns to Henry and he watches as she carries him upstairs.

He feels as if he was shown the world from the top of a mountain and then was told he was standing on an anthill.

Killian climbs the steps up to the top bedroom and finds Emma changing into a new pair of pants. At the first glimpse of skin, he turns away to face the wall.

Henry’s standing in his portable bed and he happily plays with a toy while he waits to be attended to. If only life was as simple as his.

“Emma, I want to tell you something,” Killian says when he hears her sit on the bed.

He turns toward her and crosses the room to sit beside her, leaving space between them.

Emma looks at him and waits. He swallows thickly, his fingers gripping the edge of the bed tightly. He turns ahead of himself and manages a slight smile.

His heart jumps in his chest and he nearly chickens out, but he thinks of Emma’s lips on his and he can hardly imagine living without her knowing what’s been burning him up inside.

“Her name was Milah,” he says softly. “She was my entire world for three years.”

He closes his eyes and he can see her smiling, can almost smell her perfume. He hears something he thinks is her laugh, but he knows for certain he’s forgotten what it sounds like.

“We met at the docks one night while I was cleaning the bow of a ship and she wondered if I was a sailor,” Killian laughs to himself and opens his eyes. He grips the edge of the bed tighter. “She… she was married at the time, but she told me she was getting divorced from her husband. She told me she wanted adventure. She told me she wanted to get as far away from the life she had as she could.”

He feels a lump hardening in his throat and he shakes his head. “I was young. Of course I agreed with her. We had this plan to steal away together after I finished school. We were going to sail the world for a while and I was going to practice law when we settled down. She wanted kids. I told her I wanted to wait a while. We had time.”

Killian stops himself and looks down at his lap. He closes his eyes as the memories of that night flash in his mind like an awful storm.

Tears well up in his eyes and he manages to look at Emma, who stares back at him with sad anticipation.

“I was back from school. The guys and I put money down on the bar and when Milah found out she
was pissed, you know, because we had our plan.” Killian closes his eyes tight. “We were fighting and she got so angry with me that she threw one of the beer bottles at me and when it missed, she settled with slapping me.”

He presses his fingers to the place where she’d cut his lip and he can almost see her again, the grief in her eyes once she realized what she’d done. He can almost taste the blood on his tongue. The blood and the alcohol.

“The last thing I told her was, ‘if you don’t believe in me and in what I want to do, then maybe you should go screw somebody else’,” he whispers. “The last thing she said to me was, ‘What, is that what you think this is? A good screw?’”

A tear falls from his eye and he sucks in a breath for strength. “She told me she hated me and then she left.”

He remembers the sound of the rain as it pounded against the ceiling, how it got louder when she opened the door, and how it dampened when she shut it again.

“There was a thunderstorm that night and I guess she couldn’t see where she was going. She drove her car into a semi just past the town line. I don’t know where she was driving to.” He swallows thickly and turns to Emma again. “She… she and the baby didn’t make it.”

Emma’s eyes widen slightly and she speaks for the first time since he came up to talk to her. “Killian, I-”

“I don’t need your sympathy, Swan,” he forces a smile. “I’ve wallowed in self pity long enough to know that it doesn’t help.”

He licks his lips and wipes at his damp cheek with his arm.

“I… I wanted to tell you because I wanted you to know why I left. Why I never finished law school. Why I bring home so many women. Why I get nightmares. Why I drink. It’s because what happened to Milah and the baby was my fault. If I hadn’t yelled at her- if I hadn’t been so selfish… maybe they wouldn’t be gone.”

His heart aches and he finds himself staring at Emma for strength. Her hand finds his, still tightly curled over the edge of the bed, and she works to pry him free before tangling their fingers.

“Killian, it wasn’t your fault.”

He manages a weak smile. “Aye. Of course.”

Emma tilts her head to the side wearily. “It wasn’t.”

He shakes his head. He feels as if a weight has been lifted from his shoulders, but he still feels hurt. He doesn’t think it’ll ever fade.

Emma turns away from him and breathes out heavily.

For a long time, they don’t speak. They just sit there in silence. Henry babbles to himself and finally stands up, his little fingers gripping the side of his portable bed.


Killian swallows thickly and watches as Emma stands to grab her son from his crib. “We should…
go meet your brother and Elsa.”

He doesn’t know what to make of her now, if she thinks he’s any different than he was when she met him. If she thinks he’s lying to her, perhaps.

All he knows is that her kiss has only made him wish that she’d be his, honestly and truly.
fourteen.

Though Emma had been skeptical as to why on Earth the grand prize for the snowman building competition would have been a pie at the local diner in town, as soon as she has her first bite of piping hot, fresh pie, she completely understands.

It’s the most heavenly food that she has ever tasted in her whole life.

Her eyes widen and she actually moans a little, earning an arched eyebrow from the man sitting beside her.

Their conversation earlier had been eye opening and heartbreaking. She hadn’t realized how much he’d been through, just how much hurt was built up in his chest, and now that it’s all out on the table for her, she realizes she can’t hate him for who he is.

Truthfully, the only thing keeping her walls up is herself.

She doesn’t want to get hurt by anyone and she knows that the second she lets go, he’s free to do that to her. And she can’t have that happen again.

She manages a smile back and averts her gaze back to her plate. Henry’s having a nap in the car seat beside her, his little breathing audible when she turns to check on him.

“So you guys are here for only a few more days?” Elsa asks.

“Aye,” Killian nods. “Day after Christmas we should head out, I think.”

Emma bobs her head in agreement after meeting his eyes. “We have family coming over.”

She turns her attention to Killian’s brother and Elsa, who both nod in understanding. Liam has a bite of his pie and licks his lips as he sits back a little.

“So, Killian,” Liam drawls. Emma can tell Killian gets a little tense. His body stiffens just slightly and he locks eyes with his brother. “How much are you making? As a lawyer?”

Emma looks with big eyes at Killian, who just scoffs and shakes his head. “Come on, Liam. Why don’t you trust me when I say I’m a lawyer? Would I lie to you?”

Liam tilts his head to the side and shrugs. “I think you would do anything if it meant earning my respect after what happened.”

Now Emma stiffens. She holds her mouth open when Killian clenches his jaw and she settles her hand on his arm as she says, “I don’t think he needs to prove anything to you after what happened.”

Killian seems just slightly surprised by her words. He looks at her with relief in his gaze, as if silently thanking her, and she rubs her hand down his arm where it rests beneath the table.

“So he’s told you, then,” Liam says. “About how he completely shut down after the affair ended.”

“It wasn’t-”

Emma finds Killian’s hand when he starts to snap angrily and it makes him press his lips together.
“I don’t think you’re being fair to him,” Emma says to Liam. “Your brother came home for Christmas because he was finally ready to and all you’ve done since we got here is act like he’s trying to trick you into believing he’s happy.” She studies Liam and shakes her head. “Killian thinks the world of you, so seeing you like this with him only makes me want to take our kid back to New York for good. It’s not fair to any of us.”

Killian is quiet and so is Liam.

Elsa just smiles at Emma and turns to her boyfriend. “Don’t let this ruin your relationship with your family, Li.”

Liam sighs and nods his head once at Elsa, a gentle smile on his lips. “I suppose you’re right.” He looks at Emma. “I’m sorry I’ve been so skeptical. It’s just that… it’s been six years and I guess my first thought was it had to be some kind of joke.”

Killian squeezes Emma’s hand before dropping it. He shakes his head. “I assure you, brother, I’ve moved on. Emma… “ He swallows and looks at her with emotion in his eyes. “She’s my home now.”

It strikes a chord in her chest and she loses her breath because of it.

Killian looks back at his older brother and smiles. “Why don’t you tell me how you’ve been doing, Liam?”

“Alright, I suppose I will.” Liam smiles just a little in return.

There’s a lift in the mood, as the boys start to talk about how things are going.

They tell some stories from their childhood that make Emma and Elsa laugh loud enough to wake Henry up and then Emma settles her son in her lap as he chatters to those gathered.

Elsa and Liam both love Henry. They laugh when his voice gets high pitched and they swoon when all he wants to do is snuggle against Emma. Post-nap crankiness is one of the better times for snuggling, because she can almost always elicit a smile when she tickles his belly.

It works without fail and Killian grins at her because of it.

Soon thereafter, Henry wants to spend time with Killian, and by then, all of the pie is completely gone, so all that’s left is shared stories while they allow the clock to run.

It isn’t the worst way to spend an afternoon, she thinks, especially now that Liam seems to have stopped suspecting them of doing what they are indeed doing: lying to him.

But it’s easy, to lie to everyone, because they’re both just desperate enough to want to distance themselves from their pasts.

“Oh, Els,” Liam says, sighing as he checks the time. “It’s time for us to get going, love.”

Elsa frowns. “You’re right.” She turns to them. “We promised some friends we’d meet them for drinks at the bar tonight. It’s tradition, apparently.”

Liam chuckles and nods his head. “Aye. It started when I took over at the harbor.”

Liam’s the harbormaster now, whatever that means. She only knows that Killian thought it was a monumental feat and that Liam absolutely deserves it.
“Killian, if you’d like…” Liam shrugs his shoulders. “Perhaps you and Emma could come, too.”

Emma turns to look at Killian and he looks down at the baby in his lap.

“Ah-” Killian laughs and tilts his head up when Henry tries to put his fingers into his mouth. “Maybe another time, brother. I think Emma’s due for a proper tour around Storybrooke.”

Her heart swells, even though she knows he’s probably just saying that so he doesn’t have to spend very much more time with his brother.

Liam nods his head at that. “Very well. I suppose we’ll see you tomorrow, then, at the cabin?”

Killian lifts his eyebrows and nods. “Aye. Yeah. We’ll come by ‘round lunch. I think we’re due for sleeping in.”

She can’t find that she minds the idea of sleeping in with Killian Jones, either.

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“So,” Killian says to Emma as they’re standing in the front courtyard of Granny’s.

The sun is setting, so the sky is a lovely shade of red, and the glow makes Emma seem even lovelier. She has Henry’s car seat while he holds the boy in his arms and he raises his eyebrows at her.

“Do you have a stroller?”

Emma releases a heavy sigh that comes out in a puff of white air. “I don’t have the money for a stroller. I had one but time wasn’t kind to it.”

His heart aches and he nods his head. “Ah. That explains it.”

Emma pulls her lips into her mouth and swivels, looking around. “Okay. Back to the apartment?”

Killian shrugs. “I was serious before, love, if you’d like a tour.”

She looks just a little shocked before she laughs out of surprise. “Oh. Okay. Um… okay. Lead on, Prince of Storybrooke.”

Killian rolls his eyes. It’s good to know that even though he’d shared his story with her, she isn’t afraid to tease him.

He takes her down Main Street and shows her various shops. He tells her stories about them that are completely untrue, but she laughs anyway, and once, she even steps a little closer to him so that her fingers brush against his.

They come to the bar and he tosses a hand at it. “There it is. The bar I’ve told you so much about.”

Emma hums. “I thought it’d be bigger.”

Killian laughs and he finds her expression coy and teasing. “Well, it’s bigger on the inside.”

As he stares at her, the fading sunlight in the curls bouncing around her shoulders, he thinks to their kiss earlier that very day. The way she’d been so happy, bouncing up onto her toes with laughter on her lips. How she’d yanked him into her and kissed the life out of him.
He hasn’t been able to get over the fact that she’d actually done it all day and it’s making him crave her all the more. And the way she’d been so kind after he’d spilled his soul to her makes him think she isn’t half as hardened toward him any longer.

He knows it’s not going to be easy, breaking down Emma’s walls, but he knows he needs to try, because for whatever reason now, he can’t envision a future without her.

Suddenly, he realizes that in a few days it’ll be Christmas and he hasn’t gotten her a single thing. He knows exactly what he wants to give her, but he needs to first separate himself from her in order to get it.

“Hey, why don’t we go visit the library? Belle’s probably still working. I’m sure she’d love to see Henry again.”

Emma winces a little. “I mean, we don’t have to visit her, do we? She’s always nice, but she’s-”

Killian lifts his eyebrows at her, as if daring her to continue, and she presses her lips together in a line.

“Fine.”

“That’s the spirit, love. She’s great. You’ll get along with her, you’ve just got to give her a moment to get used to her.”

It doesn’t take them very long to get to the library. He pulls open the door for Emma, who gives him a tense look before she steps into the warm building.

Henry chatters in his ear when Killian enters and Belle is sitting right at reception, her smile huge.

“Hi! I didn’t know you’d be coming in!”

Killian laughs warmly. “Well, we were just touring town and I thought we could stop in.”

Belle stands up from her seat and hurries around to greet them properly. She first smiles at Emma and says, “Hi, Emma. It’s so nice seeing you again. Did you enjoy the snowman competition?”

Emma chuckles. “Yes. It was fun.”

“Wasn’t it?” Belle laughs. “Will and I made ours into the Mad Hatter but apparently the judges didn’t like it.”

“Oh, that sounds great,” Killian says, grinning wildly at his friend.

“Right?” she asks, her eyes widening. “I think it was Leroy who threw a fit.”

Belle sighs and then steps closer to him, tilting her head as she stares at Henry. “Hi there, little one.”

Henry actually turns toward Belle, rather than hide, and Killian admires the interaction with his heart squeezing tight, almost as if Henry is his own son.

It’s an improbable idea, but he finds himself wanting it.

“Would you like to hold him?” Killian wonders.

He doesn’t even look at Emma, knowing she doesn’t really want to be here, but he needs her to
stick around for a few moments so he can get her a gift.

“I would love to!” Belle sings.

It takes them a moment to make the exchange and when Belle has Emma’s son in her arms, he checks to see the look on her face. She’s reluctant, if not antsy to leave, and Killian decides this is his chance.

He pats down his leg when he pretends to feel his phone going off and then takes it into his palm, grimacing at Emma and Belle.

“Oh, bloody hell,” he cringes. “I told Dave I’d help him with something. It shouldn’t take me long. Twenty minutes or so? I’ll be right back.”

And then he hits the screen of his phone, brings the device to his ear, and turns as he pretends to take the call. All the while, Emma’s staring at him with big eyes, as if terrified over the fact that he’s leaving her alone with Belle, one of his closest friends.

She can handle it. She’s strong.

Killian steps out into the cold and stuffs his phone back into his pocket, turning in the direction that will take him to the store he needs to visit.

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She’s a little angry, but she can’t show it, because as soon as Killian leaves, she’s left alone with Belle, who is holding her son in her arms, grinning like a fool.

“Oh my goodness, he is so sweet,” Belle sighs as Henry collapses against Belle’s shoulder and snuggles with her. Belle rubs a circle into his back and smiles at Emma. “Would you like to sit? I’ve actually got some tea I was making in the break room.”

Emma holds her mouth open for a second. “Oh, um… sure.”

Belle walks with Emma through the library and Emma takes a moment to soak in her surroundings.

It’s nicely lit here in the library, and there are shelves upon shelves of books. On the reception desk there are Christmas lights hanging and there are paper snowflakes hanging on the walls as they walk.

Belle turns to Emma and smiles. “These paper snowflakes were made by some students at the elementary school when they came for a field trip.”

Emma hums in understanding. “I like them.”

“ Aren’t they lovely?”

The break room is more of a lounge, with couches and chairs and tables. There’s a counter that has a coffee pot and a microwave and sink. It smells like cinnamon here, and pine from the small tree in the corner.

“This is actually a reading room,” Belle explains. “But it doubles as my break room because I needed someplace to make my tea.”

Emma laughs gently and Belle gestures to the couches. “You can sit! Please. Do you have a preferred tea?”
“Oh, no,” Emma smiles as she sits down on the couch.

She presses her hands between her knees and watches Belle balance holding Henry while she fixes some cups of tea. She’s almost an expert at it and it makes Emma wonder if she wants kids of her own.

Belle carries over one cup at a time, handing Emma hers with a quick, “It’s called Holiday Cheer.”

When she returns, Belle sits down beside Emma and settles her teacup on the coffee table in front of them. Emma holds hers, enjoying how warm it feels between her hands.

“So,” Belle says, her dimples in her cheeks. “What would you like to know about Killian?”

Emma laughs. She shakes her head slowly and has a sip of the tea. It’s good tea, very sweet, and she settles it down on the table as she licks her lips.

“I don’t know. Tell me anything.”

Belle chuckles softly. “Alright. How about…” Belle pauses and looks up thoughtfully. “Oh, I know, Killian used to come bother me while I was volunteering here. He’d come in and beg me to go places with him all the time, as if I could just leave the library to goof around with him.”

Belle shakes her head and Emma laughs at her annoyed expression. “One time he wanted me to go to Portland for some concert and it was a school night, so I told him that he should go on his own or bring his girlfriend, but he said they broke up and that he wanted to take me so she’d get jealous.”

“Did you go?” Emma wonders as she has a sip of tea.

Belle rolls her eyes. She has a sip of her tea and her brow pinches inward. “Heavens no. Killian knew I wouldn’t. We were very good friends and I wouldn’t ever let him try to pursue me because I only ever had eyes for Will.”

Emma has to admire Belle for that, and to some extent Killian.

“How did he get you to go out with him?” Belle asks, turning toward her some. “Was it romantic or was he being ridiculous like he was when he was in high school?”

Emma laughs. She drops her attention to her teacup and stares at it in consideration. “We met in our building and it took me a while to agree to go out with him, but he’d come by everyday and ask anyway. I think I just got annoyed.”

Belle giggles and nods. “Well, he’s so different now, Emma. You must’ve been the changing influence in his life.” Belle’s smile fades and she looks down at Henry, who she has seated against her chest, his legs pressed forward on her thighs. “And your little boy, too.”

Emma’s heart aches as she remembers the story Killian had told her about what happened to Milah and how everything fell apart. She bites on her lower lip and swallows.

“Was Killian… when he was with-” Emma hesitates and Belle looks up at her with curious eyes. “Milah. What was he like when he was with Milah?”

Belle takes a soft breath and nods her head, a gentle smile pulling at her lips and falling again.

“He was… he was very young when they were together. He didn’t really know what he wanted in
life, I don’t think, but he loved her.” Belle shakes her head. “He really loved her. With all that he was.”

Emma knows this to be true, based upon the heart Killian had poured into his retelling of that fateful day.

“I don’t think… when they were together, I don’t think he knew how to love well, though. I think he loved her passionately, but he was too young to love her the way she wanted to be. He was like a puppy dog, chasing after her, if that makes sense.”

Emma nods slowly. “Yeah.”

Belle reaches out to touch Emma’s arm. “I see how he is with you, though, Emma. He’s… he stares at you like he can’t believe you’re his. That’s something he never had with Milah. And I can tell that he truly thinks the world of you.”

Emma’s heart skips a beat. She manages to smile and has another sip of her tea.

“So how do you like Storybrooke, Emma?” Belle wonders, changing the subject.

“It’s nice,” Emma says. “It feels like home.”

Belle’s cheeks get rosy and she gasps softly. “That’s wonderful. I’m glad you think so. Do you think Killian might… do you think he might want to move back home?”

Emma’s eyes grow wide and she hesitates, making Belle shake her head. “I’m sorry. I just… I’ve missed him. And I know his brother has too. The town has been different without him.”

She holds her mouth open with uncertainty for a few more moments. “I… maybe. I know he’s missed being here. I know he’s working through some stuff.”

Belle smiles and nods her head. She swallows a sip of tea and they sit in silence for a few moments.

“Belle?” Emma asks quietly, almost timidly.

Belle’s eyebrows raise and she nods. “Yes?”

“What happened between Killian and Liam? He hasn’t told me that part of the story.”

Her companion frowns a little. “Liam wanted Killian to move on faster than he was ready. They were fighting a lot before Killian left, and then one day, he was just gone.”

She shakes her head. “He had been awful, Emma. There was no bringing him back.” Belle manages a soft smile. “I suppose, until he met you and you changed his heart.”

It makes Emma’s heart squeeze tight in her chest. They must be doing a killer job at acting happily married if Belle thinks so highly of her.

“Would you like something of Killian’s? He left it here.”

Emma blinks at Belle’s proposition. “Um… sure.”

Belle stands up and settles Henry on her hip as if she’s done it her whole life and asks Emma to follow her back into the library.
They walk through a few of the aisles until they reach reception again, and Belle turns to Emma.

“Here, if you’d hold him-” Belle and Emma exchange Henry easily and Emma smiles when her son says her name.

She turns back to Belle and finds that the woman is digging through her drawers. She grins when she finds whatever it is she’s looking for, a book, and holds it out to Emma.

“This was his favorite book. He left it here on one of his last visits to the library.”

Emma takes the book and stares at the title. “Peter Pan.”

“Yes,” Belle smiles. “Killian loved Captain Hook the best. He always thought he was misunderstood.”

Emma studies the binding, at how cracked and worn it is, and then at the pages, dog-eared and slightly tattered. She thumbs open the cover and finds his name on the inside of it, written in what appears to be third grade cursive.

It makes her smile.

“Wow,” she says, laughing as she looks at Belle. “This is… amazing.”

Belle bobs her head. “Isn’t it? Killian would come in here and sit down to read it. Sometimes I’d find him sitting at Granny’s with it, or… just about anywhere, really.”

Emma can’t stop smiling, for whatever reason, and it makes her think of something. She hasn’t gotten him a gift, not yet, and with some wrapping paper, this might make a decent present.

“Can I have this?” Emma asks. “I’d like to give it to him for Christmas.”

Belle grins. “Yes. Of course.”

“Thank you.” Emma grabs the diaper bag and tucks the book inside to keep it hidden and safe.

The door opens and Emma turns, expecting to glare at Killian, only to find David stepping inside.

Her brow furrows, though she really did know Killian wasn’t going to do something for David.

“David!” Belle cheers. “Hi. What are you doing here?”

David smiles at Emma. “Ah… I’m actually picking Emma and Henry up. I ran into Killian on my way home for the night and he said you were here. Mary Margaret made dinner, and I know she doesn’t like it if I’m late, so…”

Emma looks to Belle, who shrugs her shoulders. “I should be getting home anyway myself. It’s my vacation.”

Emma grabs the diaper bag and David picks up the car seat, which is sweet of him, and then he tilts his head to the door.

“After you, Mrs. Jones.”

She’d roll her eyes, but this is David, Killian’s former best friend, so she smiles instead.

The air is cold when she steps outside and she shivers, immediately turning to her son to make sure
he’s bundled up warmly.

“The weather report said we’d be getting more snow tonight,” David says as they start to walk. “Which is kind of a shame, because I like to spend my Christmas Eve not shoveling snow.”

Emma laughs. “Yeah.”

She sees David staring at her from the corner of her eye. He has a smile on his lips as if he’s up to something.

After a few moments, he says, “So… I’m sure Killian’s told you about me, but I had hoped to set the record straight.”

“All right,” Emma smirks.

David clears his throat. “I was wrong, yelling at him and arguing with him the way I did after what happened. He was hurting and I didn’t get that. I was selfish.” David pauses. “And I don’t know if he told you about the pigeons in college, but I swear, it was his idea, not mine.”

Emma gives him a look that makes him laugh.

“Your husband was my best friend, you know?” David smiles to himself. “I miss him.” David shakes his head. “I hope… maybe this visit isn’t going to be the last of Killian Jones all over again.”

All of this talk of staying makes Emma uneasy.

She feels guilty, too, because of what they’re doing to these people by lying to them. It’s not like they’re even close to being able to come back here as a family. They’re so far from that at the moment.

Though, she knows the kiss has changed things between them. Killian had opened up to her only after the fact, with remaining awe still in the gaze. He hasn’t seemed to get over the fact that she’d kissed him, and to be fair, she keeps thinking about it too.

It was a really, really good kiss.

Emma starts to feel sick to her stomach as she thinks about the way things are being perceived by Killian’s closest friends and family. They may have just kissed, but they’re absolutely not together.

“I’m sure it’s not the last of him,” Emma manages to say to David’s expectant gaze. “He loves you. He just doesn’t know how to articulate.”

David laughs warmly. “Well, I’m glad you’re here now. That’s more than I could’ve ever asked for. I honestly didn’t think he’d take me up on it when we asked you in New York.”

Emma scoffs. “Yeah, neither did I.”

They’ve reached the apartment and David goes to open the door that allows them back in out of the cold air. Inside the building, she can smell dinner being made, and it’s much warmer.

“So with your art,” David says as they start to climb up to the third floor. “Do you do shows or… is it a private thing?”

Emma turns to look at him and holds her mouth open. “Uh… it’s private. I do it more for myself than for anyone else.”
She figures it’s easier to tell him that, because at least now he won’t go scouring the Internet for proof of her art.

“Ah,” David smiles. “Well, I’m sure it’s great.”

Emma thinks David is far too kind for his own good. “Thanks.”

As they stand at the front door to the apartment, David pushes it open and they step inside to find their significant others chatting in the kitchen.

Killian turns to them and she swears, she hasn’t seen him this breathless in the whole time she’s known him.

“Emma,” he says. And then he’s walking over to them as they’re shedding their coats. She stuffs Henry into his arms when he’s close enough and tugs his hat and boots off. “I’m sorry I abandoned you. It was… I had.”

Emma shakes her head, cognizant of where they are and just how close David is. “It’s fine, honey. I had fun. Belle was nice. She made tea.”

Killian’s smile spreads and she sighs as she grabs onto his shoulder in order to toe out of her boots.

David goes on his way to the kitchen to greet Mary Margaret, so they’re alone, and Emma finds the intimacy friendly, maybe even a little flirtatious.

She releases her grip on his shoulder and smiles at him. “So… what’s the plan for tomorrow with your brother?”

Killian grins. “We’ll go when we’re well rested and ready. And I imagine they’ll just want to play board games and chat, so don’t worry too much over it.”

Emma nods. “Okay.”

She stares at her son when Killian settles him onto his hip. “Daddy,”

Killian hums warmly and presses a kiss to Henry’s head. “You hungry, lad? Hm? Are you ready for supper?”

“We’re having pasta!” Mary Margaret announces. “Killian helped me choose!”

Emma laughs as she follows Killian’s lead toward the kitchen. Mary Margaret stands over the stove and David grabs plates to set the table. It’s the perfect picture of family, if Emma has ever seen one.

“He said you like spaghetti with meat sauce,” Mary Margaret adds.

Emma turns to look at Killian for an explanation. He just shrugs and presses his lips to the shell of her ear to whisper, “Remember that night last week when I came by?”

She rests her head against her shoulder as he leans back again and she punches him lightly in the arm, smiling because he’s an idiot.

He’s an idiot that she made out with in front of quite a few people this morning. An idiot that stares at her like she’s made of gold and absolutely refuses to believe otherwise.

As they sit down to wait for dinner to cook, watching Henry more than the television that’s on in
the background, Emma considers just how broken she is.

Henry doesn’t belong to Killian. Even if she wanted it to be the case, he’s always been Neal’s son.

Neal: the man who broke her heart and cursed her from ever finding pure love ever again.

She knows she’s not lovable. She knows she’s not the kind of person that will ever find love.

But when she looks at Killian and she sees just how he stares at her, or at the way he gazes at her son, she feels pieces of her hardened heart being chipped at, slowly.

And the Nolan’s keep acting like she’s part of their family, as if the time that’s passed between Killian leaving and coming back hasn’t been wrought with heartbreak and confusion. As if him coming back with her and a baby was the absolute best thing that could have happened.

These people love her for who she is and she’s been lying to them about almost everything.

She’s not some artsy housewife. She’s an unwanted, unloved orphan.

Tears form in her eyes and she feels overwhelmed to the point that she feels like she should excuse herself, so she does, heading upstairs to sit on the bed while she thinks about how she ended up in this position.

She hadn’t thought she’d even start to like Killian Jones when this whole thing began, but now she feels it in her chest, weighing down her every step.

She likes him. She likes the way he makes her feel when they’re pretending. She likes the kind way he cares for her and for Henry. She likes the way his arms hold her in the middle of the night when it’s just the two of them. She likes the press of his lips against hers, and the sound of his laughter in her ear. She likes the way he stares at her son, and the way he stares at her.

She likes him.

“Swan?” Killian’s voice interrupts her thoughts. She releases a heavy sigh that she’d meant to be a laugh, shaking her head when she turns to see him standing by the steps. He presses his hands into his pockets and walks toward her. “Are you alright?”

Emma blinks up at him and laughs once. “Yeah. I’m… I’m fine.”

He furrows his brow and kneels down before her, a movement that’s way too intimate for her liking at the moment.

She flinches when he grabs her hand and he resolves to not holding it as he clenches his jaw.

“Emma. I know something’s bothering you.”

“I’m fine,” she insists. “I’m just…” She sighs. “These people think we’re going to move back here and act like this for the rest of our lives.”

Killian sighs. He averts his gaze to the floor.

“I was only in this because I wanted Henry to have a good Christmas.” Emma tells him. “I’m not moving here with you.”

Killian’s brow creases. “No. No, I’d never ask you to.”
“Well, good,” Emma replies. She listens for a moment to the sound of Mary Margaret’s happy voice as she babbles with Henry and to David’s warm laughter. “Killian, I hate lying to them.”

He sighs heavily and looks down. “I know, love. So do I.”

“Then why are we doing it?” she asks. “Because clearly your brother can tell. Wasn’t the point to make him feel bad or-”

“The point was to make everyone see that I’m fine,” Killian meets her eyes again. “That I’ve moved on and-”

“But you haven’t moved on,” Emma laughs, feeling hysterical. “You’re still wallowing.”

Killian’s jaw tenses and he looks broody and dark. This look is a massive contrast to how he’d been a few minutes ago downstairs.

“I wanted to come here because I missed them. I missed home.” He pauses. “And because we’d already built up a story with Dave and Mary Margaret, it was hard to just reverse course. Besides, David’s sitting high and mighty with his perfect life. He always has and I just… couldn’t let him win again.”

She sees the pain in Killian’s eyes and Emma sighs.

“He loves you, you know,” Emma tells him. “If you had told him the truth at the grocery store instead of lying to him, he would have still wanted to have dinner and he still would have invited you home for Christmas. That’s just who he is.”

Killian scoffs. “You don’t know David as I do.”

“Yeah, well,” Emma looks down at her lap and twists her wedding ring. She hears David talking to Mary Margaret and Mary Margaret laughs. “I’m here and I’m lying to them just as much as you are.”

Killian takes a deep breath. “If we suddenly decide to drop the act, they’ll be crushed, Swan. It’s Christmas. Give them this.”

Emma makes the mistake of looking into his eyes and her heart flutters in her chest. She swears it’s singing I like him with every pulse and beat.

But she can’t let those feelings pull her under. The last time she did that, she got burned, and as she sits here with Killian, she realizes that things are incredibly fragile between them.

Killian’s trying to heal from his losses and figuring out how he fits. She’s just along for the ride, trying to cope with the fact that this man is knocking at her walls and melting her every time he so much as glances her way.

“Fine,” Emma tells him. “But… just know that I’m not about to fall in love with you. That’s not why I’m here. I’m here for Henry.”

If she’s not mistaken, she sees him deflate just a little. There’s a flicker in his gaze, a twitch of his lips, and then he forces a smile, one of his most famous and favorite smirks. “Of course.”

She watches him stand up. He searches her eyes and stands there in silence.

“It’s time for supper. Mary Margaret wanted me to get you.”
She can see his hurt in his eyes and in the weight of his shoulders, over his life and over his choices, and it makes her hurt, too. He doesn’t deserve the pain he’s had to go through. He’s been just as abandoned as she has.

And she likes him. God help her.

“Okay,” she whispers, managing a smile. “I’ll be right down.”

When he leaves her alone, Emma scrubs her hands over her face and sucks in a heavy breath. She forces herself to stand up and licks her lips.

“It’s only a few more days,” she tells herself quietly. “You can do this.”
Chapter 15

fifteen.

Henry decides to be difficult.

He doesn’t really want to have a bath, which is already made awkward enough because of the tension-laden silence between Emma and Killian.

Each bump and lingering glance is fire under his skin and with water in her hair and on her clothes, she becomes as enticing as a siren if it’s even possible.

It takes three times as long to get him to stop playing and to actually get into his crib, and once he’s there, he cries for a solid hour.

Killian’s starting to understand just how difficult being a single parent to a one-year-old can be, and his heart is heavy for Emma, and for anyone else in the world who has to do it.

He doesn’t know what to do with himself while Henry’s crying, so he just sits up on the bed and bites down on his lower lip.

He looks at his Swan, at the tense curve of her spine as she lies on her side facing away from him, and he knows she’s not asleep, so he slides down into bed himself and presses his hands over his middle.

“How often is he like this?” Killian asks.

Emma doesn’t reply right away. She stays facing the wall, still as a rock, and then she suddenly flops onto her back and turns her head toward him.

“It’s natural,” she tells him. “Now that he’s getting bigger. That’s what the books say, at least. He’s just trying to get me to soothe him, but he needs to learn how to do it on his own.”

Killian furrows his brow. Pain lodges in his chest at the cries of the boy.

“I know,” Emma sighs. “He’s just kind of fussy right now. It’s just because he wants more attention and time out of his crib. I don’t think he was very tired when we put him down.”

“Perhaps he’s sensing your emotions,” Killian suggests.

It earns him a hard look before Emma rolls her eyes and settles her head facing forward to the ceiling again.

“He might be,” Emma murmurs after they listen to Henry cry for a few minutes. “But there’s nothing I can do to help fix it.”

He can tell she’s getting irritated just by the edge in her tone. She releases a heavy sigh.

“I’ve had to do this by myself since the beginning and sometimes there are days where it’s just like this. All day long.”

Killian swallows. He studies Emma and the way she puts her hands over her face. She’s so beautiful in the pale glow of the moon pouring in through the window above the bed.
“I used to live with this older woman in the city,” she whispers. “When I got pregnant and Henry’s dad walked out on us. She found me crying in the grocery store and asked what was wrong and… then she just brought me home and said I could stay as long as I needed to.”

Emma shakes her head and laughs to herself. “I ran like a week later and I decided to live in my car instead.” Her chest heaves and she licks her lips. “I had Henry at a shelter and I couldn’t afford to stop working, so I hid him with me at my job at this small gas station a few miles outside of the city.” Emma shakes her head again. “I got fired when my boss found out.”

Killian’s heart aches as he listens to her speak. Emma turns her face toward him again and he sees tears in her eyes.

“I had a hundred bucks, my beat up VW Bug, and a newborn baby, and I decided that I was going to have to do something quick, so I found the old lady again and she let me stay until Henry was a year old and I had an actual job that paid.” Emma sucks in a breath. “She helped me when I told her I wanted to attend some college classes, and then when I saved up enough, I moved out.”

Killian doesn’t quite know what’s prompted this outburst of honesty, but he feels that he understands her now. He can see why she feels like she has to do this on her own. She’s never had anyone else willing.

“And into your building,” Emma adds, as if he needed her to. She turns her head back and stares up at the ceiling.

Henry’s cries slow into a hiccup then and Killian turns his gaze toward the crib, a soft smile on his lips when he finds the boy lying on his back.

“Having a baby wasn’t my idea,” Emma whispers. “I wanted to travel and figure out who I was. Having Henry was a complete accident.”

Killian shifts onto his side, making the bed squeak and groan below. He faces Emma and finds her turned toward him, her fingers beneath her head.

“But I don’t regret it,” she says, a smile finally filling her lips. “Because he’s my whole world.”

Killian smiles in turn. “Aye. I know.”

Emma’s eyes fall to the bed between them and he wonders, again, why she decided to tell him all of this.

They’d spent the evening with an uncomfortable wall between them. He’d had Milah in his thoughts the whole time, thanks to what Emma had said about him needing to find closure, and she’d been equally as distant for whatever reason.

She’s right, though. He’s not over what happened six years ago, even if his heart suddenly aches and longs for Emma and Henry. The past is a dark shadow that lurks in every corner.

It turned into the silent treatment and tense eye contact and forced smiles over dinner, because he was hurt and she went back to hiding behind that wall. Then came bathing and putting the little one to bed with tension filled silent arguments and even one whispered one.

He’d seen her walls coming up when she realized that lying to the town is wrong earlier and he knows it’s what’s led them here now.

She’s afraid of being hurt. She’s afraid of hurting people in this town. She’s afraid of losing her
one support structure— that wall of hers that’s kept her relatively safe for a year now.

And so is he.

But at least he knows what his heart wants. At least he knows he can safely let down his guard with her, even if it’s a monumental risk. Emma could easily wound him, especially with the way she continually pushes him away, but he knows somehow that she’s it and if he doesn’t at least try, he’ll never be happy.

“I don’t deserve to be loved,” she whispers. “Because I’m a mess and I can barely take care of myself and my kid.”

Killian frowns. “Emma—”

“No,” she snaps in a whisper. “You need to stop pretending like we’re a family. Henry… he likes you and I know you like him, but you’re not his father, and—”

Killian heaves a sigh as anger floods through his veins.

“I could never be his blood father, I know, but I could certainly be his father in all of the ways that count. I’ve already changed more diapers, have spent more time scrubbing him clean in the bath, have spent more time playing and holding him, than this man who you’re so afraid I’m going to end up becoming has.”

Killian can sense her getting ready to argue with him, but he cuts her off quickly at the head when he says, “I’m not him, Emma. The last thing I want is to hurt you. Or Henry.”

Emma licks her lips and frowns. “Killian, why is it such a big deal for you? Why do you feel like you have to suddenly figure me out? Why do you want me to open up?”

The answer rolls straight off of his tongue, “Because when we get home, you’re just going to lock yourself up in your apartment and I’ll never get the chance to see you again. And I desperately want to.”

The weight of his words sit heavy between them and Emma’s eyes blink free tears. His heart breaks that she’d be crying because of him, so he shifts toward her and reaches in to wipe at her cheeks.

“I’m sorry, love,” he whispers. “I’m sorry your life has been hard. You don’t deserve that.”

Emma gives him a look as her dainty fingers wrap around his wrist to push him away from her. “What do you know about what I deserve?”

“Wounds that are made when we are young tend to linger,” he murmurs. He’s thinking of his past now, of the scars in his heart, and of the memories that keep him restless at night. “And I know you don’t deserve to let those wounds infect. You deserve to heal.”

Emma closes her eyes. “How?”

He thinks on it for a few moments, basking in the way her body shakes with every gasp for breath she takes. She wipes at her cheeks and releases a shaky sigh. It’s the end of her tears when she opens her eyes again and she waits for him to give her an answer.

“I think… if you just trust me, Emma, I swear to you I won’t do you wrong.”
Emma scoffs. “Of course. You just want me to—”

“What do you think I want, Emma?” he argues, desperate. “Do you think I’ve dropped my walls for you to continue to wound me like this? Do you think I wanted you to assume the worst of me when I told you what happened all those years ago?”

She blinks back at him silently.

“No,” he answers for her. “No, Emma, I just want… I want a future with you and Henry both. I want to see you smile more. I want to make you laugh, genuinely.”

He feels out of breath and almost like he’s saying too much, but he can’t help but continue.

“I want dinner dates and movie nights and silly arguments that have both of us furious with each other until we reconcile. I want to see you in the mornings after a good night’s sleep, to know that the nightmares are gone and that you feel safe.”

For a few long moments, Emma stares at him. She licks her lips and averts her gaze as she breathes in.

“I’m too messed up,” she whispers apologetically. “And so are you. I don’t think you’re over what happened with Milah yet.”

Killian shakes his head. “I’m over it.”

“You’re not,” Emma finds his eyes again. “Because when people talk about her, you flinch. And I know you’ve had time to get over her, but you look like you just lost her. You haven’t had closure.”

Emma shrugs her shoulders. “I can’t lose you, Killian. Everyone I’ve ever been with has left me and if you did because you suddenly wake up and realize that you’ve just been using me in place of her… I… I don’t know.”

He wants to tell her that he’s in this for the long haul, but instead, she turns around and tugs the blankets up to her chest as she tries to fall asleep.

Killian closes his eyes and sighs heavily. “You’re not a replacement for her.”

If he’s learned anything about Emma Swan, it’s that she’s bloody impossible, but he wants her with every fiber of his being.

It makes him determined to prove that he’s here to stay, somehow, over the rest of their time in Storybrooke, because when they go back home, she’s certainly going to force him out of her life.

///

Emma wakes up to the smell of coffee and the sound of her son’s voice.

Her eyes open to find Killian still lying beside her, his arm tossed over his head as he lies on his back. He breathes in deep and then his eyes open slowly. His tongue darts out over his lips and he hums low in his throat.

She’d be lying if she didn’t admit he’s particularly attractive in the morning.

It’s the first time she hasn’t woken up in his arms, and she’s glad for it, because after their conversation the night before, she’s not sure she would have been able to restrain herself from knocking him off of the bed in a fit of panic.
Killian turns toward her, a gentle smile on his lips. “Good morning, love.”

She feels her cheeks getting just a little warm at the rough gravelly tone of his voice and she swallows thickly. “Morning.”

He keeps staring at her with sleepy eyes and it feels like it’s far too much for her right now, so she pulls herself out of bed, slides her glasses on, and shuffles over to her son.

He’s standing, grinning up at her with his teeth.

“Hi, monkey!”

Henry giggles at her voice and she hoists him up into her arms with an exaggerated grunt. She presses kisses to his cheeks immediately and he cuddles against her, his fingers gripping at her shirt as she carries him around the bed to the floor on her side.

She sits in the way so he can walk and he does just that while she grabs a few toys for him to play with. Once or twice, he tries to get past her, but she stops him with her arms and he giggles when she tickles him.

He gets bored easily and tilts his head back to stare up at the bed. “Daddy?”

Killian takes a deep breath from where he’s lying and the bed squeaks as he shifts toward the side of the bed. His hair is a riotous mess and his eyes shine bluer than they ever have. He seems rested, and it’s a good look on him, she thinks.

Henry drops his toy and holds his hands up in the air, begging to be held. Killian laughs warmly and Emma watches as he pulls her son up onto the bed.

She sits there on the floor, feeling just lazy enough to get back into bed for a little while, but then her phone rings, and it’s cause for her eyes to widen as she pushes up and hurries over to her stuff to find it.

She curses when she sees who it is.

Chills run down her spine and she considers answering, but Killian says, “Who is it, Swan?”

Emma turns back to him with nerves pinching at her belly. “It’s… Henry’s dad.”

Killian scowls and shifts Henry in his lap. He extends his hand. “Give it to me. I’ll take care of him.”

She knows two things in this moment: she’s strong enough to not answer or to answer Neal herself, but she also knows that if Killian answered her phone, Neal would get pissed off.

Emma stares at her phone for a heartbeat, and it’s no question when she considers everything Neal has ever done to her, and then hands the device to Killian, who instantly answers.

“How is this?”

She feels dizzy and sick. It’s been quite some time since he’s called. The last time they spoke was when she won the argument they’d had about her having Henry full time.

“Killian Jones. Emma’s husband. We’d very much like it if you’d quit calling. The boy isn’t of any concern of yours any longer, mate. He’s got two parents who love him very much and I don’t want to see you put my wife through any lingering heartache. Do you understand? She’s not your
property. Neither is our son.”

She can only imagine the look on Neal’s face. Surely, he’s seething mad.

Killian just has a tight smile on his face and he hangs up the phone.

“He won’t be calling any longer,” Killian assures her. “I think I scared him.”

Emma laughs once, out of relief, and she takes her phone from his hand. She studies him honestly and says, “Thank you.”


Emma stares at her phone for a few moments and then turns it off, deciding that she doesn’t want to receive any calls or messages from Neal in his angry state of mind.

Instead, she wants to get dressed and eat something, so she grabs her clothes and informs Killian she’s going downstairs. He just nods and she goes about her business.

When she emerges from the bathroom, she hears Killian and David laughing over something, and a small smile fills her lips.

“Emma!” Mary Margaret giggles. “You should hear your son. He was just saying something that sounded like David’s name.”

Looking at David, she finds her son in his arms.


She stops, clutching her clothes to her chest while she admires the way her son stares at David.

“David,” David’s saying, as if it’ll get Henry to say it again. “Say my name. Da-vid.”

Mary Margaret rolls her eyes and Emma laughs as she turns toward the woman. “Honey, he’s one. He only knows a few words. I doubt he could say your name even if he wanted to.”

Killian hums in agreement. “I’m fairly certain he was saying my name, so, David, if you would let me hold my son-”

Killian holds out his arms to take Henry and David sighs, settling the boy back into Killian’s grasp.

Killian beams the moment he’s holding Henry. Henry settles his hand into Killian’s mouth and laughs when Killian bites down gently on his fingers.

“Whatever do you think you’re doing, monkey?”

Hearing her nickname for her son makes Emma’s heart skip a beat.

Seeing Killian want to spend so much time with her kid is enough to make her jealous, because for so long, it had just been the two of them. All of a sudden Killian wants to take a place in Henry’s life and she knows it’s for appearances at the Nolan’s apartment, but it’s not fair.

Emma smiles faintly at Mary Margaret then and the woman tilts her head back. “I’m making breakfast. How do you like your eggs?”

“Ah… scrambled?” Emma asks, starting to head back for the steps leading upstairs.
Mary Margaret bobs her head. “Okay. It’ll be ready soon.”

After Emma settles her clothes down into her bag, she finds Killian’s sweater that she’d worn to bed again and throws it over her head. She doesn’t want to have to explain it off to Killian, but it’s comfortable and she just needs something warm and cozy right now.

By the time she’s back downstairs, she hears Killian explaining his plans for the day, and Mary Margaret keeps humming while the television sits on low.

“Well, after you come back into town, there’s the Christmas Eve ceremony by the tree.” Mary Margaret says. “I’m bringing the hot chocolate.”

Emma watches as David and Mary Margaret both work on setting the table.

It’s so nice here, with David and Mary Margaret. She already feels like they’re part of her family, somehow, with their kindness and so many shared meals between them.

Emma has a seat beside Killian, as usual, who has Henry sitting in his lap while he feeds him Cheerios. She watches the two, finding it endearing even if jealousy rages deep within her belly, because Killian definitely is in love with her son.

David settles a plate of eggs, bacon, and a stack of pancakes down before her and Emma’s eyes widen at the sheer amount of food.

“Wow,” she breathes in a laugh. “Are Christmas Eve breakfasts always this extravagant?”

Mary Margaret chuckles as she sits at the table. “You’re our guests and we want you to feel at home. And being at home means you’re well fed.”

It’s all she’s never known. A home. A family. Being well fed.

It’s nearly enough to bring her to tears.

Killian hums as he cuts into his pancakes with his fork. He sticks a bite into his mouth and nods. “Well, we appreciate your kindness, Mary Margaret.”

“And we appreciate you!” she says on a swoon. “You have no idea how often we’ve thought about finding you in the city. Part of me thought we might run into you while we were there.” Mary Margaret shakes her head. “I can’t believe we actually did.”

Emma glances over at Killian as he casts a look her way.

It’s almost as if he knows she’s becoming overwhelmed. He’s too damn perceptive.

They quietly return to their breakfasts and Emma’s eyes rest on her son as he munches on his food.

“So Henry had a rough night, huh?” Mary Margaret asks.

Emma sighs. “Yeah. A little. It’s because he wanted to keep playing but it was time to sleep. He was just mad at us.”

Mary Margaret bobs her head in understanding. “That’s what I thought.”

“I’m sorry if he kept you up. I just couldn’t let him have his way.”

David looks up from his plate and wears a sympathetic smile. “It was fine. Don’t worry. We’re
about to have ours. It was good experience.”

She doesn’t know about that.

“Well, at the beginning it’s a lot different,” Emma tells them.

She feels like the experienced parent as she remembers the first few months of Henry’s life. It had been incredibly difficult, but she’s strong, so she managed.

“I’m sure,” Mary Margaret sighs. “How did you guys handle waking up in the middle of the night? Did you do it together or one at a time or-”

Emma’s eyes widen a little and she turns to look at Killian. His mouth hangs open for a moment and she can see him scrambling. He cocks his head to the side as his tongue darts out to lick his lips.

“Uhm,” he clears his throat, shifting up in his chair with his hands at Henry’s sides. “We worked together.” He smiles and Emma releases a breath of relief. “Henry was breastfed, so after the first few weeks Emma felt more comfortable letting me have a try at it. Naturally, he didn’t latch on.”

His attempt at humor isn’t missed. They all laugh, including Emma, and she sees the smile on his lips widen as he casts a glance at her.

“But, yeah, we were both up and out of bed. As he got older it was easier to alternate.” Killian smiles at Henry when he looks up at him. “And, of course, you’re exhausted at the start because it’s… every few hours.”

Emma nods. “Yeah.” She sighs. She turns to the Nolan’s and bites on her lip. “But you guys are going to be great parents.”

David and Mary Margaret smile and look at one another. They grab hands on top of the table and it’s almost too sweet, the way that they love each other.

Looking to her son again, she finds that he’s more interested in smacking the table with his hands, something that makes Killian and Emma both laugh.

“Do you want to go for a walk?” Killian asks. He starts to get up, but Emma touches his arm.

She feels like she’s suddenly become second place to this man and she quite frankly misses having to do all of the work. It’s what she’s used to and it’s not fair that Killian seems to think he can just take the work away from her.

“I can get him, babe,” His eyes hold hers. “Eat your breakfast. You’ve had him for a while anyway.”

Killian finally relents and Emma gets up from the table before she scoops Henry up and settles him down on the floor.

He wants to hold her fingers while he walks for a few steps and she smiles because of the simple interaction.

Henry eventually consents to sitting down again in the living room and as she sits with him on the floor, he plays with one of the pillows from the couch as well as anything he can touch. She has to keep him from yanking the tree down by the ornaments or from crawling under the cabinets.
At one point, he gets under the tree and lies there, staring up through the branches. He doesn’t grab for any of the lights or ornaments at least, but the position makes Emma wary.

She pulls him out from below the tree and settles him in her lap before the tree instead, so he can still see the lights and soak in their glow.

After a while, David comes over. “Would you like to finish your breakfast? I can watch him.”

She smiles thankfully and stands up. “He apparently loves those Christmas lights.”

David takes Henry from her and when Emma glances over, she finds Killian helping Mary Margaret with something in the kitchen.

When she turns back to David, he’s smiling with Henry, offering him a high-five that her son gladly participates in. He’s cute, her little boy, and seeing David feel comfortable with him is almost as precious.

“Hey, Emma,” David says, his eyes bright. He keeps a grin on his face. “What would you think of leaving him here with Mary Margaret and I? For a little practice? That way you and Killian could spend some time alone. You haven’t had much alone time since you got here.”

Emma holds her mouth open. She’s so tempted to say no, because Henry’s the best distraction she has from intimacy with Killian Jones.

“Um…” Emma shakes her head slowly. She sees David deflate slightly, in the way his shoulders fall and his lips curve downward. “Yeah. Why not?”

David immediately smiles easy again. “Cool.”

It’s anything but cool as Emma thinks about it. She goes to the table and sits down to finish her now cold breakfast.

Killian’s drying dishes for Mary Margaret and he glances up to find her eyes. After a few moments, he comes to sit down beside her.

He grabs his mug of coffee and has a sip before licking his lips. Emma plays with her bacon between her fingers and stares at the floating chunks of whipped cream in her cocoa for a few moments.

“I told David he and Mary Margaret could watch Henry,” she tells him as nonchalantly as she can. She has a bite of her bacon and a sip of the cocoa.

Killian stares at her with big eyes. “Oh.”

Emma shrugs her shoulders in response, not feeling up to talking to him at the moment.

“Well, I look forward to some time alone with you, Emma,” Killian’s voice is quiet and gentle, with not a hint of flirting in it at all.

She looks at him with tension in her chest. Things between them are changing.

Where he’d once been hard to even look at, now she’s found herself telling him about her past and he’d chewed out her ex on the phone… it’s starting to pile up and get really uncomfortable, but looking at the honesty in his eyes somehow makes it easier to breathe.

Not to mention the fact that every time she gives into the act while they’re sitting with his friends
or family, she feels her heart swelling with something akin to *love*.

“Yeah, well,” Emma tosses her head from side-to-side as she turns back to her meal. “It’s not my dream for Christmas Eve.”

Killian laughs through his nose and she sees him shaking his head as his arm goes around the top of her chair.

“When I win your heart, Emma,” he whispers against her ear, “and I will win it; it won’t be because of any trickery. It will be because you want me.”

Emma meets his eyes again and chills run down her arms beneath his sweater. A funny feeling fills her belly and she looks away from him as she grabs the mug of hot chocolate. All of the intimacy lately is definitely not helping her forget about the crush she has on him.

“I…” Killian’s voice is suddenly reserved. “Emma, before we head out to visit Liam and Elsa, I… I want to take a walk by myself, if that’s alright.”

She feels his arm fall away from the back of her chair and she nods. When she looks at him, his brow is furrowed slightly and he searches almost desperately for her permission.

“Yes. Okay.”

Killian smiles a little. “I’ll be back within the hour.”

She’s left wondering just where he could possibly want to go on Christmas Eve, but at least she doesn’t have to worry about him saying anything *else* that could remind her of just how much she likes him.

Her heart already has had more than enough, with all of the endearing things he’s said about how he wants to stay and become her family for real.

Emma watches him from behind the rim of her hot chocolate as she stands in the kitchen a few moments later, as he kisses Henry goodbye and tells David he’s going for a quick walk.

He looks good, in his winter clothes. His scarf is snug around his neck and his beanie oddly makes him more attractive, despite the fact that the majority of his hair is covered up.

He’s a quiet mystery sometimes, like he is in this moment. When he meets her eyes from across the room, her heart jumps with a mixture of surprise and delight.

“I’ll be back,” he says to her. “I’ve just got to do something.”

“Okay,” she replies. “We’ll be here.”

He tosses his hand up in the air, pulls open the door, and then he’s gone.

“Where’s he going?” Mary Margaret wonders nosily.

Emma laughs under her breath. “I have no idea.”

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The air is cold as Killian steps into the cemetery. Snow crunches beneath his feet and his heart races in his ears while a lump forms in his throat.
He hasn’t been here since the funeral. He’d been drunk off of his arse that day. Liam forced him to get out of bed and he refused to dress up even though his brother had left out his suit.

He’d shown up late wearing a leather jacket and knee-torn jeans. He threw up by a tree. He refused to look at the grave, or much of anything. He staggered off before anyone could see the tear trails on his cheeks.

Gold had some choice words for him after it all. And so did Liam, and David, and Mary Margaret… pretty much the whole town was on his case for showing up drunk to his beloved’s funeral.

Now, he’s completely sober, and the experience is so very real.

Killian swallows thickly and licks his chapped lips when he finds her name. His stomach twists and he feels sick, but he pushes through.

He stares at the gravestone for a few long minutes as memories flash through his mind. Tears burn behind his eyes and he opens his mouth to speak, but words can’t come forth.

“My love,” he finally manages to say, though it’s choked and he cries wet tears that make him feel incredibly small. “I… I’m sorry.”

Killian closes his eyes and chokes again. He’s thinking about their argument, as clearly as it had happened, and he shakes his head at the grave.

“I loved you,” he whispers. A small smile fills his lips. “I loved you so damn much, Milah. And I don’t think I ever quite knew that until you were gone.”

He clenches his jaw and clears his throat.

The cemetery is quiet and not a soul stirs. The snow on the ground is fresh and unmarked, meaning he’s the first to come visit a lost loved one in quite some time.

“I am not perfect,” he says. “And that day, I was at what I thought could be my worst, until the next morning I found out what happened.”

He thinks of her, of her smile, and he realizes he can’t really remember the sound of her voice, nor the timbre of her laughter. She’s fading, a mere memory now.

“I want you to have something,” Killian says, studying the impression of her name on the stone. “I… I was going to ask you to marry me, but not until we could find our happily ever after, of course. After the winds blew over and we could leave town.”

He digs into his pocket and removes the box he’s kept in the pit of his sock drawer in denial for years. He opens it up, studying the ring itself, and smiles a little.

“You would’ve hated the idea at first,” he laughs. “You probably would’ve yelled at me and shoved me and told me to keep the ring.” He shakes his head and snaps the box closed. “But I think I would’ve talked you into it, wouldn’t I have? I always have had a way with words. And you loved it when I sweet talked you.”

Killian steps forward and uses his arm to wipe the snow from the top of her gravestone, then traces his fingers through the letters on the front, and settles the ring box in the snow.

“I know wherever you are you must be happy,” Killian whispers. “Exploring and being
adventurous with the wind in your hair. Is there wind where you are, love?”

He narrows his eyes in consideration and laughs to himself.

“I’m sorry for how things were left between us, Milah. I’m sorry I yelled at you. I’m sorry we fought. I’m sorry I didn’t fight for us.” Killian frowns and shakes his head. “I miss you every day, but… I think you’d want me to move on. You wouldn’t want me to stay angry.”

Killian thinks of Emma then, and of her words spoken under the cover of darkness.

“I found someone,” he breathes. “She’s… fiery and, gods, she’s beautiful. Her name is Emma.” He smiles because he can’t stop himself. “And she has a son named Henry, who is sweeter than can be.”

He laughs again and stops himself when his heart squeezes tight in his chest. “I imagine our little one would’ve been quite the troublemaker. With your wild hair and your strength. They’d have my eyes, perhaps, and all of my dashing good looks.”

Killian swallows thickly as the tears rush forth again. He shakes his head. “I’m sure you’ve met them, where you are. Tell them I love them and I’m sorry we’ll never get a chance at sailing together and at bedtime stories and bath time misadventures.”

He takes a deep breath as he wipes at his eyes and cheeks. He stares at Milah’s name again and he reaches out to touch the top of the stone.

“I’m sorry it’s taken me this long to move on, Milah,” he apologizes. He feels a weight being lifted from his chest and shoulders, as if he’s finally free to breathe on his own. “I wish I’d done it a long time ago, but at least I’m here now.”

Killian sucks in a deep breath and nods to himself. “Rest well, my dear one. I know we’ll meet again someday.”

He only lingers for a heartbeat more, and as he wipes his eyes and sniffs. He starts back toward the truck so he can get back to the Nolan’s.

Once upon a time, he could never have fathomed letting Milah go, but he feels free now. He feels as if years of aches and pains have been sent on their way and all that remains is him again.

He hasn’t felt himself for quite some time.

Killian turns on the radio when he starts the truck and he sings along to the music on the radio while he drives down Main Street. And he laughs, because he can.

Emma was absolutely right about him needing closure, that much is certain, but she was wrong thinking he’d replaced Milah with her. No, his heart leaps in his chest at the mere thought of her now, and he feels more capable of loving her purely.

As he knocks on the door to the Nolan’s apartment, he gets nerves tickling under his palms and his heart skips a beat when the door whisks open.

Emma stands on the other side, her hair tucked behind her ears. She’s wearing one of his sweaters and the sleeves are pushed up to her elbows. Her eyes widen slightly at the sight of him and he smiles at her.

“Hi,” he says. His heart races and butterflies twist in his gut.
“Hi,” Emma replies, clearly confused about where he’d been and why he must look as light as he does.

She holds open the door for him to enter and he does.

Mary Margaret and David are talking from somewhere in their apartment, but they’re not out in the open, and when Killian looks, Emma has brought down Henry’s things to the living room.

“Are you ready to go?” Killian asks.

Emma slides her hands down her thighs and holds her mouth open as she studies the living room. “Uh… yeah. If you are.”

Honestly, he feels like he could fly if he tried.

A genuine smile fills his lips and he nods. “Aye, love. I’m ready.”
sixteen.

The trip to the cabin is quiet.

Killian drives while Emma sits shotgun. Her legs wiggle just a little with restlessness and she keeps her head turned away from him, as if she’s afraid of being alone with him.

He just wants to get this chance to have one-on-one time and not feel like there’s a massive wall between them.

“Emma,” he says her name gently, almost quietly.

He turns to check on her and she keeps staring out the window.

She looks dreadfully cozy, bundled up with a coat and hat. Her fingers are covered with her favorite mittens and she has boots that rise toward her knees above her dark blue jeans.

“Where did you go this morning?” she asks. She’s not looking at him until he glances her way.

A smile pulls at the corners of his lips. “I… I went to say goodbye to Milah. I found closure. Like you suggested.”

Emma’s expression reflects her understanding. She looks down at her lap and he feels the tension shift from contemplative to something else altogether.

It’s odd, how easily she’ll close herself off, and he wonders if there might be some reason behind her action other than those walls of hers.

“That’s good,” she says.

“Aye,” Killian agrees. He nods his head. Silence returns and he hates it, so he tries to think of something to talk about. “My brother is probably going to want to talk about any variety of—”

“I don’t want to know any more facts about your life, Killian.” Emma cuts him off. He looks at her and she’s facing him. “Why do you seem to feel like I’m some puzzle you have to solve? I’m not anything special. I swear. I’m just… hurt and broken.”

Killian takes a deep breath. “Well, perhaps I can see past the hurt. Perhaps I can see your heart and maybe… maybe I like your heart.”

Emma is quiet for a few long beats. The sound of the tires against the snow is relatively loud.
All he can think about is how badly he wants to break through with her.

They don’t have much time if he’s going to be successful in his attempt at winning her heart. He just wants her to know he’s here and he’s not planning on going away like the rest of the people in her past.

“Things are different now.” Emma shakes her head. “What was it? Was it the kiss?”

Killian’s brow creases deeply. He sucks in a breath. “More like what the kiss exposed.”

“It was just a kiss,” Emma breathes in disbelief.

He only knows one thing in this moment, as he’s driving them toward Liam and Elsa’s cabin, and it’s that he doesn’t want this opportunity to pass.

“Emma, I never thought I’d be capable of letting go of my first love- of my Milah- to believe that I could find someone else.” He pauses, his heart aching as he dares a glance her way. “That is, until I met you.”

Emma’s silence is accompanied by the flutter of her eyelashes against her cheeks as she struggles to find something to say.

“Do I really mean that much to you?” she finally asks.

Killian shakes his head as a lump fills his throat. “When I think about going back to life in the city after this, I can’t imagine it. I can’t imagine my apartment. I can’t imagine not getting to see you. I can’t imagine not getting to hold Henry or to play with him. I can’t imagine not holding you through your nightmares. This is… it’s the closest thing to family I’ve ever had.”

He pulls the truck up to the cabin then and shifts into park. He turns toward Emma and finds her staring at him.

“I’m…” Emma looks down with a deep breath sliding past her lips. “I grew up without a family and even when I was with Henry’s dad, I never had a home. But here, with you-”

Emma meets his eyes and he thinks his heart might leap straight out of his chest when she shrugs. The words are unspoken, but he knows what she means to say.

Killian doesn’t move. He doesn’t think he even breathes.

“I’m terrified about that. You know I am. I just… I can’t let it be my home because it’s too good to be true. We’re pretending. This is a game. We’re playing house. And I think that’s why you want me. Because right now, everything is good. But what happens when things aren’t good?”

He sighs heavily. “Emma. Things aren’t necessarily good.”

“Aren’t they?”

“Darling, we’re bickering constantly,” Killian argues. “You won’t let me in for longer than five minutes at a time and when you do, you so easily throw up your damn walls again.”

Emma tilts her head at him. “Because this isn’t real.”

“It’s real,” Killian says. “I see the look on your face when you think I’m not paying you any attention and you’re in love with this.”
Her eyes close and she shrugs. “It’s… nice, okay? Pretending to have a life I never could have. With a husband that loves me and a dream job and a dream apartment.”

“Don’t be afraid of the moment that reality hits,” Killian pleads. “Because when it does, when we’re back in our tiny apartments with our crap jobs and debts… we’ll still have each other. Regardless of what our relationship status is.”

She unbuckles her seatbelt and looks out at the cabin before them while she runs her tongue over her lips to wet them. Her eyes are watery when she looks at him again.

“We should go.”

Killian sucks in a breath. “Aye.”

He isn’t sure what to make of these changes he’s seen in her.

It’s been hard for her, because they’ve been pretending to be married practically three quarters of the time, and he knows this relationship isn’t easy to begin with. They’re both complicated individuals with pasts that hurt.

Her walls are high, but he thinks they must be coming down if she’s willing to admit that she feels at home here with him.

Killian doesn’t let it get to his head, though. He takes it as a step in the right direction, feeling a bit lighter when he follows her lead out into the snow.

She walks close to him toward the cabin and when they stand at the door, she shivers, making him turn to her with worriedly lifted eyebrows.

“Are you alright?” he asks quietly.

Emma hums. “Yeah. Let’s just get inside.”

Killian knocks on the door and they wait in silence for someone to come. It takes a few moments, but soon enough, Liam pulls open the door and grins at them.

“Brother!” Liam throws out his arm as he steps backward. “Come in! Please! It’s freezing!”

Killian waits for Emma to go first and once she’s inside, he steps forward, smiling thankfully at Liam on his way in.

The cabin is nice. It’s just as big as Liam had mentioned, with a modern kitchen and open living space. There are a few doorways that lead elsewhere in the home, and Killian immediately is struck with the scent of something sweet.

He turns, facing Elsa, who stands in the kitchen focused on something intently.

“Where’s your boy?” Liam asks as soon as they start peeling out of their coats.

Killian’s mouth falls open, but Emma speaks instead, “He’s with David and Mary Margaret. They wanted to babysit, so who was I to say no? Some private time with Killian is rare enough as it is.”

“Ah,” Liam says, though his eyes narrow just slightly, and Killian begins to wonder all over again if he’s not skeptical of their situation.

Emma toes out of her boots and he laughs lightly when she scrambles to grab onto his arm. Her
eyes meet his, all bright and as if she’s been caught in the act. Killian just smiles back at her and Emma’s cheeks become pink with a blush.

“Elsa and I had a few gifts for Henry,” Liam says. “I suppose you’ll have to just take them back to the Nolan’s for later.”

At Liam’s words, Emma’s grip on his arm tightens just a little, and then the rosy hue in her cheeks fades as her gaze falls. It’s clear she’s uncomfortable with the idea of his family becoming hers, but it’s part of the charade.

He’s noticed it too, of course he has, the way people seem to think they’ll come back and live here as a happy family. He knows it’s impossible, because even if he and Emma were to fall magically in love over the course of this short week, they wouldn’t leave the city.

“That should be fine,” Killian says to Liam. He grimaces when he realizes something. “Oh, but we completely forgot to get you a gift.”

Liam shakes his head. “Nonsense, Killian. You being here with your family for Christmas is a gift on its own.”

Still, Killian can’t help but see distrust in his brother’s eyes.

Liam might be everything to him, and he might have been the near perfect example of a man before he left, but right now, Killian finds himself doubting their relationship entirely.

“Emma,” Liam says. “Would you come with me for a moment? I’d like to show you something.”

Emma pivots toward Killian, her eyes widening, and Killian just smiles at her. “Go on, love. I’ll help Elsa with…”

“Snickerdoodles!” Elsa cheers, making Killian chuckle.

“Ah, yes, the snickerdoodles.”

Emma’s gaze stays on him for a few moments, as if pleading with him, but then she turns to Liam and nods her head.

“I hope its baby pictures. Killian swears up and down that he was a cute kid, but he has no proof.”

Liam laughs heartily. “Ah, well, perhaps you’re onto something.”

Liam winks at Killian, but Killian just gives a groan, calling out, “You better not show her those awful pictures of me in high school!”

“Oh, brother, you can count on it.” Liam teases back.

Killian watches as the two of them walk out of the main living area and then he turns to his brother’s girlfriend, sighing softly.

“Well, it’s just the two of us, then.”

Elsa hums a laugh. “Would you like a cookie?”

He scoffs. “Of course I do.” He goes around the counter to stand beside Elsa and she delicately points out which he can enjoy. He plucks it up and pops it into his mouth. “Delicious. Wonderfully done.”
“Thank you,” Elsa blushes a little. “It’s my aunt’s recipe.”

Killian hums. He examines Elsa as she gracefully scoops out dough to place on the cookie sheet and he finds her beauty quiet. Liam hadn’t ever really dated when they were growing up, but Elsa is someone he imagines works well with him.

“So… how did you and my brother meet?” Killian asks, a smile filling his lips as she leans back against the counter.

Elsa looks up at him and laughs softly.

“Well, I was passing through town about a year and a half ago and I was lost, trying to find someone in town. I found my way to the harbor, and Liam was just sitting there watching the horizon.” Elsa smiles a little. “And I asked him for directions and he gave me the worst directions in the world. It took him half an hour to explain it to me before I just asked him to accompany me.”

Killian hums and Elsa shrugs her shoulders. “We exchanged phone numbers and after a month or so he came to find me where I used to live in Greenland. He actually flew out to come find me.”

“Greenland?” Killian laughs. “Really? All the way to Greenland?”

Elsa shakes her head and laughs. “I’m a scientist. It’s my job to study things and I was in the middle of a research project. So he stayed with me for a little while and…” Elsa shakes her head. “I guess we fell in love somewhere along the way, because I’m here now and I don’t think I’ll be leaving anytime soon.”

Killian finds her sweet, and despite every desire Killian has to be fiercely protective of his brother, he thinks Elsa is a great match for him. She’s sweet most of the time, but she’s also strong and opinionated. She carries grace in her step and isn’t afraid of letting her thoughts be known.

Much like a certain Swan he knows.

“Well, I’m glad to hear it.”

Elsa slides the cookies into the oven and sets the timer. When she returns to him, she scrubs her hands with soap under the running water of the sink faucet.

“Killian,” Elsa says, keeping her voice quiet. She nibbles on her lower lip and shuts the water off. Elsa steps toward him and stares at him for a few moments. “There’s something that’s been bugging me for a while, and I feel like it might not be my place to say something, but you deserve to know it.”

He furrows his brow. “Is everything alright?”

Elsa nods. “Yes. Well. It’s about Emma.” Elsa glances over her shoulder and then turns toward him again. “She came to the harbor when Liam and I came back into town before you were reunited and I happened to be there as well. She… told me all about her story and about her relationship with you thinking I was a stranger.”

Suddenly, he feels sick. Maybe Liam does know.

His eyes widen. “Does- did you-”

“I didn’t tell Liam,” Elsa insists, holding out her hands and pressing one to his arm. “But… I just… I wanted to tell you because Emma seemed awfully confused about how to feel about you thanks to
your closeness lately. And I know it can’t be easy for you, either, so… if you want to talk, I can… I
can be that listening ear I was for Emma the other day.”

Killian studies Elsa and takes a deep breath. “She’s hard to read. Sometimes she’ll open up, if even
a little, and then she’ll pull back because she realizes what she’s doing.”

Elsa drops her gaze to the counter for a moment. “Do you have feelings for her?”

Killian’s stomach twists and he sighs as his fingers run through his hair.

He hears Liam talking from somewhere beyond and he thinks of Emma, of the words they’d
exchanged in the truck, and he thinks of her confessions in the middle of the night, and of the
feeling of her lips pressed against his.

“Yes,” he whispers. He closes his eyes and bites down on his lower lip. “I only asked her to do this
so people wouldn’t think me a failure.” He finds Elsa’s gaze again. “I left here and I left a disaster
in my wake. All of my friendships were shattered. My own brother didn’t want me living with him
any longer.”

Killian sighs. “I had just lost the love of my life and our unborn child. They all thought it was
nothing, that my relationship with her was a fling, but… it wasn’t. I loved her. I wanted a future
with her.”

Elsa frowns at him and reaches for his hand, giving his fingers a gentle squeeze.

“I… I wanted to move on when I moved to the city,” he murmurs. “I tried to. But I just ended up
covering up all of the loss with anything I could.” Killian swallows thickly. “And then I met
Emma.”

Elsa nods. “She changed things.”

“Aye,” Killian confirms, a weak smile filling his lips. “It only took a few days for her to remind me
of what happiness feels like. She and her boy were the best parts of my day for the weeks leading
up to this.”

He shakes his head and Elsa sighs softly.

“Now that we’re here, pretending to be married, I realize just how big of a fool I was thinking that
we’d be able to do this without getting attached or ruining the lives of my friends and family.
They’re happy for us- for me- and we’re about to go back to the city again, to our separate
apartments and lives.”

Elsa shakes her head. “I think you should tell Emma how you feel.”

“I have,” he laughs. “She just won’t hear me out.”

Elsa purses her lips. “Well, you can’t give up on her. I know it seems like she’s forcing you out,
but… while she can be prickly, Emma has a heart behind those walls of hers. She’s just trying to
figure out if she can let you in without getting hurt.”

Killian swallows. “Aye.”

“I know it doesn’t make it easier,” Elsa murmurs. “But… just think about what she’s going
through. She has a son and she wants to be a good mother for him. And if she’s struggling with her
feelings for you, too, she’s probably just being careful of making sure those feelings are true.”
“So,” Liam says as they sit in one of the bedrooms.

Between them, there are photo albums that Liam’s been showing off to her. She’s seen one too many pictures of an adorable baby Killian for her heart’s well being.

“I moved out of town to be with Elsa for about a half year, and I came back just in time to be here for Christmas.”


Liam smiles back at her and his attention falls to the photo album in her lap.

She runs her thumb over a picture of Killian standing on a boat. He’s about four years old in the picture, with his hair a mess and his shirt off. He’s holding his arms up in the air as if he wants to catch something in them. His eyes are bright and the gaps between his teeth remind her of innocence.

“Killian’s had a hard life,” Liam says suddenly, his voice remorseful. “I tried to help make it easier for him after our father left. We were the brothers Jones. Nobody could steal us from each other.”

Emma meets his eyes and finds his smile weary. “He loves you a lot, you know.”

Liam laughs softly. “Aye, well, the last conversation we had before he left would argue otherwise.”

He frowns, hurt, and Emma folds the album closed. She shifts on the bed toward him.

“Emma, I know my brother,” Liam states. “I know how he’d been when he left. He wasn’t in his right head.” The man sighs. “So when he came back to town and he suddenly has a beautiful wife and a son, I think you can understand why I was so skeptical.”

Emma honestly doesn’t understand and Liam must read that, because he clears his throat and lifts his eyebrows.

“Killian was hurt more than he’d ever been before. He completely shut down. He was drinking a lot. He was angry. I can’t see that going away over the course of only a few years in a new city. My brother has a hard time giving up when he’s feeling pity for himself.”

Emma takes a breath and shrugs her shoulders. “Well. Love changes people.”

Liam stares at her and hums skeptically. “Aye. I suppose.”

It sends chills down her arms, how Liam seems to be so certain she’s lying.

She’d thought they were done with this, when she shut him up about it just the day before. Knowing he doesn’t like her is bad enough as it is, but to think he still thinks they’re lying is enough to make her sick.

“How much is he paying you, Emma?”

Emma gives him a confused look. “Excuse me?”

Liam sighs and shakes his head. “How much is my brother paying you to pretend to be his wife? And your boy to be his son? For the week? Or is he paying you by the day?”
Emma’s jaw falls open and she shakes her head slowly. “I’m not pretending to be anything. Killian and I are married.”

Liam hums. “When did you get married?”

“Two years ago.”

“What’s your anniversary?” Liam pushes.

She stares at him, narrowing her eyes. “Valentine’s day. We wanted to be able to remember it. And it’s easier to celebrate two in one.”

“How did he propose?”

Emma’s mouth feels dry, but she continues easily, “He did it one morning while I was over at his place. He just asked me while we were hanging out on the couch. It was simple.”

Liam hums. He shifts closer to her on the bed and searches her eyes. “Emma, it’s not you. I think you’re wonderful.”

“Killian’s not lying to you,” she promises. “I’m not lying to you. Why would we?”

Liam shakes his head. “To make me feel guilty? To prove to the people of this town that Killian’s fine when he’s still hurting?”

Emma swallows and averts her gaze to her lap. She stares at her wedding ring and considers Killian’s words to her in the truck.

She’s his home just as much as he is hers.

“Well, if that were the case,” Emma says, bravely looking him in the eyes again. “It’s not any of your business. If he wants to deceive all of his friends and family into thinking he’s happy for once in his life, where’s the harm in that? These people suddenly think he’s okay? They think he’s married with a kid? Okay. So what?”

Liam smiles and shakes his head. “The problem is, Emma, that Killian would lie to begin with. Do you know how many people love him? Do you realize how many people have become attached to the idea of him being happy? If they found out it was all a lie…”

“It’s not,” Emma bites out. “Killian is happy. With me and our son.”

She rises to her feet and curls her fingers into fists at her sides. Her heart races and she’s suddenly protective over this whole charade, because as much as she detests it, Killian means something to her now, and so do the people in this town, and she wants to make sure nobody finds out the truth.

But besides that, she knows that coming here has changed Killian. She knows that he found closure and that somehow, he’s been able to get past what happened to him.

For his heart to be as light as it had been this morning, with that happy look on his face, and the joy in his laughter, he must have found a way to do that.

And she knows being here is good for her, too, because she likes Killian. That couldn’t have happened were it not for this town and these people and the lie.

“If they found out it was all a lie he’d lose their trust,” Liam finishes, “he’d lose them forever. And so would you.”
Emma’s stomach jerks and she swallows thickly. “Yeah, well, you don’t have to worry about us losing anyone, because we’re married and we have a kid. That’s the truth. We’re happy. He loves me and I love him.”

The words barely escape her lips before she storms out of the room, desperate for something.

Liam Jones hates her, or at least hates the idea of her, and it makes her mad, because she doesn’t know what to do with the idea that he has that she’s much better than Killian- too good for him.

Emma walks back into the main cabin area and finds Killian sitting by himself next to a window that reveals snow trickling slowly to the earth outside. His profile is handsome, she thinks, with his hair fluffed just so and his jaw pointed.

He looks contemplative, as if puzzling over the complexities of the world. It’s a look he wears well.

Emma determinedly decides to break the peace and slides herself into his lap, effectively jerking him into attention.

“Emma-”

She wraps her arms around his neck and his go around her middle as she presses her palm to his cheek. His eyes are wide and he clearly wasn’t anticipating her to come to him like this.

She wasn’t either.

But there’s something about Liam being on her case about Killian that makes her want to prove him wrong.

So, she kisses Killian, and it’s not a gentle kiss, nor is it a chaste kiss. No, it’s a deep, sensual kiss, one that sends butterflies stirring in her belly and fire ignites under her breastbone.

Killian groans a little as she kisses him and she sighs against his lips, not daring to break apart for even a second until they need breath.

And then they’re back at it, his nose brushing against her cheek, and her fingers making a fist in his hair.

His hand squeezes her hip and God he’s good at this. She hasn’t had a good make out session in quite some time, and this one is definitely taking the prize for being the best she’s ever had.

It should scare her, but she hears Liam’s footsteps, and she pours herself fiercely into the kiss before her forehead bumps against Killian’s and they breathe in deep.

She wants to kiss him again, her lips hovering close to his, and she can see it in his eyes when she opens hers, that he’d like nothing more. But she licks her lips and leans back just a little so she can rest her head against the back of the chair.

Killian’s chest heaves and when her fingers press against his pulse she feels it rushing fast.

“Not that I’m complaining,” he murmurs as his head settles back against the chair too. His pupils are still dilated and the dimples in his cheeks are sweet. Emma’s fingers lift to the fringe of his hair and she admires the way he smiles. “But what was that all about?”

Emma shrugs her shoulders and smiles coyly. “Nothing.”
“Nothing?” Killian teases. He pinches her side and it makes her laugh, her legs twitching a little as her chest bounces with her laughter.

She catches her breath and cups his cheek again, shifting upright to press her forehead to his. “I just wanted to kiss you. Can’t your wife kiss you?”

“She can,” Killian replies breathlessly. “Any time she feels like it."

Emma hums. She leans in to kiss him again, a soft thing that lingers. Her fingers caress his beard and she licks her lips again when she pulls away.

Their eyes meet and her heart races in her chest, mostly because kissing Killian like this, in a semi-private setting, is much different than the kiss they’d shared when they won the snowman contest.

And with the conversation they’d had in the truck before coming in still ringing in her ears, she almost wishes she could talk to him some more in complete privacy.

This isn’t easy, pretending to be married. Her heart races when he looks at her even when they’re alone and as she sits here with him now, she realizes that every fear she’s ever had about losing him is ridiculous.

His eyes are so soft and he doesn’t press her for information, nor does he press her for more kisses. He just waits and listens, and he’s good.

Her heart races wildly against her ribs, reminding her with every stuttered beating of the rhythm of the words I like him, again and again.

Her stomach twists at the reminder of her silent feelings. Kissing him certainly hasn’t helped her argument with herself over whether or not to give into these feelings. Now, she’s just as confused as ever, especially looking at him and finding that light she’d seen in him earlier.

He wants her so desperately that it must be killing him that she’s here in his lap, touching him and teasing him.

Emma can tell that Killian must think something’s going on, but she can’t speak freely with Liam and Elsa hovering quietly nearby. Honestly, they can’t listen to music or something?

Emma’s fingers fall to Killian’s chest, over his heart, and she presses her lips to his ear and whispers, “He thinks we might be lying.”

Killian groans softly when she meets his eyes and she nods apologetically.

He glances over into the kitchen and Emma settles her head against his shoulder, wanting to watch the snow outside.

“Hold me,” she murmurs. “Just for a little.”

Killian takes a deep breath and tightens his hold on her. She feels his lips press against the top of her head. “As you wish.”
Chapter 17

seventeen.

“Killian, what are we going to do if somehow we screw it up?” Emma asks as soon as they’re sitting in the truck.

Killian furrows his brow at her. “Screw what up?”

“This,” she says, shaking her head. She gestures between them, around them, everywhere she can with her hands. It’s adorable, for certain, and the look on her face is equally as cute. “The lie.”

Killian sighs as he turns the truck on. He clicks his seat belt into place and waits for Emma to do the same before he starts to drive. The tires crunch against the snow and he sets his mind on their destination: Henry.

“We’re not going to screw it up,” he tells her finally. “I think we’ve done a good job of keeping everything to ourselves.”

Emma is quiet. “Yeah, but… these people are my friends now, too, and I don’t really want to lose their trust, because I like them a lot. They feel like family.”

Killian turns his head to look at her. “Is this about what Liam talked to you about?”

Emma yanks her hat off and plays with it. “Kind of. He… I think he’s suspicious, but he doesn’t have any evidence to back it up.”

“We’re fine, then,” Killian says. “If Liam hasn’t found anything yet to find us guilty, he won’t. There are only a few days before we return to the city, and I think that after the afternoon we spent with them, he might have changed his mind about us.”

He thinks back to the moment she’d come to him so eagerly after her conversation with Liam. She’d draped her body over his and kissed the life out of him. He doesn’t think he’s ever going to be able to kiss another woman ever again.

Emma releases a shaky breath and he glances over at her.

He feels like he could easily fade into nothingness still. Their closeness as they spent time with his brother and Elsa was something dreams could only be made of.

“Emma, do you… would you like to discuss what happened in there?”

“I kissed you,” she states.

He can’t help from smiling and lifting an eyebrow at her. “Damn good kiss.”

Emma laughs a little. “It was good.”

He keeps his eyes on the road, but he can’t stop smiling. His fingers flex on the steering wheel and he thinks as he stares at the way the sunlight filters through her hair, that he loves her.

He turns his gaze back to the road and thinks over their time at Liam and Elsa’s again.

After they’d spent a quality handful of minutes entangled and warm on the chair, Liam had offered
them drinks and they’d ended up playing a board game while they chatted about simple things. He could tell that Liam was still uncertain, but Emma stayed close to him the whole time. She’d wrapped her arm around his middle and hugged him while they sat at the table. She’d held his hand, and she’d kissed him a few times in joy when she won the laborious game of Monopoly.

The crinkles beside her eyes and the dimples in her cheeks were more than enough to make his heart flutter contentedly.

Emma had worried about Henry in a low tone as Liam and Elsa cleaned up the game and he’d excused them from sticking around for very much longer, much to her delight.

And to think, going into the cabin he’d thought they were making small steps in the right direction.

“Are you alright?” Killian asks when he pulls the truck up to the apartment building.

Emma turns to him and shakes her head in confusion. Her cheeks are pink with a blush. “Yeah. Why?”

Killian shakes his head. “I don’t know. It’s just… before we visited with Liam and Elsa you seemed like you didn’t want to let me in that much. We… kissed.”

Emma sighs. He watches the way her thoughts form behind her eyes and how she carefully chooses her words.

Suddenly, she smiles at him, and shrugs her shoulders. “What’s the matter, Killian? Couldn’t handle it?”

He lifts his eyebrows and laughs. “Oh, Swan, I could handle it. I’m just wondering if you could.”

She gives him a playful look and unbuckles so she can get out of the truck. He watches her put her hat back on and she turns to him, that smile still resting easy on her lips.

“Trust me,” she says in a voice low enough to elicit a chill down his arms and spine. “I could handle it.”

He drags his tongue along his lower lip as they hold each other’s attention. She’s the first to break away and open her door. He follows, desperate because this is a side of Emma he hasn’t seen before and he’s quite interested to learn all about her.

She waits for him on the sidewalk and lifts an eyebrow at him, as if teasing him for taking his sweet time. He just flirtatiously bumps hips with her and starts to lead the way to the apartment building.

He holds open the door for her and gestures inside, “After you, Mrs. Jones.”

Emma laughs. “Thanks.”

When they reach the Nolan’s apartment door, Killian knocks once before the door whisks open and David stands there with Henry in his arms. David looks exhausted, mostly, with eyes blown wide as soon as he sets eyes on them.

“Good. You’re here.”

David quickly deposits a half naked Henry into Killian’s arms without any other words exchanged.
Emma holds her mouth open in confusion and Killian just kisses Henry’s head when the boy clings to him and starts to whine.

“So what happened, mate?” Killian asks as they step into the apartment.

Emma strips out of her winter wear first and then turns to grab Henry from him.

As he’s toeing out of his boots, he catches a glimpse around the apartment and finds it just a little messy. Mary Margaret is nowhere to be found, and David has already started to pluck up remnants from a mess from the couch cushions.

“Henry is a good boy,” David insists. “It’s just… I don’t think he likes me very much.”

Emma laughs a little and Killian meets her amused gaze. Henry seems content. His fingers curl into Emma’s hair and she leaves kisses to his cheek.

“Well, it’ll be different when you have your own,” Killian tells his friend.

David just sighs and holds out a dirty diaper in one hand and a bottle of baby powder in the other. “I sure hope you’re right.”

“Where’s Mary Margaret?” Emma wonders for the both of them.

David shakes his head. “She had to go handle a quick emergency over at the school. She’ll be back in a few minutes. We have to head down to the tree soon anyway.”

Emma’s eyes widen. “Oh. Okay.”

She goes to grab Henry’s diaper bag from the floor and Killian drops to his knees to help clean up the mess Henry made of the wrapping paper of one of the gifts below the tree.

David, meanwhile, throws the dirty diaper away and cleans his hands off in the bathroom sink.

“Mama,” Henry babbles to Emma. He’s standing on his own, gripping the side of the coffee table in his baby hands. “Mama.”

“Yes, monkey?” Emma asks.

He glances over to see her picking up some of Henry’s things scattered around on the floor. She stuffs them into the bag and then Killian shuffles over to get beside her to help her with what he can.

They finish the task together, ever the team, and Killian smiles when he meets Emma’s eyes. They crinkle when she smiles back at him, and he considers saying something to make her laugh, but he’s interrupted when the door opens and Mary Margaret steps inside.

Killian stands up and grabs Henry from the floor before he can go running and Emma slings the diaper bag over her shoulder as she rises to her feet.

“Emma! Killian!” Mary Margaret sings. “Hi! How were Liam and Elsa?”

“Good,” Killian says. He looks at Emma, soaking in how lovely she looks with her hair falling around her shoulders. “They were great.”

Mary Margaret hums. “That’s good. Henry was great. He was just a little sleepy I think.”
As if to prove her point, Henry fusses and presses his head down against Killian’s collarbone. His fingers curl against his shirt and Killian sighs.

“Okay, well, perhaps he’s due for a nap, then.”

Emma bobs her head in agreement when he looks at her.

“Yeah. Look at him.” She frowns at her son and reaches out to brush his hair back. “David and Mary Margaret tired you out, huh?”

Mary Margaret laughs softly. “You can go ahead and put him down for a nap. We don’t have to leave for the tree just yet. It doesn’t start for an hour.”

Emma hums. “Okay. Yeah.”

She leads the way upstairs and when Killian reaches the landing, she already has the baby’s clothes out. He settles Henry down on the bed and Emma dresses him with practiced fingers and low murmurs coming from her lips.

He watches her with adoration as she settles Henry down in his portable crib and the boy groans a bit while she leans over to kiss him. She hands him a toy and whispers, “Okay. Nap time, monkey boy.”

Emma has a small smile on her lips when she turns around to face him. He sits on the bed and takes a deep breath while he considers all that remains of the week.

It’s going to be smooth sailing, assuming they don’t somehow muck it up. He can’t imagine that it’ll be possible, it being that their stories match and their friends haven’t seemed suspicious, with the exception of Liam.

He watches as Emma crosses the small bedroom toward him. To no real surprise, she sits right beside him.

He can see concern in her eyes, as if her mind is a hundred miles away from here, and he frowns.

“What’s wrong?”

Emma swallows and shakes her head. “Mary Margaret and David are too nice. They don’t deserve us lying to them. And they think we might stay.”

Killian takes a deep breath. “There isn’t anything that can be done without hurting them now.”

Emma seems dismayed. She closes her eyes and rubs her palms together in her lap before clasping her hands together.

“I know what we’re doing is wrong,” Killian tells her quietly. “Looking back on it now, I can see just how big of an idiot I was when I first thought it would be a good idea.”

It’s hard to believe that it was just less than two weeks ago that in his desperation, he asked her to come to Storybrooke with him.

“Despite how much I think you absolutely were being an idiot, you weren’t being an idiot,” Emma sighs. “You were hurting.”

Killian looks over at her and swallows thickly. “Do you think that, Swan?”
Emma blinks at him. “Yeah. You… being here has helped. Pretending you’re someone you wanted to be instead of who you are. It’s crazy, but, yes, I think playing happy ending versions of ourselves was actually beneficial in the long run.”

Oddly, it does make sense to him. He nods his head.

“Will you tell me about the bastard I spoke to on the telephone this morning?”

Emma rolls her eyes. She shakes her head and sucks on her lip as she stares at him.

“Neal is his name,” she murmurs. “We met when I was seventeen. He was older than me. Sophisticated. Smart.” Emma shrugs. “I thought it was fun, because he was kind of like me- on the run, searching for something.”

She swallows. “Anyway, I went to prison thanks to him and he couldn’t bail me out. When I was released, he was there, and he was the only person I knew, so he was who I clung to, despite the fact that I took the fall for him. He apologized, so I guess in my naive state of mind, I thought that was enough.”

Killian feels his fingers curling into fists as anger boils under his skin. “He’s even worse than I thought.”

Emma laughs through her nose and nods. “Yeah. We were on the run for a few years after that. We finally stopped when I told him I was tired, found a place in Tallahassee, and that’s when I found out I was pregnant. I was kind of excited, because we’d been in love for a while, at least I thought, so I told him right away and he completely freaked out and left.”

He clenches his jaw tightly and watches Emma as her gaze falls to her lap. She reaches up to tuck her hair behind her ears and sighs.

“So I drove to New York and you know the rest.” She shakes her head. “Neal followed me after a while. Because he realized he was wrong, freaking out like he did, and he told me he wanted into our kid’s life. We fought for a year until he finally backed off. He was just calling this morning to ask about Christmas, I’m sure.”

Emma rolls her eyes and sits up straighter as she turns her face to him. “He’s always trying to get me to grant him time with Henry, but he doesn’t care about him. If he did, he wouldn’t have left to begin with.”

“No, you’re right,” Killian agrees softly. “He’s an arse. I’m glad you’re as strong as you are, Emma.”

She smiles just a little and plays with her fingers against her legs. She glances down at the bed behind her and crawls up to her spot in bed. He watches over his shoulder, finding her eyes tired, half-lidded and sleepy.

She rubs his spot on the bed for a moment and he satisfies her when he slings his legs up and rests his head on his pillow.

He turns to look at Emma and she curls her hands up under her pillow.

“It was hard to keep things straight in my head,” Emma whispers. “About you. I didn’t want to let you in because of what happened with Neal. But half the time we’re pretending we’re together and I guess… it’s not that bad.”
Killian smiles to himself, but doesn’t say anything. Emma’s chest rises as she breathes in deep. She reaches over to pat his cheek and he laughs softly at the softness he sees in her eyes at the same time.

“Naps are good,” she whispers. “We should have a nap too.”

Killian nods as her hand goes between them. “Great minds think alike.”

He watches as her eyes fall closed and she hums sweetly in response. Killian’s eyelids feel heavy, but he feels a blanket by their feet and makes a quick decision to wrap Emma in it before he settles himself down again.

“Sleep well, sweetheart,” Killian whispers.

///

There are approximately thirty kids in Storybrooke Elementary School’s choir. Their ages range from kindergarten through fifth grade, and they’re all dressed in elf costumes while they sing hymns and carols under the glow of Christmas lights.

Emma stands with Killian. Henry is in her arms, fascinated by the glow of the lights on the tree.

It’s snowing just a little and it’s freezing, but they’re all bundled up warm and Killian made sure to grab her a hot chocolate that he’s currently holding for her while she focuses on Henry and his needs.

A lot of Killian’s friends are here, though Belle and Will apparently decided against coming. Robin’s son Roland is part of the choir, so Robin’s up close to the tree, combating the other thirty parents for space to record video with his phone.

What’s surprising is how good these kids are. They’re not terribly pitchy, and they seem to have the schedule of songs down pat.

She turns to look at Killian, her eyebrows lifted, and he smiles back at her. “They’re rather good, aren’t they?”

“Yeah,” Emma laughs in disbelief. “Were you a choir kid?”

Killian scoffs and shakes his head. “No. Not once did I think that sounded appealing.”

Emma hums. She grabs her hot chocolate from his hand and has a sip. She holds her cup for a moment, allowing the heat to wrap around her hand.

As she takes in the evening, she has a look past Killian and discovers Liam and Elsa standing quite close by. She nudges Killian in the arm and tilts her head that way.

“Guess who’s here?”

Killian has a look and sighs, his breath a white cloud in the air. “Well, I’m sure he figured we’d be here.”

It only takes a few more songs for the show to be finished. The choir director says their carols are complete and that everyone’s free to head home out of the cold.

Emma has shivers and she knows Henry’s getting uncomfortable, so she turns to Killian and says, “Hey, can we head back? Henry needs a warm bath. I need a warm bed.”
A smile curls at Killian’s lips. “As do I.”

She smiles back at him. She’s glad they’re getting along now, but the tension is still strung tight as a string about to snap.

“Well, here you are!” Liam says, grinning from ear-to-ear as he and Elsa approach. “And here’s my nephew! How are you, lad?”

Henry, already fussy, curls against Emma and whines. Emma laughs and presses her hand to the side of Henry’s head as she kisses him.

“He’s ready for bed. He’s cold.” Emma explains.

Killian nods in agreement. “Aye. It’s getting on bedtime, isn’t it?”

Elsa smiles softly at Emma. “Wasn’t this a nice tradition? I thought the kids were great.”

Emma hums. “Yes. They really were.” She turns to Killian. “Robin’s son was one of the singers, right?”

“Aye,” Killian grins. “As far as I could tell he did a fantastic job.”

Emma laughs a little and so does Elsa. Liam just stares at Emma and then at his brother.

“So what are your plans tomorrow? I’d like to see you again before you leave.”

“Ah…” Killian reaches up with the hand that holds Emma’s hot chocolate to scratch behind his ear and shakes his head. “We’ll probably sleep in and open some presents with the Nolan’s. We could get together at the diner? Make a party out of it. Invite everyone?”

Liam nods his head. “Aye. I’d like that. I’m sure Granny would appreciate a goodbye party this time.”

Killian holds his mouth open and she can tell it stings, but he laughs a few times to humor his brother. “I’m sure she would.”

Emma straightens out and smiles at Liam and Elsa. “Okay. We’ll see you tomorrow. We should get going.”

“Yeah,” Killian agrees, lifting his eyebrows and sighing. “Sweetheart, I can meet you at the truck if you’ll just take these to the trash?”

He slides his empty cup under her still half-full cup and Emma sighs. “As you wish.”

She doesn’t miss the smirk on his lips, or the way his eyes twinkle. The dimples in his cheeks are something of a hidden treasure she realizes she wants to see more of, and she’s left contemplating that sudden revelation as she walks their cups to the hot chocolate table.

Mary Margaret is being swamped with visitors who want something to keep them warm. David’s keeping her company, though, and she finds the protective way about him sweet. He rushes to help when she appears to lose balance and she laughs at him for it.

She kind of loves these people. A whole lot more than she could’ve ever thought she would.

Emma has a final sip of her beverage before she tosses them into the trash.
She glances over her shoulder to find Killian giving Roland a high five and laughing before waving at Robin and his son.

He actually jogs toward her and she laughs when he reaches her. “You didn’t have to run. I’m not going anywhere.”

Killian laughs and shrugs his shoulders. “I felt like it.”

Emma hums. “Okay.” She holds Henry tighter when he fusses. “C’mon, we should get him back to the apartment.”

When he nods, she gets a look at his dimples again and her heart does that stupid fluttering thing all over again.

She is so screwed. She likes him and he doesn’t even know it.
eighteen.

It’s a tricky thing, liking someone.

Especially when you like them and you’re sharing a bed with them.

Emma gets nervous. Her fingers tremble and her skin feels flush. She swallows thickly while she sits up in the queen-sized bed.

Henry’s asleep, after having a bath with the both of them scrubbing and washing him down. He’d been ready to cuddle and read his favorite book right away, and then he’d gone down easy.

Now she’s waiting, for whatever reason, for Killian to finish getting ready for bed. She’s not sure why she’s waiting. She could probably lie down and fall asleep.

Butterflies tickle her stomach when she hears his feet hit the steps and she decides to lay down, so she pulls off her glasses, sets them down, and slides down so she’s staring up at the ceiling.

She listens as Killian settles his things down, and then as he crosses the floor to the bed. He makes the bed squeak when he sits and then she feels the sheets shift under his grip. He slides himself into the bed with quite a bit of jostling and Emma just remains quiet.

Her heart is racing in her ears and she’s thinking of all of the things she could say or do right now, blushing when she feels his leg press against hers as he fidgets with the blankets and tries to get comfortable.

Emma turns her head to look at him and swallows thickly.

“Apologies, Swan,” he whispers, finally getting still. “I know you detest my inability to stay still in this horribly loud bed.”

He’s smiling wryly, as if he’s already anticipating her to say something witty back. But all she can think about is how cute he is, and how badly she wants to run her fingers through his hair.

She knows it’s soft. She’s felt it between her fingers as she kissed him. Multiple times.

The thought really shouldn’t make her blush, because she’s a grown woman and she’s done far more than kiss a man before, but everything’s off the table now that she likes him.

Her heart rate quickens when Killian slides his hands up under his pillows. He’s lying toward her on his side, and when he moves his arms, she gets a good visual of his bicep. It really does nothing good for her imagination.

Killian furrows his brow. “You alright, Swan?”

Emma widens her eyes and manages to smile. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m fine.”

She turns her head forward again and settles her hands over her middle as nervous waves run through her.

“Did he go down easy?” Killian asks in a quiet whisper.
Emma hums. “Yeah.” She smiles a little at him and he smiles back at her, with those bright blue eyes of his shining in the glow of the moon. “I like you.”

The words escape her lips without permission and she’s shocked by it, but she can’t cover it up, so she just turns onto her side and faces him. Her heart skips a few beats simply because of the look on his face.

“Do you now?” he teases.

Emma’s cheeks fill with a blush and she gets a sick feeling in her belly as her hands press against her face. “God, yes, okay? I like you.”

Killian’s expression softens and he almost appears as if he wants to say something completely ridiculous, but instead, he smiles just a little and nods his head.

“I like you too,” he whispers. “Quite a bit.”

Her heart swells at his words and she releases a breath she’d been holding. Killian shifts in the bed, sliding closer to her, and they just stare at each other.

His face is just a few inches from hers and she can feel his breaths against her. His eyes caress the lines and flaws of her face and she feels herself trembling as she moves her hand up to cup his cheek.

His eyes fall closed at her touch and Emma takes her time, caressing the curves of his face with the pads of her fingertips. She touches the scar below his eye and swipes a line over the arch of his eyebrow.

When his eyes open again, she thinks she could probably get lost in the depths of him.

It’s funny, she thinks, that of all of the nights they’ve slept in this bed together, tonight she doesn’t feel half as cold as she has before.

She feels unguarded and exposed, and it’s okay. She’s felt this moment coming from the day she agreed to do this, even if she’d denied it would even be possible.

The ring wrapped around her finger feels heavy as Emma brushes back Killian’s hair. She hears his breathing hitch and her eyes fall closed as their noses bump.

“Emma, I would very much like to kiss you.” His voice is so quiet that she isn’t sure he’d even spoken at all.

She finds that she can’t speak even if she wanted to, so she just slides her hand back down his face and holds him as her lips touch his.

It hits her, as her heart rate quickens and she hears Killian release a low groan, that this is their first proper kiss.

Their first had been a surprise, to both of them, but it had been for show, and the subsequent kisses had been, too.

But this kiss is one she feels down to the balls of her feet. This is real.

It’s a gentle kiss, separated by a pause for breath before they find each other again. Her body draws toward his until their hips press together and she feels Killian’s hand on her side, his fingers gently
caressing the barely exposed skin he finds there.

Killian is so very good at this- making her delirious for him with the simplest of actions.

He’s the one that breaks the kiss, and she’s glad, though she chases him for more and he complies with a smile on his lips for just a moment.

His hand leaves her side in exchange for pulling her hand away from his face. He entwines their fingers above the covers and Emma licks her lips as she stares back at him.

He’s still grinning as he catches his breath and Emma wants to kiss him again, but she just leans her forehead against his instead.

“I don’t want to screw anything up,” Emma whispers.

“How could we screw anything up when everything’s perfect?”

She smiles to herself. Her fingers slip away from Killian’s and she wraps her hand around his neck instead so she can kiss him again.

“I like you, Killian Jones,” she murmurs between soft, lazy kisses. “Don’t make me regret telling you.”

Killian hums. “I won’t.”

Emma kisses Killian again with an easy smile on both of their lips and when they break apart, she feels content.

“Sleep well, Emma.”

“Good night, Killian.”

///

Killian wakes up slowly.

The memories from the night before return to him all at once when he opens his eyes to discover Emma’s head resting on his chest. She must have moved with him in the night and the thought makes him smile to himself while his hand slides up and down her arm.

The very idea that he could have succeeded might be easy to feel cocky about, but Killian just wants more. He wants everything with Emma. He knows it’s probably not going to come easy at first, but at least she hasn’t fought him or hit him yet.

Emma stirs. She takes a deep breath and then shifts her head, nuzzling her body closer to his for just a moment before she cranes her head to look at him through half-lidded eyes.

Slowly, she slides her way up and settles in close next to him so she’s resting her head on his pillow beside him. Killian turns onto his side to face her.

“It’s Christmas,” she smiles.

“Aye,” he breathes, in awe of how beautiful she looks right now. Her hair is a knotted mess, but it glows in the morning light. Her eyes do too. “Happy Christmas, love.”

Emma shifts her hands up under her face and closes her eyes tiredly. She hums and drags her feet
up his legs until she decides to tuck them between his legs.

He laughs lowly. “Swan.”

“Hm?”

“I’m not your personal body heater.”

He sees a graceful smile fill her lips. “Hmm. Maybe you should reconsider.”

Killian studies Emma for only a few moments before he decides to pinch her sides until she squeaks and giggles joyfully. She tosses her head back and her legs flail as she clamors for his face with her hands.

“Killian,” She says his name and it sounds like the most beautiful song in the world. “Killian.”

He stops tickling her and instead holds himself up where he lies, just barely hanging over her. His arm is under her neck and she tilts her head so her hair tickles his skin as she blinks at him.

She’s still holding his face in between her hands and he lowers himself closer to her. His eyes fall closed when their foreheads touch.

“Emma, I know I talked a big game, before, but… darling, I’ve found myself lost in you.” His breath hitches as he rubs his nose against hers. “Coming back to Storybrooke wasn’t supposed to lead here. This wasn’t my intention.”

Emma’s fingers caress his beard and she takes a soft breath. “I know.”

Killian opens his eyes and searches Emma’s face. “I want you to know that I’m sorry, Emma. I’m sorry I was an idiot.”

“Hey,” Emma whispers. She presses her finger to his lips and shushes him. “I like you. Somehow it happened.” She laughs and bites down on her lip. “I don’t know how. Maybe it’s all of the pretending.”

“Well, I don’t know, Swan, we’re very similar, you and I.”

She laughs as if she thinks he’s being ridiculous and moves her hand from his face to instead press against his chest.

“What, do you think we’re soulmates? Since when are you Mary Margaret?”

Killian groans softly. “I’d rather you not talk about Mary Margaret when I’m this close to kissing you, Emma.”

She giggles and yanks at his shirt. Her teeth dig into her lower lip as she searches his eyes. “Maybe you should just kiss me, then, and when we get back to New York we can figure out just how it is we ended up progressing from friends to whatever this is in a week.”

The fact that she doesn’t want to put a label on their relationship doesn’t give him pause. He knows just how fast they’ve moved all too well, but the heart wants what it wants.

Killian arches an eyebrow and narrows his eyes at her, smirking as he says, “Whatever this is?”

“We’re pretending to be married at the moment. I don’t know what you want me to tell you.” Emma rolls her eyes, just what he was looking for, and he lowers his lips to hers as he laughs
happily.

She feels warm and her kisses are sweet as can be, though the taste of sleep lingers between them. He nuzzles her nose afterwards and then lies down on his side.

They lie there in silence, just staring at each other, and Emma suddenly smiles at him. Her fingers run through his hair.

“You’re cute in the mornings.”

Killian beams back at her. “Am I?”

She keeps her smile small, probably so as to rein in his enthusiasm, but he won’t be so easily swayed when Emma Swan thinks he’s cute. And she likes him.

“Mm.”

He reaches in to tuck her hair behind her ear. “So are you.”

He thinks about kissing her again, but the baby wakes up and starts saying, “Mama. Mama. Mama.”

Emma drops her hand and licks her lips. She gets out of bed and he leans back so he can watch her as she reaches into the crib. “Hey, Henry! Hi, little monkey!”

Henry giggles happily when she pulls him up onto her hip and she gives his cheek some loud kisses before she carries him toward the bed again.

“It’s Christmas. Did you know that, kid?”

Emma sits down on the bed beside him and settles Henry on his feet against her thighs. She holds onto his hands and Killian finds himself torn between watching Henry’s happy expression or Emma’s. It warms his heart, knowing she’s so happy today.

He knows that Christmas last year can’t have been good, with Neal probably bullying his way into her life, so he’s determined to make this Christmas as special and magical as he possibly can.

“Dada,” Henry babbles, his smile spread wide.

Killian grins back at the baby and reaches out to gently squeeze his arm. “Happy Christmas, Henry!”

Emma laughs with him and he meets her eyes in the moment before she decides to lean over and kiss his forehead. “Merry Christmas, Killian.”

///

It isn’t lost on her that she’s sharing Henry’s first technical Christmas with Killian Jones. Nor is it lost on her that she’s spending Henry’s first technical Christmas pretending to be married to Killian Jones.

At least they’ve admitted that they have romantic interests in one another, so this Christmas can be without tension or stresses of any kind. It’s actually the first time she’s actually had a stress-free holiday, and it’s all because she has Killian Jones at her side.

They decide to sit up in bed for a little while playing with Henry. Henry loves the attention. He
goes from her to Killian and back again at least a hundred times a minute and insists on having all of the hugs and kisses he possibly can give and get.

Killian pulls out his phone at one point and they take a handful of family pictures together. In most of them, Killian’s cheesing it really hard, or she’s kissing his cheek, or giggling at Henry.

Emma keeps her ear out for the Nolan’s and when she hears the bathroom door close, she turns to Killian and accepts Henry’s toy truck when he hands it to her.

“Do you want to go down?” she asks. “Henry will probably want to play with all of his toys when he opens them.” She pauses for a second, running her fingers over her son’s hair. “Or, when we open them for him.”

Killian laughs warmly. Henry decides to go to him because of it, landing on his chest. Killian grunts and wraps his arms around the baby.

“What do you think, lad? Shall we venture downstairs to see what treasures lie under the tree?”

Emma laughs a little at his choice of words and it encourages a grin to break out on his face.

She watches him get out of bed with Henry. Her son is endlessly delighted, giggling as Killian whirls him around in a circle. Killian settles him down on the floor and holds his fingers.

“Diaper first?” Emma asks after she goes to the diaper bag against the wall.

“Ah. Yes. I think he’s due.”

They work together to get his diaper changed and it feels natural.

She may have had some reservations about letting Killian into her life before, but now that she’s actually admitted her feelings, she thinks those fears she’d had were silly.

Once Henry’s all cleaned up and ready to go, Emma slips into one of Killian’s sweaters and follows them down the steps and into the living room.

“Hi!” Mary Margaret sings from the kitchen. “Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas!” Emma replies, smiling just because she can.

“Happy Christmas!” Killian says.

Mary Margaret hums happily. “Did you sleep well?”

Emma catches the smirk on Killian’s face and rolls her eyes just a little as she goes to the couch and curls up on it comfortably.

“Ah… yes. Excellent, in fact.”

She waits with anticipation for Killian to join her on the couch and she’s not disappointed when he does. They sit unnecessarily close and Henry wants to get down as soon as Killian sits, which means Killian can’t stay with her, instead getting down on the floor to protect Henry from running around the loft.

“Emma, would you like something to drink?” Mary Margaret asks. “I’m making hot cocoa if you’d like some.”
“Sure,” Emma smiles. “That’d be great.”

“I’ll have one, too, if you would, Mary Margaret.” Killian says, craning his head to ensure his voice is heard.

David emerges from his bedroom and smiles at them. “Hey! Merry Christmas, guys!”

It isn’t long after David sits down in the living room that they decide to exchange gifts. Most of the time is devoted to Henry, who has several gifts to open thanks to David and Mary Margaret’s kindness, as well as Liam and Elsa.

Emma takes pictures of Henry as he opens his presents, or tries to, and laughs with Killian when he immediately wants to play or hand the toy to Killian instead of keeping it for himself.

They sit together on the floor, all three of them, and David and Mary Margaret look on from the couch while the television sits on low volume to keep the background noise going when Henry plays with his toys.

Killian fits so well into hers and Henry’s lives.

She has a mug of hot chocolate and Killian has one too and they both keep getting mixed up about which one is theirs, because they left them sitting too close on the coffee table behind them.

Killian easily coaxes Henry into getting into presents and when it seems like Henry’s getting bored, he’ll hand him a new one with such enthusiasm that she can’t stop laughing. He flashes her grins and sometimes, she’ll sit close to him and kiss his cheek.

When it comes time for Mary Margaret and David to exchange gifts, Killian seems a little nervous. He’s sitting with his legs spread and Henry’s sitting on the floor in front of him playing with a new toy truck he’d gotten from Liam.

“Emma,” Killian’s voice is quiet, barely pulling Emma’s attention away from her little boy.

She smiles softly at him. “Yeah?”

Killian reaches under the tree for a trio of wrapped gifts. She arches her eyebrow at him.

“It appears Santa left you a gift.”

Her jaw falls open and she shakes her head slowly. “Killian-”

Killian just smiles in encouragement and holds the presents out toward her. She takes them from him and bites down on her lip hesitantly as she runs her fingers over them.

“Any order I should open them?” she asks.

Killian shakes his head. “Any will do.”

Emma decides to open the smaller gift first and as soon as she tears back the paper, she gasps and tears fill her eyes.

“Paintbrushes,” she says, looking at Killian.

He just smiles at her. She can tell he’s uneasy about his gift to her, even if a little, but she won’t make any final comments until she sees the rest of what he’s given to her.
The second gift is a whole box of paints.

The third is a set of four canvases.

Needless to say, she’s just a little more than teary eyed and speechless when she turns to him at the end of it.

“I thought, perhaps… you could paint again.” He explains quietly.

From somewhere behind them, Mary Margaret and David are talking, so his words go unheard, and Emma just nods her head at him while she holds on tight to the canvases in her lap.

She tilts her head onto her shoulder and then decisively grabs onto his shirt to yank his mouth to hers.

She kisses him with all she’s worth, because she can’t think of any better way to thank him.

When she pulls away, she swallows and murmurs, “Thank you.” Emma reaches up to wipe her eyes and laughs softly. “I love this. Thank you.”

Killian nods once, a sweet smile filling his lips. “Aye, love. You’re very welcome.”

Her heart races at the cute way his dimples flash and she rests her head on his shoulder while she holds onto her canvases tight. Killian’s lips press against the top of her head and he wraps his arm around her.

This is something Emma has never had before. She’s never had a Christmas she can think of where she got a gift this valuable, wrapped in the warm arms of someone she cares for.

So far, this Christmas is everything she could have possibly dreamed for Henry, and it’s all thanks to Killian.

///

“I have a present for you, too,” Emma says.

Mary Margaret and David have left the room to go get something together, which in and of itself is suspicious. Killian thinks they could quite possibly be leaving to go do things, but Emma tears him away from those thoughts. Thankfully.

He watches as Emma crawls toward the back of the tree, to a place he’d noticed something tucked away but hadn’t the energy to grab, and when she returns to him, she sucks in a deep breath.

“Oh, yes,” she says. Her eyes shine bright at him and she licks her lips. She holds onto his present for a moment before handing it to him.

The weight already reveals to him that it’s a book and he furrows his brow thoughtfully. “What is it?”

“I don’t know. You should open it.”

Killian chuckles. “Okay.”

He peels back the carefully wrapped gift and when he realizes what it is, his heart skips a beat.

“I know it’s not as great as what you gave me, but I was with Belle and she had it—”
“Is this…” he smiles breathlessly as he flips open the cover. His fingers trace the lettering of his name and he shakes his head. “Bloody hell. It has been quite some time since I’ve seen this book.”

He looks up at Emma and she looks nervous. “Do you like it?”

“Yes,” he promises her with a nod. He shakes his head in disbelief. “I can’t believe she kept it.”

Killian thumbs through the pages of his favorite book and he’s immersed in memories with each lingering moment.

“Thank you, Emma,” he says after he lifts his gaze.

Emma smiles softly. “You’re welcome, Killian.”

Before he can kiss her, David clears his throat and Killian turns around to find the two of them standing with a rocking chair. Mary Margaret holds her arms out to it.

“Merry Christmas!”

Emma audibly gasps and Killian feels just a little nauseous because of the gift. Emma stands up and shakes her head.

“Oh, no, you guys-”

“You said you didn’t have a good rocking chair.” Mary Margaret insists. “And this is the best. You said so yourself.”

Killian sees her scrambling, as if she doesn’t know what to say or do, so he pushes up onto his feet and carefully checks to ensure Henry’s okay.

“It’s just that we didn’t get you anything.” Killian says, frowning.

David and Mary Margaret both smile, first at one another, and then at them.

“We don’t need anything.” David says. “Having you here has been as good a gift as any.”

Killian looks at Emma, finding her staring up at him as if she thinks he knows what to say. Killian just smiles and nods.

“Well, thank you. I’m sure it’ll be an excellent replacement for the one we’ve got back home.”

///

Mary Margaret makes pancakes for late breakfast.

Emma and Killian sit on the sofa together while they watch Henry playing with David on the floor. Emma’s arm boosts her head up while her legs curl to her side. Killian sips at his hot chocolate when she turns to look at him.

He smiles a little back at her. “Do you know how beautiful you are?”

Emma rolls her eyes. She slides her legs over his lap and scoots close to him. It makes him grin wider and she wraps her arms around his neck.

“Shut up.”
“Never.” Killian teases in a whisper as she presses her lips against his.

She doesn’t think she’s ever been this happy before, and she can’t say she minds that it’s with Killian. He’s somehow become her family in these past few days.

She finds that she’s filled with hope when she leans her head against Killian’s neck and they stare at her son on the floor. Hope that this wasn’t a complete waste of time. Hope for a happy future and a happy relationship.

There’s still plenty of time for things to go sour, but at least for right now, she feels content.
Chapter 19
	nineteen.

In all of his life, Killian doesn’t think he’s ever been as happy as he is now.

His friends and family surround him. Emma sits beside him with Henry in her lap. Her hand is held tight in his and he brushes an occasional kiss to her temple just to remind himself that she’s here with him.

The party at Granny’s was a great idea, especially considering how he and Emma will be leaving soon.

It’s just barely three in the afternoon and the sun shines brightly through the glass windows. The chatter in the diner is spirited and Killian has to pinch himself to remind himself he’s not just dreaming.

A situation like this is something he could never have dreamed up. Just a few weeks ago, he was content not ever seeing these people again. Now, he feels as if he’s home again.

“So you’ll have to come back!” Mary Margaret insists. She’s seated across from them at their table.

Emma has a bite of Killian’s slice of pie and Killian flashes her a smile to tell her that he noticed. It makes her laugh.

He really, truly loves her. It keeps swelling in his chest and he knows she’s not ready to hear the words from him, so he keeps them at bay, instead just showing her as best he can that this relationship is precious to him- that she’s precious to him. He hopes she can see that he’d do anything for her.

“Well, we’ll see,” Killian says coolly. “Maybe we’ll come in the summer.”

Mary Margaret and David both like that idea. When Killian checks on Emma, she smiles at Henry and tickles him until he laughs.

The sound makes his heart swell. Yes, he’s definitely in over his head for these two.

The front door to the diner swings open and Liam and Elsa step in, looking apologetic as ever. Liam smiles when he sees them. Elsa laughs when Belle wants to give her a hug.

Liam crosses the room to their table. He has something in his hands, a gift, and he takes a deep breath as he stands at the head.

“Happy Christmas,” he greets them.

“Aye. Happy Christmas, brother.” Killian nods. He releases Emma’s hand in order to grab his mug of cocoa and have a sip.

“Emma,” Liam smiles at her. He turns to David and Mary Margaret. “Hello, Nolan’s. How’ve you been? Has it been a good Christmas?”

“Yeah,” David grins. “Pretty fair.”
Liam hums. He fidgets with the item in his hands and Killian sees the moment he goes from friendly to testing. He slides the item down onto the table in front of Emma and stares at her specifically.

“Since we didn’t get you and Killian a gift for Christmas as an agreement because you didn’t get Elsa and I a gift, I took the initiative and got you a gift for your upcoming anniversary.”

Killian watches Emma for her reaction. She just holds her mouth open and shakes her head. “You didn’t have to.”

“Nonsense. Save it for Valentine’s Day. Open it then. It’s your anniversary.”

For whatever reason, the chatter in the diner has died down, so when David and Mary Margaret simultaneously talk over each other in their apparent confusion, Killian feels as if the whole world has heard of their suddenly realized slip up.

“What?” the Nolan’s both ask at once.

“Valentine’s Day? I thought you got married in June.” David’s tone is skeptical and confused, with a hint of anger.

Mary Margaret sounds scandalized, with her eyes wide, and she turns to her husband. “Emma told me January.”

Liam’s eyebrows rise. “Emma told me February fourteenth.”

Killian’s heart falls to the pit of his stomach and he looks at the people gathered before him. He sees the betrayal, knows exactly what they’ll say. They’ll call him a liar and a cheat and-

And when he looks at Emma, she’s staring right back at him with a mixture of sorrow and fear. He hadn’t realized just how much this would impact her. The people in this room must see her as a stranger now, and he knows it must be uncomfortable for her.

“I can explain-” Killian says. He holds his hand up toward Liam and his brother just shakes his head.

“I don’t think you can, Killian.”

Mary Margaret’s voice is quiet when she whispers, “Did you lie to us? About… everything?”

Killian just stares at the woman in the booth across from them. He can’t find any words to say that could possibly make this right.

“We… yes. We lied.”

There’s a tight knot in his throat and he cannot believe they didn’t talk about this. Anniversary dates seem pretty important in hindsight.

David’s lips part and he shakes his head slowly. “So you’re not…”

“No,” Killian confirms. “None of it’s true. I’m not… I’m no lawyer living in a fancy apartment. Emma’s my neighbor. Henry isn’t… we’re not a family.”

Mary Margaret looks the most hurt of the two of them and the rest of the people in the diner are silent, but Killian doesn’t dare turn to see their expressions. He knows they’re just as confused and angry as David and Mary Margaret look.
“How could you do this?” Mary Margaret asks. “How could you lie? We… we gave you so much. Why?”

Killian’s stomach jerks and he doesn’t know what to say. He turns to Emma with his heart completely shattered only to find her staring down at the table silent.

She suddenly gets out of the booth and walks straight out of the diner, without any explanation, and he can’t blame her, but it breaks his heart even further to see her go.


Killian shakes his head. He’s suddenly fuming with Liam, because his brother couldn’t just leave well enough alone. He just had to prove a point.

Killian slides out of the booth and clenches his jaw as he shoves his brother backward.

“Why did you have to ruin it, Liam?”

Liam gives him a look. “Killian, why does it matter? It was all a lie to begin with.”

“No,” Killian snaps. “I love her. I love her and you sent her running because she’s humiliated. We only did this because I didn’t want you to see me as a failure.” He looks back at the table, at David. “I didn’t want you to think I couldn’t move on. I didn’t want you to win. Again.”

“Killian, I want you to be happy.”

He looks back at Liam. “You certainly didn’t make that clear when I was in mourning six years ago.”

Liam tilts his head to the side, anger flaring at his nostrils. “I did what I could to help but you weren’t having it, Killian.”

“Oh, shut up. You could have cared less about how I was feeling. You just wanted me to pay up because finally, after all of those years of it just being the two of us, I was out of the house. But the minute I lost my footing, you refused to help me.”

“I helped you,” Liam growls. “I paid for the funeral. I paid all of your debts. And what did you do in turn? You slept all day, drank all night, and left the guest bedroom a disastrous mess. When I tried to talk to you, you wouldn’t have it. You completely shut down. I wanted to help, but you didn’t let me.”

“So this is about my behavior,” Killian scoffs. He shakes his head. “Typical Liam. Typical. I had just lost the love of my life and our unborn child and all you wanted me to do was to move on with my life.”

“I think after a month that’s well enough time-”

“Shut up, Liam! Shut up!” Killian growls. “I lost everything.”

“You didn’t lose me.”

“Are you sure?” Killian snaps. “Because I’m fairly certain you’re the one that told me to get out of your apartment after you bailed me out of jail.”

Liam clenches his jaw and his hands curl into fists at his sides. Both of their chests are heaving and
“And what about me coming home for the first time in years?” Killian asks. “You acted as if I was interrupting something. Being here with Emma and Henry. As if my happiness was something you could never believe. As if I could never move on.”

Liam gives him a look. “You couldn’t move on. I saw you. You weren’t at her funeral for more than ten minutes. Showed up piss drunk, reeking of nicotine and rum, and you threw up on your way out.” He shakes his head. “You were in no state to move on when you did. Especially on your own in some new city.”

“What, you think I depend on you, Liam?” Killian growls. He steps forward and shoves his brother back again, toward the front of the building. “You might be the older brother, but you’re not the one in charge of me. You don’t have control over how I’m feeling.”

Liam, for once, shoves him back.

“You inconsiderate git.” Liam suddenly shoves Killian onto the floor and everyone gathered gasps. Liam perches himself astride Killian’s torso and cocks a fist. “I worried about you for years, and you come walking back into town acting as if none of it ever happened!”

“Because you held me at an impossible standard my whole life!” Killian shouts. “Stop pretending you’re perfect, because you’re not. You’re the whole reason I left.”

Liam yells at him wordlessly and then hits him square in the jaw, making Killian bite on his own tongue so it bleeds. Killian flinches his arms upward, grabbing onto his brother’s arms so he can roll him onto his back. Liam grunts as Killian beats his fist against his nose.

“Gods, Killian, you’re so bloody selfish.” Liam growls through gritted teeth as his nose begins to bleed. “Did you ever stop to think about what you leaving did to me? That’s why I didn’t believe you couldn’t have moved on. If you had, why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you say something to me about how you were doing? If everything was so perfect, why couldn’t you be bothered to talk to your own brother?”

Liam tosses Killian onto his back again and Killian growls as he fights his brother, but it’s pointless, because Liam locks his arms by his sides, just like he did when they were younger.

“Hm? Did you think about how worried I was?” Liam demands, leaning in close. “You could’ve died and I wouldn’t have ever known.”

Killian’s chest heaves and he swallows. “Does it really matter when you treated Emma and I like garbage this whole week?”

Liam hits him again and Killian growls at him. “How long did you even know her? A week? A day? Was she even your neighbor or did you find her online?”

Killian lets out a yell and uses his legs to flip Liam back onto the floor. He leans over him, angrily beating his face in.

“I’ve known her long enough,” Killian says, breathing hard as he stares at the blood marking his brother’s lip. It brings back memories and he swallows thickly. He loses his resolve then, his tone lowering as he speaks, “Why does it matter to you? Haven’t you ruined me enough? We were happy, Liam. Just this morning.”

Tears find his eyes and he falls onto the floor beside his brother. He tastes blood on his tongue and
pants as he turns his head to look at Liam.

“And then you had to tell everyone that we’ve been lying to them.”

Liam searches his eyes. “What good did it do you, Killian? Lying?”

Killian licks his lips and shakes his head. “I didn’t have to walk into town alone. I didn’t have every single person I knew staring at me like I had just lost her. I didn’t have people wondering if I’d ever move on; offering me advice to find healing.”

He closes his eyes and thinks of Emma, her fingers tracing the lines of his face, and her lips on his in the dark. He thinks of the way sunlight makes her glow, and how sweet her laughter sounds in his ears.

When Killian opens his eyes again, he’s calm. “I found it on my own. It took a long time, but I did.”

Liam nods his head. A small smile fills his lips. “That’s good, brother.”

“Aye,” Killian breathes out. “But it’s over.” Killian pulls himself up so he’s sitting. He looks around the diner, at his friends who all stare at him like he’s lost all over again. “I’m sorry. I just did what I thought would be best.”

Everyone looks dismayed, turning away from him. He’s officially lost them. All of them. It’s something he really should’ve seen coming, but it doesn’t mean it doesn’t sting quite a bit.

Killian swallows thickly as he finds Elsa’s gaze. She comes to his side and kneels down.

“Go find Emma,” he says to her quietly. “Make sure she’s alright. I’ve got to help Liam clean up.”

Elsa nods. “Okay.”

Killian watches her go and sighs as he turns to Liam. He offers his brother his hand. “I’m sorry, Liam.”

Liam sits upright after taking his hand. “For the bloody nose, for leaving, or for lying?”

Killian rolls his eyes. “For all of it.”

Liam nods his head and takes a deep breath. “Me too, Killian. I was wrong to question your being here.” He frowns deeply, brow knitted. “I was just upset because of how we’d left things. You stormed out. I was left to pick up the pieces here. Do you realize how often I’ve wondered where you went? Not even a postcard from you, brother.”

“I know,” Killian sighs.

Liam searches his eyes. His right eye is beginning to swell and his lip is bloody. “I was only trying to find the truth. It was almost too good to be true, seeing you living a perfect life. I knew something had to be wrong.”

“The only thing wrong was me,” Killian says. “Thinking I’d ever be able to fool you. It was the wrong way to find peace. But I did. With Emma.”

///

Emma is freezing, but she’s standing at the harbor, because staring at the horizon is the only thing
she can think of that won’t make her go running or hiding in panic.

Henry’s fussing and sobbing against her, so she bounces him on her hip and tries to soothe his sobs with kisses, but he doesn’t want to accept them. Clearly, he’s feeding off of her emotions right now.

Things fell apart and it’s all because of her.

If she had asked Killian what day their anniversary was, she wouldn’t be in this predicament.

She could be cuddled up next to him right now laughing and chatting with David and Mary Margaret, or with Belle and Will.

Maybe Liam wouldn’t stare at her with that judgmental gaze and Elsa could actually hold a longer than five minute conversation with her. Maybe she would have been talking with Roland and letting Henry bounce around the room for hugs by now.

Maybe she wouldn’t feel like the absolute scum of the earth right now if she hadn’t messed up.

Tears gather in her eyes out of stress and anxiety and she pleads with Henry as she steps around in a thoughtless pattern.

“Emma!” Elsa’s voice breaks her from her thought and she turns.

Elsa has her coat in her arms and a worried frown on her lips. “Emma, are you alright?”

Emma shakes her head honestly. She can’t speak.

When Elsa comes to stand before her, she extends her arms. “Here. Let’s get you guys warmed up.”

They work together to get Henry into his coat and Emma wraps her coat on tight. She digs into her pockets for her hat and gloves and rubs her hands together as she bounces a little on her toes.

“Emma, I’m so sorry,” Elsa apologizes.

Emma shakes her head. “It wasn’t your fault. It was mine.”

Elsa furrows her brow deeply and Emma holds her arms out to take Henry away from Elsa again. They make the trade easily.

“Is Killian okay?”

Elsa lifts her eyebrows and rubs her arms. “No.”

Emma sighs. She shakes her head. “Shit. I screwed the whole thing up. Everyone.” Tears make her stop talking and her lower lip trembles as she exhales shakily. “Everyone’s going to hate me, aren’t they?”

Elsa gasps. “Oh, no, Emma.” Elsa shakes her head vehemently. “No. They couldn’t.”

Emma laughs once. “They don’t know who I am. They don’t know… my past or what I do. They thought I was Killian’s wife, but now who am I to them?”

She swallows the lump in her throat. “Elsa, I think I want some time alone, if that’s okay.”
Elsa nods. “Okay.”

Emma listens to the sound of Elsa’s feet as they carry her away. She breathes in deep and releases a shaky breath as her gaze returns to the horizon.

She got burned, just like she was afraid she would, and just like last time, it’s her fault. There’s no reason for her to keep pretending she’s holding this together, because she’s not.

All she can see as she stares at the sky is the look on everyone’s faces when they realized that they didn’t know who she was- that she was a complete stranger and they had loved her like Killian’s wife.

“This is how it always goes, isn’t it?” Emma whispers. “One mistake and suddenly, they don’t love me anymore.”

She swallows thickly at the lump in her throat and leaves a kiss to Henry’s head.

“I’m sorry I ever brought you here, monkey. This was a mistake.”

///

Killian finds Emma standing at his truck. She’s throwing things into the backseat angrily and when she steps back enough to see him, she goes still.

“Emma, I-”

She shakes her head. He sees tears in her eyes and he knows in that instant that it’s over for them.

“I want to go home.” He doesn’t respond, feeling too heartbroken to say or do anything. “Please, Killian.”

He swallows and nods. “As you wish.”

Emma turns to the truck and licks her lips. “I… packed everything up. Your stuff too.”

He nods again. “Okay.”

She stares at him and he aches to tell her that he still wants her, that they can make things right if they just explain things to everyone, but she just lowers her gaze to her left hand and pulls off her wedding ring.

She holds it out to him and he looks between her extended hand and her eyes.

“Take it,” she says, almost roughly.

It crushes him to see her so broken, to know that their time here had meant so much to her. She doesn’t want to keep pretending any longer- she wants to move on- and he begins to wonder if what they’d shared last night and this morning was even real at all.

Killian removes her ring from between her fingers and grips it in his hand for a moment before settling it into his pocket. She climbs into the truck and closes the door before he can say another word.

He figures saying goodbye would be pretty much moot at this point, so he goes around the truck and opens up the door.
When he’s inside and he starts the truck up to leave, he feels a sense of déjà vu taking him over. This is just like it was six years ago, only this time everyone he cares about knows that he’s a liar.

He knows many of his friends are just confused and angry. He would be if someone he loved came to him and lied to him for a week straight about their happiness, especially after something horrible happened to them that they hadn’t been able to find healing from.

“Emma-” Killian tries as soon as they pass the Storybrooke town line.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

When he looks over at her, she has her hands between her legs and she’s staring outside like she’s been sentenced to death.

In the backseat, Henry starts to cry, and it only pulls at his heart more when he looks into the rearview to check on him.

Emma moves, turning around so she can give Henry something, but it doesn’t help. The boy just cries.

“Shit,” she curses under her breath. She flops back into a normal sitting position and slams her hands against the dashboard.

It makes Henry cry more.

This is going to be an impossibly long car ride and he’s not looking forward to it, or to the conversations that will likely follow.

He feels numb. He’s lost Emma. He’s lost Henry. He’s lost all of his friends and ties to the town except, oddly enough, Liam. Liam, who was the only one to question their charade and knew exactly what they were doing this whole time.

It’s more than enough for him to sit on as they drive back to the city.

///

Killian insists upon helping her.

He grabs her things and opens up doors for her. Henry’s been sleeping for the past hour of their trip, thankfully, so she’s carrying him to the elevator with Killian just shortly behind her.

They ride the elevator to their floor in complete silence.

An uneasy feeling settles in her belly and she feels sad, mostly, but she’s also still reeling after being humiliated in front of everyone she actually kind of started to care about.

Emma unlocks her apartment door and flicks the light on. She leaves the door open for Killian and he steps inside to leave her things inside as she carries her son into her bedroom.

It’s so weird, being home again, because it doesn’t feel like home. It feels like a place she used to live, once. It’s cold and it’s empty and it doesn’t feel warm. It hardly feels safe.

Emma studies her son for a few moments in silence before she dares to go out into the living area. Killian’s standing in her kitchen, having dropped her bags off.
She knows he wants to talk. They managed to come the whole way here without exchanging words, and for that she’s glad. It was a mess, back in Storybrooke, and it was because they were foolish enough to believe lying was a good idea.

“Thanks,” she manages to say. “You can go home. It’s late.”

He looks like a wounded animal. His brows are furrowed and she can tell he’s hurt by the tone of his voice. “Emma, we need to talk about this.”

Emma gives him a weary look. “No we don’t.”

“We do.” Killian insists. “We were happy this morning. Why can’t we be happy now?”

Emma reaches down for one of her bags and settles it down on the counter. “Because. I ruined everything and you shouldn’t want to be with someone as self-destructive as I am.”

“You’re not self-destructive.”

“I am,” she tells him. “I ruined the whole thing because I couldn’t keep my facts straight. And I… none of those people know who I am.”

“I do.” Killian replies immediately, as if it’ll make matters better.

Emma tosses her head toward her shoulder. “This isn’t about you.”

Killian clenches his jaw and swallows. “Isn’t it?” He searches her face. “I don’t know what I did-”

“You didn’t do anything.” Emma raises her eyebrows. “We just... we lied to them and I feel really crappy about that decision because at the end of it all, they don’t love me anymore. I’m a stranger that played them for love and a home. Everything I did when I was with them was lie for you.”

They both stand there, with chests heaving, and it feels like it’s the end.

“So does that mean we can’t be together?”

“No.” Emma replies in a low murmur. “We can’t.”

“So that’s it, then.” Killian shakes his head. “We’re happy for a few hours this morning and then it all went to hell and all of a sudden, I can’t love you.”

Her heart leaps at the words, but Emma stays quiet. She stares at the wall behind him and then at the floor.

He can’t possibly love her. Not after what she did to ruin everything. Not after she alienated both of them from their friends in Storybrooke because of her stupid mouth.

“Go home, Killian.”

Killian shakes his head. He drags his hand over his head and shoves his hands against her counter. “Emma, do you know how you’ve helped me? You brought me out of the darkness.”

Her heart stings in her chest and she feels her eyes burning with tears. It’s getting late. She’s hungry. She’s tired. And she’s trying to not break down after losing pretty much everything over the course of a single day.

“No, I didn’t do anything. You did that for yourself.” Emma grits her teeth, feeling angry that he’s
even here to begin with. “Go home. You can’t be here anymore.”

Killian drops his shoulders wearily. “Emma-”

“Killian, get out of my apartment.”

Killian stares at her and she knows he’s hurting just as much as she is. His jaw clenches and he
laughs once, as if he can’t believe this is happening.

“I love you, Emma.” His words make her look away from him. She can’t handle hearing an
admission like this right now. “I love you and I love your son. I can’t leave unless I try.”

She shakes her head. Her voice trembles when she raises it. “You did try. You tried this whole
week, and then it fell apart because of me. Those people saw the mistake I made by going along
with your plan and made a decision that I wasn’t worth loving because of it.” She searches his
eyes. “And pretty soon, you’ll realize the same thing. That I’m… too broken and used to love.”

Killian shakes his head slowly, as if he’s somehow noble enough to keep fighting. “Emma, that’s a
lie. We’ve talked about-”

She laughs. “No. You know what’s a lie? Pretending to be happy together. Pretending we’re
married. Pretending we’re living some fairytale life that neither of us can have.” Emma pauses. “I
can’t do this. I can’t look at you and think about how I screwed everything up just like I worried I
would. You need to go home, Killian.”

He looks down at the floor and nods his head as if he’s a child being scolded. “Okay.”

Killian crosses the short space between her kitchen and the front door. He stares at her from the
door and then he goes, closing the door behind him.

Her chest tenses and shakes before the tears come. Emma locks the apartment tight and then leans
back against the door, clutching her hands to her chest when she thinks of everything that went
wrong.

It’s a living nightmare, remembering the horrified looks on everyone’s faces when they realized
they didn’t truly know who she was.

Over the course of a day, she’s lost friendships, a family, and the only man she’s ever really felt a
connection to. And it’s her fault for every last part of it.
twenty.

Being back in the city could probably feel just a little bit better than it does.

Her job has been pretty awful, it being that she skipped an entire week claiming her son was sick and he needed her attention. Her boss puts her on every shift possible and the customers decide to be ruder than usual. They don’t tip well and they ogle her from every angle and make sure she knows it.

By the time she gets home every night, she’s worn down and completely exhausted.

And of course Henry gets sick for real, so she has to cope with a fussier than usual baby while she’s running on just a few hours of sleep due to nightmares that keep waking her up.

She could probably have an emotional breakdown at any moment, but she’s somehow kept it together. Maybe it’s because she’s already at her rock bottom to begin with.

She gets home at ten at night and thanks her sitter for watching her kid. She gets into her pajamas and finds something to eat, then she zones out and watches TV for a few hours.

Henry sleeps soundly when she checks on him before heading to bed herself, and she sinks down on the edge of her bed with a heavy sigh.

It has downright sucked. These past few days being back in the city haven’t helped her forget the events of the week before. In fact, they’ve left her almost wishing she could go back, but she can’t. Because she screwed up.

Emma lies down and listens to the sounds of the night. Henry breathes noisily thanks to his cold and Emma feels hot tears in her eyes when she realizes she can hear Killian on the other side of the wall. He’s just now getting back home.

She misses him.

She misses his teasing and his smile. She misses the warmth of him. She misses the press of his lips against hers. She misses the jokes and the way he’d lift his eyebrows at her in secret. She misses his hand in hers and the sound of her name past his lips.

Most of all, she misses waking up to the feel of his arms around her, especially after a nightmare.

Somehow, she manages to fall asleep to the sound of Killian watching a movie. Apparently, he’s not sleeping well either.

She wakes up breathless and panting.

Neal had come for Henry again and she had no choice but to give him up, so she’d been alone and unwanted, and for some reason, she’d been in Storybrooke, so all of the people she’d wronged had been there to watch and mock her.

Emma stares at the wall of her apartment, heaving in deep breaths as she clutches her pillow in her arms.

It’s moments like this that she misses Killian the most. She wishes he were here to help soothe her,
to talk her down from this panic, and to hold her.

“Emma,” Killian’s voice comes from his side of their shared wall. “Was it a nightmare? I could hear you.”

She closes her eyes at the sound of his voice, so concerned and weary.

She can tell he hasn’t been sleeping well, and when she glances at the clock for the time, she realizes he’s awake at three in the morning even though he’d gotten in a few hours ago.

“Well,” Emma murmurs back to him. She slides up against the wall and presses her cheek to it.

She still feels like she’s there, in the dream, so she’s still breathing hard while tears streak down her cheeks.


She remembers how he’d taught her to breathe, in and out, and she shuts her eyes while she repeats the exercise. Her breath is shaky and her heart aches more than it should, but she gets her breathing back to normal.

Emma presses her hand against the wall and pretends he’s doing the same. She frowns as tears fall freely. She wipes them and sniffs.

“Henry’s sick. He has a cold.”

“Ah. That explains all of the fussing.”

“Yeah.”

Emma stares at the wall and runs her hand downward. If she closes her eyes, she can pretend she’s back in David and Mary Margaret’s apartment before it all went south, lying in the upstairs bed with Killian.

She remembers that night her fingers had explored his face and she can still feel the grooves and curves of him under her fingertips, but it’s fading with every passing day.

And she misses the way he felt below her hand. She misses the silly way he’d lift his eyebrows and how he’d grin at her. She misses how his scruff feels under her palm and the soft blue of his eyes under the glow of the moon.

She can almost feel that night they kissed for real all over again if she closes her eyes tight enough. She can almost feel her heart racing as it had when she’d admitted her feelings for him, and how he let her do what she wanted before whispering that he wanted to kiss her.

God, she wants him here with her again. She wants him to help warm her up and hold her close. It’s the closeness she misses the most.

“He misses you,” Emma tells him. She closes her eyes. “He’s always asking for you.”

Killian hums. “I miss him, too.”

She knows he’s not just talking about Henry, but neither was she.

Emma sometimes wonders if she should have let him in when he was fighting for it, but then she thinks of what happened and of how impossible it is that he could actually want her or love her.
Killian clears his throat. “Liam called me this morning and asked if I might go back home. Move back.”

She drops her hand away from the wall and straightens. Her heart races and her stomach twists in uncomfortable knots. She doesn’t necessarily want him to leave, but it’s his life.

“Are you going to?”

“I…” Killian sighs heavily. “I don’t know. I’m thinking about it. He said he’s sorry about what happened and if things don’t look up here, I can move back in with him if it’ll help me get back on my feet.”

Emma swallows the lump in her throat. “You should. It’s your home.”

He’s quiet again and she can almost picture the hurt look on his face. “Is it?”

Emma takes a deep breath. “You’re not sleeping well here. You’re not happy.”

“Aye, well, neither are you.”

Her stomach jerks and she shakes her head.

He always seems to read her so well, even if he can’t see her. She supposes the fact that she’s not sleeping well is a given, it being that she just woke up from a nightmare, but not being happy is a whole other thing.

“I don’t have a home to go to.” Emma replies. She listens to Henry breathing. “I’m home here. With Henry.”

And yet, she misses him.

She wishes he were with her instead of separated by a wall, but she also knows if she lets him come over here, it’ll just make things worse. She needs to get over him and she’s not going to do that if he’s over here warming her bed and staring at her with those sweet eyes of his.

“I miss you.” Killian murmurs. “I miss everything about you. Even your moodiness.”

She wants to snap back at him that she’s not moody, but she knows that would be playing into his hand, so she keeps her lips pressed together.

Emma shifts in her bed so she can lie down again and Killian sighs heavily.

“I think you should go back. Those people love you. They can forgive you, with time and a little bit of that Killian Jones charm. I’m sure you’ll have them eating out of your hand in no time.”

“Emma.” He sounds exhausted, but he doesn’t say anything else, so neither does she.

She lies down and presses her hands to her face and breathes in deep.

It’s okay. She’ll be okay. Eventually.

///

Killian doesn’t eat. He doesn’t sleep. He has a hard time focusing on even the more mundane tasks.

Every time he closes his eyes at night, he sees how hurt Emma was and how everything was ripped
from it’s hinges. The nightmares come back when he dreams, and he often wakes in a cold sweat, Emma’s name on his lips.

She truly has ruined him for all other women. He can hardly see straight knowing she’s just a wall apart from him, feeling as if she’s lost everything.

He’s lost everything, too. Being apart from her and from Henry doesn’t help him feel as if he’s getting any better.

Liam had called him to ask how he was doing the other day and then he’d asked if Killian wanted to come home when Killian couldn’t answer positively. He’s been thinking about going back home ever since, especially since Emma thinks he should.

If he goes home, at least he has people who care about him. At least he’ll be able to ensure they all know he’s sorry for what he’d done. At least he can start over.

That’s what Liam had argued, too, in a kind brotherly tone. He had asked if Killian had worked things out with Emma, but Killian choked up, and Liam apologized profusely again.

It’s not Liam’s fault that he and Emma haven’t made amends.

Here, in New York, he has nothing. It’s eye opening when he considers how he used to live this way before going to Storybrooke again.

Storybrooke is home, now that Emma has pushed him out of her life.

He listens, mostly, to the sounds coming from her apartment. Because he works at night, he’s at home most of the day, so he gets to hear Henry’s fussing and babbling all the day long.

He spends a lot of time staring at the pictures of them on his phone, thinking with his heart stinging, about the happiness they’d shared. He studies the look on Emma’s face in some of the pictures, at how she gazes up at him, or at how she smiles when he kisses her cheek.

Surely that couldn’t have been a lie to her. It certainly didn’t feel like lies to him when she kissed him.

Sometimes, Henry calls out for him and then he starts to cry. It tugs at his heart more than anything ever could.

He once was incredibly close to going over to dry his tears and to hold him, because his cries ripped at his heart so deeply. But Emma doesn’t want him in her life, so he wants to respect that. That bloody ponce Neal never respected her space or her wishes, and he’s better than him.

When she’d told him he should move back to Storybrooke, he nearly argued with her to the point of going over to her apartment so he could see her again.

But he didn’t. He just thought about it.

He thinks about what it might be like if he hadn’t allowed them to slip up by sharing different anniversary dates with several different people.

They’d probably have gone on at least one date by now. Perhaps he would have coerced Emma into letting him stay with her to help with Henry while he gets over the cold he has. He’d at least be content here in the city.
Work feels like a chore. Every time he enters the pub, he grimaces, and he goes through the motions of fixing orders to the point that when a woman tries to flirt with him over the rim of her glass, he actually rolls his eyes.

He’s taken to keeping the wedding ring on when he goes to work, just so he has a constant reminder that he’s fallen in love with Emma Swan and nobody can take that from him.

It keeps women off of him, for the most part, and his coworkers give him confused looks, but he just snubs them when they ask him if he’s all right.

Killian sits up against his and Emma’s shared wall the night he’s decided to move and he plays with Emma’s wedding band between his fingers. It fits his pinky, just barely, and it makes him shut his eyes as he leans his head backward.

“Emma?” he asks quietly.

She’s home, he knows, because she’d come storming into her bedroom about a half hour ago. She’d been crying, and she’d attempted to silence her sobs, but it hadn’t worked very well.

He imagines she’s going through something quite similar to him- this existential crisis suddenly created from the realization that their trip to Storybrooke together had changed them as individuals.

“Emma, are you alright, sweetheart?”

Again, she’s quiet. Killian hears her move in her bed, as if she’s sitting upright against the wall, and he presses his hand to the spot he usually does.

“I… I’ve decided to move,” he tells her quietly. “I’ll leave the money I promised you under your doormat tomorrow morning.” He swallows and blinks rapidly in an attempt to keep from crying. “It might be nice if I could see you and Henry again. One proper goodbye.”

For a moment, he thinks she’s ignoring him, and he’s having a conversation with his wall for no reason.

“When are you leaving?”

Killian’s heart flutters at the sound of her voice. He smiles just a little, in spite of their conversation topic. He doesn’t want to leave her here all alone, but he truly has no choice if she doesn’t want him in her life any longer.

“In about a week and a half. I’d like to get a fresh start. It’s January, so… I figure, new year and all that.”

Emma is silent again. “That’s really soon.”

“Aye,” he murmurs. He twists the wedding band on his pinky finger and shakes his head. “I just don’t feel really at home here, so I figure why wait?”

“That makes sense.” Her voice is almost a whisper, broken and weak.

Killian bites down on his lower lip. “So do you think I can stop by before I go?”

Emma takes a breath loud enough that he can hear it. It’s almost as if she’s annoyed with him. “Yeah.”

“Thank you.” Killian closes his eyes and imagines her sitting with him. “Emma, how are you
“I don’t know,” Emma responds. “Everything’s… different now.”

He sighs. “Aye, love, I know.”

“I just want to forget what happened,” she says. “I want to move on.”

“Is that your way of telling me to shut up?”

Emma doesn’t respond.

Killian groans and presses his hands over his face. “Emma Swan, you are the most maddening woman I know.” He sighs heavily. “Goodnight, my love. Let’s hope for no nightmares the rest of the night, hm?”

He slides down in his bed and pulls her small ring off of his finger to put it on the nightstand. He stares at his alarm clock and swallows the lump in his throat.

“Goodnight, Killian.”

///

Emma wakes up to the sound of Henry’s whiny chattering, clearly frustrated with his sickness. When she glances over at his crib, he’s standing up.


Emma groans and buries her face into her pillow. “Kid, how many times do we have to talk about this for you to understand that he’s not coming back?”

She groans again when Henry just repeats the word. Emma pulls away from the pillow and sits upright, folding her arms against her legs after she pulls them toward her chest.

She rakes her fingers through her hair until it’s behind her ears and licks her lips.

Moving on from Killian and from Storybrooke has been a hell of a lot harder than she’d thought it could be, and to make matters worse, she can’t seem to find peace with life here in the city.

She’d thought she had this under control when they came back. She’d thought it would be relatively simple to just settle for the life she’d had before she left. She’d felt comfortable in that life. It was easy. She got by.

But now she knows what it’s like to have friends, and what it’s like to be loved, truly, and it breaks her heart all over again.

Emma releases a heavy sigh and buries her face into her legs and arms.

“Mama,” Henry says her name innocently, and when she doesn’t respond, he goes back to, in a loud voice, “Dada!”

“Henry!” Emma snaps at him.

It makes him cry and she instantly feels like the world’s worst mother. She groans and hurries out of bed to go to her son. She frowns at him and shakes her head.
“Hey, no, no,” Emma murmurs. “I’m sorry, Henry. I- it’s okay. I’m not mad.”

She reaches in to take him into her arms and brushes a kiss to his head as she thumbs over the tears on his cheeks.

He quiets down, but it takes a few moments of coaxing, and Emma ends up standing in her kitchen feeding him while she watches his favorite television show on the TV.

“Look,” she says, pointing with the hand she holds the Cheerios in. “Look at all of those colors. And Elmo!”

Henry makes a noise and it makes her smile. She feeds him another Cheerio and he moans to himself as he eats it.

“Okay. Let’s sit down, huh?”

Emma carries him into the living room and sits him down on the couch. She sits down beside him and continues to feed him while he keeps his attention on the television.

She has to go in about half an hour, so she tries to hurry it up by giving Henry a cup with the cereal, and then she rushes out of the room to get changed.

She’s pulling on her pants when her cell phone rings and she groans to herself. Emma grabs her phone and answers without checking to see who it is. “Hello?”

“Hi! Emma!” it’s Mary Margaret, of all people.

Emma’s heart rate quickens and she holds open her mouth. “Mary Margaret. How’d you get my number?”

“Elsa,” Mary Margaret says apologetically. “I know what you’re thinking and I’m not calling to yell at you. I’m not mad for what happened. I just wanted to check to see how you’re doing. I know you’re probably- you probably think the worst of yourself and of us.”

Emma swallows and finishes pulling on her pants. She walks out of her bedroom and sits back down on the couch with her son.

“I’m… it’s hard. I feel so bad about what happened, Mary Margaret.”

“Don’t,” Mary Margaret insists. “None of us hate you, Emma. I, for one, think you’re a wonderful woman. You and I are friends, right?”

Emma shakes her head. “We were, before-”

“Emma,” Mary Margaret says on a sigh. “Emma, it’s okay.”

“But it’s not, Mary Margaret. I lied to you so you would like me. I’m not Killian’s wife. You don’t know who I am.”

Mary Margaret is quiet on the other end. “Now, I’m completely certain that isn’t true, Emma. We became friends over the course of your time here, and it hurts me thinking you went home without getting to know just how much your friendship meant to me.”

Emma looks down at the couch cushion beside her, at the little curly haired boy gazing up at her while he chews his cereal.
“Sometimes we make mistakes,” Mary Margaret continues. “And I know you and Killian were just trying to make things easier for him, but in spite of what happened at the end, you were happy. I saw it. I saw just how much you cared for him and he cared for you and your son. He loves you.”

Emma sighs softly. “I know.”

“I want you to know you can come back anytime you want to, Emma. You’ll always have a place to stay, and I would love to just sit with you and talk.”

Mary Margaret’s kindness is truly overwhelming. Emma feels choked up and she shakes her head, managing to smile just a little.

Even after everything that happened, Mary Margaret loves her for who she is.

“Thanks, Mary Margaret.”

The woman on the other end hums. “Of course.”

///

Killian’s phone rings and it’s what pulls him out of a rather nasty dream about losing Emma and Henry. He’s breathless and sweaty as he sits up in his bed and he rakes a hand over his face as he grabs his device.

He doesn’t bother checking. There’s only one person it could be at this hour.

“Hey, Li.”

“Hey, brother,” Liam’s voice is somber. “How are things?”

He’s called every day since he’s been back in the city and they’ve talked, trying to make up for lost time, and bonding as Liam listens to Killian talk through his issues. It’s the polar opposite to how it had been when he’d lost Milah, and he’s glad for it, even if his heart is broken.

Killian’s chest aches as he leans back against the wall. “Shit.”

Liam sighs. “Have you thought about what we discussed? There’s an open bedroom here, or I could help you find something in town if you’d prefer to have your own place. Once the house is finished, there’s a guest room with your name on it.”

Killian smiles just a little. “Ah, well, I think I’d prefer to start new on my own.”

“Of course.” Liam breathes. They’re silent for a few moments. “How’s Emma?”

Killian stares down at the empty bed beside him and finds himself missing her all over again. Being next-door neighbors and not getting to see her is really the worst feeling in the world.

“She, uh,” Killian sighs. “I think she’s finished with me.”

“Gods, Killian, I’m sorry.”

“Quit apologizing, Liam. I understand that you’re sorry for what happened. I’ve already forgiven you for it.” Killian says softly. “Anyway, what happened between Emma and I isn’t your fault. Emma’s… she’s got her reasons. I love her, but sometimes she can be hard to crack.”

Liam hums. “Well, maybe it’s best if you come back, then. If things can’t be fixed.”
“Aye,” Killian manages to say. “I’ll try to come in a week and a half. I think that’s enough time. Already put my two weeks in at work anyway. I hate it here, brother. I’m not sure why I thought living here would be a good idea.”

“I know,”

Killian rubs his hand over his face. “I, um… I’ll call you later, Liam. I should get going.”

“If she’s worth staying for, I don’t want you to feel like you’ve got to come back here, you know.” Liam says lowly.

He’s silent. “No, I want to come back for me, Liam. It’s not about Emma.”
Chapter Notes

an: since the last two chapters have really bugged you guys out, I figured I'd give you two today to try and make up for it? I'm glad you seem to be enjoying this story at least! These last few chapters are my absolute favorite so I hope they leave you smiling!

twenty-one.

Killian gets home the night before he’s due to leave for Storybrooke feeling like he’s about to make the biggest mistake of his life, even though logically he knows this is the best decision he could make.

He’s got boxes to pack and he figures he’ll just stay up for a while finishing up the job, because he can’t sleep anyway.

Sleep proves to be his enemy each and every time he closes his eyes.

The last thing he has in his fridge is pizza he’d ordered a few nights ago, so he finishes the remains cold, turns on his music to something relatively low so as to not wake Emma or the baby, and packs what’s left into six boxes.

He gets heartsick all over again when he finds his copy of Peter Pan sitting in his night table. He remembers how nervous Emma had been giving it to him, as if he could hate anything she had to give him at all.

Killian sits on his bed and licks his lips. He thumbs the novel open and then stops short when he discovers a folded piece of paper that he hadn’t seen before.

His heart stops and he can’t breathe as he lifts it and discovers that it’s a picture, but on top, there’s a sticky note. From Emma.

*I drew this picture of you the day I met you. I was so frustrated with you for being ridiculous, but secretly, I loved every minute of it.*

*I’m sorry for holding back for so long. You’re not so bad after all, Killian Jones. I could probably fall in love with you if we’re not careful.*

*Merry Christmas.*

*-Emma*

He peels back the sticky note and he laughs at the picture she’d drawn of him. It’s so well done, with detail precise and natural. She’s drawn from his shoulders up, even perfecting the arch of his eyebrow and the curve of his smile.

Clearly, she’d intended this to be part of his gift, but he hadn’t seen it in time. Oh, how he would have loved to compliment her artistic mastery.
Killian leans back against the wall that separates them and slips the artwork back into the book before he settles it down on his night table again.

He decides, in that instant, that he needs to try. One more time. Even if she won’t listen to him or talk back.

He hears her on the other side of the wall muttering to herself. It’s two in the morning and she’s been home for hours, but apparently, she’s not sleeping well either.

“Emma,” he murmurs her name and taps gently on the wall.

She stops muttering. “Sorry. Are you trying to sleep?”

“No,” he responds. He pauses, just allowing himself to soak the moment in. “I just saw your note in Peter Pan.”

“Oh.”

He smiles a little. “I rather liked your artistic rendering of me, Swan. Very roguishly handsome, if I dare say so myself.”

Emma laughs, an actual laugh, and he smiles even more because of it. He hasn’t heard her laughter in what feels like forever and he’s missed it so much more than he’d thought possible.

“Yeah, well,” Emma sighs. “You said it, not me.”

Killian hums. He closes his eyes and plays with the wedding band wrapped around his finger. He should probably take it off, but he can’t fathom parting from it, at least not while he’s still fighting for them.

“How are you?” she asks softly.

Killian’s heart leaps. He takes a deep breath. “I wish we could talk.”

“We are talking.”

“Not like this,” he sighs.

Emma’s quiet. Killian turns to the side so his ear presses against the wall. He lifts his fingers to caress a line where he imagines she would be.

“How’s Henry?” he changes subjects, sensing she’s uncomfortable.

“He’s getting better.”

“That’s good.”

“Mm.”

More than anything, Killian misses seeing her.

He misses the pout of her lips when she’s frustrated, or the roll of her eyes when he says something ridiculous. He misses how warm she can be, and how happy her eyes can get. He misses feeling like he has someone to talk to if he needs to, because she’d been that for him and he likes to think he’d been that for her.
“I’m leaving tomorrow.” Killian tells her. “I’d hoped I could come see you in the morning before I leave for good.”

It makes him sick, even thinking he’ll be leaving her here on her own, but she’s not his and despite how comfortable their relationship had been at the end, they’re not in that place any longer.

“Okay,” Emma replies softly. “I have to leave for work at seven thirty.”

Killian sucks in a deep breath. “Alright. I’ll be there before then.”

Emma is quiet again and Killian leans his head back against the wall. He pulls the wedding band off and settles it down on the night table after he studies it for a few moments.

It’s over between them. It has been for a while now. Holding onto the past will give him nothing but heartache.

///

Emma feels heavy when she wakes up. She hadn’t slept well, tossing and turning the whole night long.

“Daddy?” Henry asks.

Emma sighs as she gets out of bed. She shuffles toward her son and pulls him out of his crib. She carries him into the kitchen and sits him down in his chair. The boy keeps asking for Killian and it feels like she’s being torn apart.

He’s not even gone yet.

Tears burn in her eyes, but she refuses to let them go, and she gives Henry something to eat before she turns on the television.

“It’s just a normal day,” she murmurs to herself.

Even though it’s probably going to be the day her tear ducts dry themselves out from all of the crying she’ll be doing.

She curses the fact that Killian Jones could ever make her feel this way, but it’s for the best. They weren’t ever truly together to begin with and after what happened in Storybrooke, she can’t expect things will easily fall back together.

She goes to clean up for her day and as soon as she’s in her work outfit, there’s a knock at her front door.

Her heart skips a beat.

Henry’s chattering when she hurries into the kitchen and she stands at the door with her fingers trembling just a little at her sides.

She unlocks the door and then steels herself before pulling it open.

Killian stands on the other side, a nervous little smile on his lips. He looks really, really tired, but he’s so handsome that it makes her heart swell.

“Hey,” she says. Her voice cracks a little and she pulls the door back so he can enter her apartment.
“Hi, Emma.”

When he’s inside, Henry starts yelling excitedly. “Daddy! Daddy!”

Killian laughs warmly and Emma watches with her lower lip between her teeth as Killian approaches her son.

It’s easily the happiest reunion she’s ever seen. Killian gives Henry’s face kisses and Henry makes delighted sounds.


He drops down so he’s at eye level with her son and she can see he’s so in love with Henry just in the way he laughs at the silliest, simplest things he does.

Henry offers him a piece of his cereal and Killian accepts it with his lips. “Mmm. Very yummy, isn’t it, lad?”

Henry grins at him and munches on his breakfast. “Dada.” he hums happily.

Killian smiles and pushes himself back up. He leans over Henry and kisses the top of his head. “I love you, Henry.”

She’s fairly certain she hasn’t ever felt worse about her choices.

Killian turns to her and swallows. He tilts his head to the side and smiles weakly. “So… this is it, aye?”

Emma just stares at him. She can’t bring herself to witty comebacks or even truths when she feels like this could very likely be a huge mistake.

“Yeah,” she manages to get out.

Killian glances around her kitchen and then looks at her again. “Emma, I want you to listen to what I have to say right now, because I have been thinking about what I’d like to say to you for quite a while.”

Emma nods at him. “Okay.”

Killian takes a breath. “I don’t blame you for what happened in Storybrooke. I don’t think any of those people blame you for what happened, either. It was my idea to lie to them. It was my fault for not giving us dates to work with.” He shakes his head. “Not that lying to them was a good idea to begin with.”

He brings his hand up to his hair and slides his fingers through it. “But it happened. You and I went to Storybrooke. We lied to everyone and said we were a family. And for a week, you steadily chipped away at me, until you held me in your hands. I have never loved anyone as much as I love you, Emma.”

She closes her eyes and shakes her head. “Killian-”

“No, you let me finish,” he says firmly. “What happened to me six years ago brought me to a place I hated and I couldn’t leave it until we met. Do you know that the nightmares went away that first night you were living next door? Or that I quit drinking when I properly met Henry?”

His words make her heart break. She melts under his gaze, finding herself folding her arms as a
form of defense.

“When we went to Storybrooke together, I didn’t think we’d get as close as we did. I knew you had your history and that I had mine. I knew that we were similar in the sense that we were both broken. I had been so lost before we met, Emma. Somehow I was able to find home again. In you and in Henry.”

It feels like he’s putting responsibility for his goodness on her shoulders and she can’t have him doing that. She can hardly look herself in the eye in the mirror anymore.

“Killian, you have to stop acting like I’m your savior,” Emma tells him, her voice hard.

“You’re not my savior,” he concedes. “But you certainly led me down the path to finding peace.” She sees the honesty in his eyes and he smiles weakly. “I wanted to be a better man for you, Swan.”

Her shoulders fall and she knows he’s waiting for her resolve to break, but it won’t.

Killian searches her eyes and nods his head as his jaw clenches. “I had to try to fight for you. For us. For the wild week we shared.”

She feels tears in her eyes, but she doesn’t say anything. Killian manages to smile and he takes a deep breath.

“I suppose I should be off. Everything’s packed and ready to go. I just… came up to see you both.”

Killian looks over at Henry and then back at her. He steps toward her and she doesn’t know what to expect. His lips press against her forehead and her eyes flutter closed.

Her heart is racing and she needs him to leave, because she can’t move on if he’s making her feel like this.

Killian goes for the door, pulls it open, and then turns back around. “I know what I want to ask as my third question.”

Emma gives him a weary look. “Killian-”

“Yes. Her heart is in her throat and she nearly tells him what he wants to hear, but she can’t speak.

Killian waits for her, studying her as if this is the last time he’ll ever see her again.

“Yes. Her heart is in her throat and she nearly tells him what he wants to hear, but she can’t speak.

Killian waits for her, studying her as if this is the last time he’ll ever see her again.

“Do you love me?”

“Do you love me, Emma?” he whispers, desperation lacing his tone this time. “There’s no need to fear that I’ll leave you if you wish that I’d stay. You’ve ruined me completely for anyone else. I’m about to go to Storybrooke, but if you said the word, I would stay. In a heartbeat. I’m yours, Emma.”

She searches his face and swallows. Emma shakes her head. “I don’t know what you want me to say.”

His cheek flinches when his lips pull upward for but a moment and he nods his head sorrowfully. “Goodbye, Emma.”

Emma stares at him and her heart races. “Bye.”
And then he’s gone. The door closes and she hears him walk away.

He’s gone. Forever. Never to return.

Emma’s eyes widen as she stares at the door.

She lost everything a few days ago. She lost Storybrooke. She lost her friends. But that was a choice she made. Mary Margaret told her that she loves her still - that she wants to be friends - for real.

She hadn’t truly lost Killian a few days ago, even if it’s felt like half of her heart had been ripped away from her when everything fell apart. No, right now, he’s leaving the building and he’s leaving the state.

She’s really losing him right now.

“Daddy?” Henry asks.

Emma surges forward and she rips open the door, not bothering to put her shoes on or to grab her kid. If all goes well, she won’t be gone long.

She looks around as soon as she’s out in the hallway and she finds Killian not anywhere to be seen. So, naturally, she begins to run to the elevator.

He’s standing there when she reaches it. The doors peel open as soon as she says his name and he furrows his brow as he turns around to see her.

“Emma?” he asks.

She takes a breath to steady her breathing and she searches his eyes for a brief second. “Yes.”

He looks confused. “What do you-?”

“Yes,” she repeats. “I love you.”

Killian immediately smiles as if he can’t believe it and Emma does too. Her heart feels much lighter now and all fear leaves her shoulders. He’s here now. He’s not going to go anywhere.

He leans in and presses his lips to hers. Her arms go around his neck and he wraps his arm around her middle. Killian tugs her to him and she can’t help but smile when they break the kiss only to be reunited again.

Her lips tug at his and he hoists her up off of her feet. It makes her giggle against his mouth and he just grins smugly until he sets her down again.

Her fingers dig into his hair and she leaves soft kisses to his lips until she’s finished kissing him for the moment.

Emma meets Killian’s eyes and for once, she feels good about a choice she’s made.

“Do you mean it?” he asks quietly.

“Of course I do,” Emma rolls her eyes. “I don’t tell just anyone I love them.”

She drops her arms from his neck and his fall away from her middle. Emma takes a deep breath and turns back toward her apartment. “Come back with me?”
Killian nods quietly. “Aye.”

She finds his hand and eagerly takes it. She doesn’t want to lose him again. She can’t lose him again.

Emma pushes open her apartment door and they both enter one after the other. Henry’s pleased to see them both. He giggles and says both of their names.

Emma turns to Killian as they stand in her kitchen and for a moment, they just stare at each other, until Emma finally crumbles, her hands running up his arms.

“I missed you,” she tells him. “I missed your stupid jokes and your bedhead and your laugh-”

Killian settles his arms around her middle and pulls her toward him. He buries his face in her neck and she wraps her arms around him, too.

“I missed you too, love,” Killian whispers. He leaves a kiss to her the spot behind her ear and then to her cheek as he pulls back. “What will we do, Emma? How’s this going to work? I’ve just given up my apartment.”

Emma laughs and shakes her head. “I don’t know. I… maybe you can stay with me and Henry for a few days until we can figure something out.”

Killian glances over at her son and a smile fills his lips. She reaches up to his neck and drapes her arms around him. He turns to her and tilts his head to the side.

“That might be nice,” he murmurs.

He lowers his lips to hers and she giggles when he kisses her, delighted that she’s back in his arms, and that they’re happy together.

“You know what would be really nice?” she asks against his lips. She kisses him again.

“Hm?” he chases her for more until she’s pressed against the counter and his fingers flex on her hips.

“You take me to dinner tonight.”

Killian hums warmly. He settles his forehead against hers and she meets his bright eyes.

“That sounds pretty nice,” he agrees in a whisper.

Emma nods. “Yeah.” Her phone suddenly goes off and she widens her eyes when reality hits her. “Crap. Okay.” She pushes Killian back gently and hurries into her bedroom to collect her stuff as she calls out, “I have to go to work so if you want to stay and watch Henry, that’s fine, but the sitter is going to be here soon-”

There’s a knock at her door just as she enters the room wearing her shoes. Killian just smiles at her.

“Don’t worry,” he says on a comforting nod. “I’ll take care of him. When will you be back?”

Emma takes a deep breath. “Around seven. Early for once, but traffic is killer.”

“Aye,” Killian agrees.

Emma steps up to her son and kisses the top of his head. “Be good, monkey. I’ll be back soon.”
She goes to Killian and puts her hands in his. He gladly leans in for a kiss and she smiles against him. He keeps chasing her for more, likely so she’ll laugh, and she does.

“I gotta go, Killian.”

“Okay.”

When they part, she beams up at him and he back at her. Finally, something in her life feels right.

///

As soon as Emma leaves, he’s faced with watching and caring for Henry. The boy is delighted to have him back, and Killian is equally as pleased.

He and Henry bond over breakfast shared on the sofa while a television show about bubbly animals plays. Then, between diaper changes, excited laughter, and playing with all of his toys, Henry becomes sleepy.

Killian rocks him to sleep and then finds himself without a single thing to do. Until he realizes he could probably clean the apartment.

He starts with the main living area, finds the vacuum and the duster, and sets to work putting toys away and adjusting her furniture.

When he gets to the kitchen, he cleans the sink full of dishes, discovers her leaky faucet and immediately goes to grab his tools to fix it, and then he remembers her fridge and does the same.

He’s singing to himself as he scrubs down the countertops and he starts when his phone chirps from halfway across the room. He sets his sponge down and goes for his device.

It’s a message from Temporary Wife. He has to smile because of the fact.

How goes it, Daddy?

Killian bites down on his lip as his stomach twists. He eagerly types out a response: Fairly well for a Tuesday. Henry’s down for a nap. How about you?

He doesn’t have to wait long for her to reply: I miss you.

He smiles to himself.

You’ll see me soon enough, but I do miss you quite a bit as well.

Are we still on for dinner?

He has a look around her apartment as he ponders where he’d bring her and how it would go.

What if we stayed in tonight? I can take you out on your night off.

Fine by me. I’m getting a headache anyway.

That’s no good.

I’ll be fine. Talking to you is making it better.

I didn’t realize I was a miracle worker. How nice. I’ll have to add that to my resume.

I’m rolling my eyes.
Killian laughs out loud. *I can tell.*

*I have to go. I’ll see you in a few hours.*

*I’ll be counting the minutes.*

He settles his phone down after he changes her name to *My Swan* and then rakes his fingers through his hair as he looks around the apartment.

He’s delicate when he goes to clean her bathroom. He finds out what kind of shampoo she uses and has a good whiff of it because he misses her, and by the time he goes to clean her bedroom, Henry’s wide awake.

“Oh,” Killian laughs. “Hello there, Henry.”

“Dada,” Henry chatters with him.

Killian decides to tidy up Emma’s bedroom before letting Henry up. He handles it gently and doesn’t go snooping, instead just makes her bed and gathers up her laundry so he can take it down to get it cleaned.

By the time he’s finished cleaning everything, he and Henry stand together in the kitchen while Killian prepares something for dinner. The television is on low and the table is set for the three of them.

All that’s missing now is Emma.

“Alright, Henry, look at how clean the apartment is,” Killian grins at Henry. “Daddy fixed it right up for Mummy. Do you think she’ll like it?”

Henry smiles at him and sticks his hand into his mouth, causing Killian to scoff and remove it right away.

“C’mere, lad. Let’s get you something to eat. I know you’re hungry.”

As he’s settling Henry into his high chair at the dinner table, the door opens. He turns to find Emma entering, a relieved smile on her lips.

“Hi,”

Killian can barely keep himself together. Seeing her again after a rather long day is so good. To think that he’d almost lost her today is bewildering, because she looks so lovely that he’d be a fool if he ever let himself let this go.

“Hi,” he replies, feeling breathless and hopeful.

Emma furrows her brow as soon as she looks away from him. She scans the apartment and cocks her head at him.

“Did you clean?”

Killian holds his mouth open. “Ah… I may have gotten a little carried away with the disinfectant wipes, yes.”

Emma laughs. She takes her shoes off and shrugs out of her coat. He goes to her and takes it from her before she can remove it fully.
She laughs again and he might consider recording it because it’s truly music to his ears, hearing Emma Swan happy.

She meets his eyes and presses on his chest as she raises up onto her toes to kiss him hello. It’s a sweet innocent kiss that remains that way. She lowers herself back down and hums.

“Hi.”

Killian grins at her. “Hi.” They stare at each other and then he clears his throat as he settles Emma’s coat by the door. “I cleaned everything up and I did your laundry and I made dinner. It’s just about done.”

Emma scrunches her nose up at him. “You did my laundry?”

He feels a little embarrassed, his cheeks getting hot, and he holds his mouth open. “I… apologies. I just-”

Emma shakes her head with a smile. “It’s okay. It needed to get done like a week ago but I haven’t had the time. Thank you.”

He releases a sigh of relief and nods. “Aye.”

Killian goes to the stove while Emma goes to greet Henry and then she says, “I’m gonna go change.”

“Alright. Supper’s just about finished.”

It has been a long time since he’s had a proper date, and while this isn’t exactly a date, it’s certainly the first time they’ve had time together alone without their walls to hide behind.

The idea makes him just the slightest bit nervous, but as he’s making Emma’s plate of raviolis, he can hear her voice from her bedroom and suddenly his nerves go away.

“Hey, Killian?” she asks.

“Yes dear?”

“Where’d you put my- oh. Never mind I found it.”

He laughs to himself and carries their plates to the table. He grabs Henry something to eat from the cabinet and settles it down on the tray.

“Alright, lad, let’s see if the carrots taste good now that you’ve had a good nap in your system.”

Emma emerges from her bedroom in a tank top and a pair of sweats. Her hair is tied up in a messy bun and she’s wearing her glasses, but he doesn’t think she could be lovelier.

She smiles softly at him as she sits at the table and Killian joins her.

“Did you make this yourself?”

“Aye. I did.”

Emma arches an eyebrow and has a bite. She nods. “It’s really good. I’m impressed.”

Killian grins. “I’m glad you like it.” He turns to Henry and feeds him from the jar of carrots. Henry
hums happily. “Oh, good, you like them now.”

Emma laughs. “Did he try to trick you earlier?”

He widens his eyes and laughs with her. “He absolutely did.”

Emma’s giggles are sweet. She shakes her head and reaches up to wipe Henry’s lip with his bib. “Monkey boy, you’re so smart.”

He watches her for a few moments, still holding the spoon with a scoop of carrots between the tray and Henry’s lips, and decides that he absolutely adores the way Emma cares for her son.

She casts a glance his way when Henry starts to complain and Killian straightens with a deep breath before delivering the food to the baby’s lips.

“There we are,” Killian mutters. “You like the carrots, don’t you?”

When he turns back to see Emma, she’s admiring him just as much as he’d been admiring her. There’s a rosy hue in her cheeks as she cuts a ravioli in two and then she has a bite.

“So when are we going to talk about the elephant in the room?” Emma asks.

He arches an eyebrow. He feeds Henry another bite and shakes his head. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know… we kind of left Storybrooke and all of those people in the lurch.” Emma has a sip of water. “And you don’t have an apartment anymore, or a job.”

Killian sighs. “It’s fine. I’m sure… I could just find another job and another apartment if the landlord decides I’m an idiot.”

Emma hums. She plays with her food and has another bite. “Well, you could… stay here. Watch Henry. Cuddle with me on the couch after dinner.”

His heart swells at the mere idea and he can’t help from smiling at her. “I suppose I could…”

Emma laughs. “Shut up. You want to. I know you.”

He shrugs his shoulders. “I do.” He feeds Henry another bite. “However, I have a truck full of furniture and I’ve got to do something about it.”

She sighs. “Right.”

Killian has a bite of his supper and smiles apologetically at Emma. “I’ve left the truck with a friend who lives nearby. He’s keeping it safe for me. But I should probably follow through, otherwise Liam will think I’m massively depressed or something. He called this morning to check to see that I was still coming and I had to let him know I was delayed.”

Emma frowns a little at that and his heart aches.

“But it won’t be awful, Swan,” he promises. “I’ll stay for a few days and we can decide if this relationship is going to stick. And if it is, as I suspect it is, we’ll face reality then.”

He watches her carefully, knowing full well that this might be enough to scare her, but she just nods.

“Okay.”
Killian smiles in turn. “I’m in this for the long haul. I want this to work.”

Emma’s expression becomes bright. A rosy blush fills her cheeks and she smiles. “Me too.”

///

Emma and Killian both sit with Henry for his bedtime routine, and Henry almost doesn’t want to go to sleep because he’s so happy that they’re both there with him.

But, after a few read-throughs of his favorite books, a cuddle with both of them, and Killian’s warm voice lulling him to sleep, he’s out cold.

They both watch him sleep for a little while. Emma doesn’t think she’s ever felt so comfortable before in her life, and it should scare her, because this thing with Killian is very new and their feelings are so passionate already.

But instead of feeling fear, Emma feels content.

She and Killian go out to the sofa to watch late night television together and they share a blanket while Emma leans her head against his shoulder. His arm is around her and he leaves kisses to the top of her head every so often that make her heart skip a beat.

During commercial breaks, he’ll ask her if she’s cold or wonder if she’s tired, and she just has to smile, because Killian Jones, a man she had once hated with a passion, is actually as tame as can be when he’s in love.

That’s what this is, she has no doubt.

The words terrify her, and she really shouldn’t have admitted them earlier, but each time Killian holds her just a little bit closer while he laughs at something on screen, or each time he whispers about how he hates this bloody commercial, she feels it tugging at her heart.

She is in love with him.

“Are you happy?” she asks during a commercial break.

He looks at her, his brow knitted inward, and smiles. “I don’t think I’ve ever been happier than I am right now.”

“Yeah,” she agrees quietly.

She reaches up to press her fingers to his hair, brushing it out of the way, and then she caresses the lines of his face as she had that first night that it was real.

Killian just allows her to have her way with him. He studies her while she memorizes the way his cheek feels in her palm when he leans against her and she bites down on her lip.

The show comes back on, but Killian turns it off. He turns toward her and her hand falls away from his face, instead coming to rest over his racing heart.

“When do you have a day off?” he asks.

Emma smiles at him. “I have a day off tomorrow.”

He grins back at her. “Yeah?”
She nods. “Wanna go grocery shopping with me?”

Killian laughs and she delights in the feeling against her palm. He leans in to kiss her chastely. “I would love that.” She slips her hands up to his hair and pulls him down for another soft kiss. “Perhaps we can go for dinner tomorrow.”

“I would love that,” she mirrors his response, a wry grin on her lips.

“Good.” He nuzzles her nose with his and sits upright. “I’ll sleep out here if you’re tired. I know I am. Henry is quite the handful sometimes.”

Emma hums. She pulls their shared blanket off and stands up. She waits in front of him and extends her hand to him. While it’s sweet that he wants to give her space, it’s been far too long and she’s spent far too much time missing him for them to spend tonight apart.

“Come on. You can share a bed with me.”

Killian playfully narrows his eyes at her as he takes her hand. “Why, Swan, I thought that was against your rules.”

She rolls her eyes as he stands beside her and starts to walk him toward her bedroom. “I guess I’ve changed my mind.”

“Now I wonder why that would be…”

Emma laughs happily and turns around to hit him in his chest. He makes pained noises and grabs for her. He wraps her arms around his neck and leans down to kiss her.

“I hate having to sleep without you,” she admits softly. Their noses brush and Emma’s eyes fall closed, her heart feeling impossibly warm as he holds her close. “Please come to bed with me.”

“As you wish.”
Chapter 22

twenty-two.

Things have been really, really, really good.

Somehow, neither of them has completely ruined everything with their tendency to shut people out, and even when they argue, they manage to make up in record time. Most of the arguments stem from exhaustion and stress, but regardless, they happen.

She thinks it’s lucky that they’re able to fight even though they’re still in this happy little bubble of a new relationship. It’s helped give her perspective on who he is, and it’s helped her grow.

It’s been a week since Killian almost moved back to Storybrooke. He spends his days watching Henry and she goes to work, even though she has a feeling she won’t be staying in the city for very much longer.

With each passing day, she and Killian keep getting closer. She tells him more about herself and he tells her more about him. They learn together and don’t hide things because they’ve only given themselves this week.

On the one day she was blessed to have off, they did things together and then he took her out on a proper date. Including flowers and a goodnight kiss at her door that she laughed about because he ended up cuddling with her not twenty minutes later in her bed.

But, for the rest of the week, they’ve only had the evenings to share, and she has loved every moment of it all.

She wakes up to see Killian sleeping soundly beside her.

His arm is above his head and his breathing is deep and slow. He’s snoring just slightly. It’s what she’s come to affectionately find waiting for her nearly every morning before she has to get up and get ready for the day, though sometimes he’s up before her, preparing breakfast and teasing Henry.

In the mornings, he’s always somehow his most handsome, with hair standing up in every direction, sleepy eyes, and sweet smiles that just hardly reach his eyes.

He wears a tee shirt and sleeping pants to bed and it’s nice to see him standing in her kitchen dressed as such, barefooted, because it reminds her that he’s here and he’s not going anywhere fast.

Emma sighs at the sight of him. He’s handsome, with his scruffy beard and his bedhead. She doesn’t really know how she had ignored his good looks before, even if he was an ass to her on more than one occasion.

Now, he has her thinking about waking up every morning to his sleeping form and loving every minute of it.

He takes a deep breath and suddenly, he’s awake, licking his lips and turning his head to look for her. His eyes are half-lidded, and a smirk fills his lips.

“You watching me, Swan?” he slurs thickly.

Emma laughs through her nose and watches as Killian turns onto his side. He slides toward her and
then wraps his arm around her middle while his head rests over her breast.

She sighs and takes her fingers through his hair. His hair is soft under her fingers and he hums warmly as she massages his scalp. He holds her tighter, making her stomach tickle with butterflies.

“You’re so warm,” she murmurs.

“Hmm,” Killian responds. “You’re you.”

Killian’s other arm goes beneath her and she wraps herself toward him, her nose buried in his hair. Her eyes fall shut and she feels so comfortable that she could probably fall asleep again. His breathing tells her that he could, too.

This relationship is warmer than sunshine and she doesn’t want to stop basking in it.

And then his phone starts to go off. He curses under his breath before yanking himself out of bed to find the offending device that might wake the baby.

She watches him leave the bedroom after he answers in a quiet murmur. When she briefly checks on Henry, she finds him still passed out, so she decides to grab her phone.

She has a text, oddly enough, from Elsa.

*Hi Emma! Miss you! Just wondering if we could chat sometime. Let me know! xoxo*

Emma finds it so sweet and thoughtful. She hadn’t realized how much she missed Elsa until just this moment.

*I would love that. I’ll let you know when I have a few minutes to spare.*

As she lies there waiting for Killian to come back so she can snuggle with him and try to sleep for just a few minutes more, she realizes that she really misses Storybrooke.

She misses the people and the small town-ish-ness. She misses the diner and the library and David and Mary Margaret’s little loft apartment where they’re waiting for the arrival of their baby.

She misses the beauty of the winter in town, how the Christmas lights twinkled at night, and how people were always so happy to see her even if they didn’t know her.

She misses the friendships she’d found the most. She aches for them just as much as she’d ached when she and Killian were apart.

She wishes they hadn’t left things so poorly.

She and Killian have talked about it a few times, and she knows he feels bad for what happened too. He intends to make things right when he goes back. *If* he goes back.

He’s told her that he’ll stay in the city with her if that’s what she wants him to do, and he’s also told her that he’ll go home if that’s what she wants him to do. It’s just a matter of deciding if their relationship is worth fighting for.

She thinks it is. She knows it is.

Killian returns then, smiling apologetically as he discards his phone and returns to his spot under the covers. He turns himself toward her, his arm draped around her middle and his head on the edge of his pillow near hers, and sighs.
“It was Liam,” he murmurs. “Wanted to know if I’m still coming home.”

Emma reaches for his hand under the covers and turns to him. She searches his eyes and her gut clenches tight at the words forming at the end of her tongue, but it feels right.

New York has never truly been her home. She hates just about every aspect of it. The rent is high and the people are rude. She hates her job and the only thing keeping her here is Killian.

“I think we need to go back. Together.”

Killian’s eyes widen and he laughs under his breath. “Darling, I think you might be still asleep.”

Emma rolls her eyes and shifts closer to him so that their legs tangle together. “What, do you have a monopoly on stupid ideas?”

Killian laughs once. “Sweetheart, you’re not proposing we pretend to be married for a week. You’re telling me you want to uproot your life to be with me in a town hours away from here.”

She releases his hand and digs her fingers into his hair instead. She stares at him, considering his words and her emotions. It just feels right, being with him, and she would feel at home just about anywhere with him, but living here is making do with what she has.

She wants something more out of life than making do. She wants friends and a place that feels like home.

“I don’t like this city.” Emma informs him on a sigh. “I never wanted to stay here. It just kind of happened.”

Killian has a permanent crease in his brow, as if he’s thinking through every possible problem he can. She hates it when he’s like this.

“Emma, I-”

She gives him a look. “I hate my job. School put me in debt. I have no friends.” She shakes her head. “Storybrooke felt like the place I’ve been looking for my whole life. I can’t explain it. The people I met there… I just…”

Slowly, a sweet little smile spreads on his lips and he stares at her like he can’t believe she’s real. “Aye. I know.”

For a moment, they just stare at each other. She plays with his hair and his fingers tickle up the small of her back before falling away. Killian looks down at the bed and then back up at her.

“I don’t have to leave. If you’d rather stay. We can date for a while and see where things go before we make big decisions like moving to my hometown together.”

Emma smirks wryly. “We don’t have to live together, you know.”

“Ah, but you forget that Storybrooke is essentially the size of this apartment building. If we broke up, there’d be no getting rid of me.”

She gives him a look and yanks on his hair. “I thought you were in this for the long haul.”

He laughs softly, those sweet crinkles by his eyes returning with his dimples. “Aye. I did say that, didn’t I?”
Emma sighs. “This past week has been really good, Killian. Really, really good.”

He nods in agreement. “It has been good.”

“I just… I don’t want to waste time. I’ve already wasted a lot of my life away with bad choices. With you it feels right. I don’t want to second guess anymore.”

“Aye. I know how you feel.” He nods once, more definitively. “Alright. We’ll probably need a bigger truck.” He shoots her a teasing look that she shoves his chest at. He laughs happily. “But I think we can pull it off, don’t you, Swan?”

Emma grins at him. “We do make quite the team.”

She pulls him toward her and they kiss sweetly. Killian nuzzles his nose against hers and whispers, “That we do.”

///

They get to Storybrooke at eleven at night, so it’s impossible that they’ll run into anyone, but it’s fine by both of them. They want to have a little bit of wiggle room before they come before their friends to explain what happened.

Killian steps out of the moving truck and hurries up to Emma, who has driven his truck into town with Henry in the backseat and a few of their belongings in the bed.

She has a smile on her lips when she opens the door. “Hey! We did it!”

Killian laughs and helps her down out of the truck. “That we did. But now we’ve got to get a bed up into the house.”

After they decided to move to Storybrooke, they agreed that they should look for a place to live together, which led them to spending hours sitting on Emma’s bed scouring the internet for affordable places.

The place they found is a quaint three bedroom home that overlooks the water. It’s painted yellow, with a small garden in the backyard, and there’s space enough for the three of them to grow happily together.

Killian watches Emma grab her son from the backseat and then he gets the portable crib and the diaper bag when she leaves him the space to.

“Allright. Let’s go see about our new living quarters, hm?”

Emma, despite probably being quite tired, smiles and nods at him.

Thankfully, the key is hidden under the rock like the landlord had told him. When he tries the lock, it immediately works.

He pushes open the door and grins at Emma. “Welcome home, Swan.”

She rolls her eyes at him just a little, but there are dimples in her cheeks and she seems happy. She steps into the home and nods as she takes in the surroundings.

“This will work.”

Killian laughs. “Aye.”
He walks with her through the layout of the place, finding each room as they’d seen online. They come back to the living room and Killian takes care to notice of the sleeping baby in Emma’s arms.

“Let’s set Henry’s crib up out here? We can just bring a mattress in and share. It’ll be easier, aye?”

Emma nods. “Yeah.”

Killian sets Henry’s bags down and then gets to work at assembling his crib. It doesn’t take very long, and when he’s finished, he watches Emma settle the boy down in it.

Henry stirs just a little, but he remains sleeping.

“Okay.” Emma whispers. “Mattress?”

They giggle most of their way back into the house with his mattress and Emma carries on her back the bag they’d packed of basic essentials for the night, including the sheets for the bed.

He has to go back out for the pillows and an extra blanket, and when he returns, Emma’s making the bed.

“Let’s see if I can’t find the furnace, hm?” Killian asks, and then he’s heading for the little box he’d seen on the wall and adjusting the temperature so it isn’t as freezing as it is outside.

He goes to lock the front door and toes out of his shoes once he’s back into the living room with Emma. She smiles at him as she puts their pillows at the head of the bed and then she sits down on the edge of it so she can take off her shoes and get out of her coat and hat.

“So this is it, huh?” Emma asks. “Home?”

Killian peels out of his jacket and sets it on the floor. He goes to the bag on the floor by the crib and digs out his pajamas.

“Well,” he looks up at Emma. “You know, Swan, this was kind of your idea.”

“I don’t regret it yet.” She says with a little smirk. “Give me a few days of you and your messes and we’ll see.”

Killian laughs. “Sweetheart, you know I’m not a mess. We’ve lived together a week.” He goes to her and kisses the top of her head. “I’m going to brush my teeth. Be back in a mo’.”

“‘Kay,” Emma laughs.

It’s hard for him to believe that he’s here. Just a week ago, he’d thought he’d be letting her go forever. Just a week ago, she wouldn’t talk to him.

But then they’d come together again. They’d reconciled and found happiness in being together this past week. He doesn’t think he’ll ever get over just how lucky he is that Emma Swan loves him.

When he goes back to the living room, he finds Emma changed and sliding into bed. She’s wearing one of his sweaters and he has to laugh because of it.

“What?” she asks in a whisper, smile spread wide. “I’m cold.”

“I’ve just turned the heat on, love,” Killian rolls his eyes.

He settles his dirty clothes down beside Emma’s and easily slips into bed beside her.
It’s definitely not the first time they’ve shared a bed, but it’s the first time they’re sharing a bed in their new home. It’s something that makes his heart swell each time he thinks of it, which is quite often.

“Do you feel good about this?” Emma asks quietly.

He turns his head to look at her and she’s on her side facing him. Killian smiles back at her.

“It feels like we’re starting fresh,” he says. “Though, I would prefer us moving a bit slower than this. I’d like the opportunity to properly court you, Emma.”

Emma smiles softly. “You can still properly court me. We’re not sharing beds, remember? We’re just roommates that happen to be dating.”

“Aye,” he laughs.

He still can’t believe she’s agreed to be in his life, much less go on dates with him.

A tension-filled silence falls over them and Killian turns onto his side fully. “Emma, can we talk about what happened when we were here last?”

She shrugs. “I thought we already did. A few times.”

“Aye, but… we left on quite poor terms with everyone.” He grimaces slightly at the memory of the look on their faces. “What made you want to come back?” Emma smiles just a little, her eyebrow arched. It makes his heart swell. “Other than me.”

Emma smiles a little. “Mary Margaret called me. She told me she felt like we were friends, even if I wasn’t actually your wife.”

He takes a deep breath. “Ah. I see.”

Emma shifts her hands under her pillow and sighs softly. “I guess having her say she loved me for who I was made it easier for me to let you back in.” She frowns slightly. “Killian, I’m sorry for pushing you away.”

“Hey,” Killian shakes his head. He slides toward her and wraps his arm around her. “It’s okay. It wasn’t a good day for either of us. And you were right to be angry with me for what happened. I was the one that pushed you into lying to them in the first place.”

Emma licks her lips worriedly. “That doesn’t mean I didn’t hurt you. I know you didn’t sleep well when we were-”

“It’s okay,” he says again. He smiles at her. “I’m here with you now. We have hope for a future together. That’s well enough for me.”

Emma nods. “Yeah.”

He kisses her sweetly. “Alright. Get some sleep, beautiful. In the morning we’ve got to move the rest of our belongings in and see if we can’t find some people to apologize to.”

Emma groans a little. “Do we have to?”

“Mm. Afraid so. It’s part of starting fresh.”

She turns around so she’s pressed with her back to his chest and he smiles into her hair. Emma
pulls his arm up against her chest and sighs contentedly.

“Night, Killian.”

“Goodnight, Emma.”

///

Unloading the truck takes them awhile, especially since they have Henry eager to see them each time they come back into the house with a new piece of furniture.

“Hey, monkey!” Killian says, squatting down beside Henry who’s been playing in his bedroom since they managed to put all of the baby proofing up.

Emma settles her box of books down in the living room where they’ve decided to put up their bookshelves and then goes to stand in Henry’s bedroom doorway.

Henry hasn’t ever had his own bedroom before. It’s quite exciting to think she won’t have to worry about tripping over Henry’s things in her own room.

“Daddy,” Henry babbles, looking concerned.

“What?” Killian plays along. “Are you upset Mummy and I are busy? I know you’d rather play. We’ll play in a few more minutes. I promise.”

Emma smiles at him when he looks up at her. “Why do I get the feeling I’m about to become the least favorite parent?”

Killian laughs. “Darling, I don’t think I could ever take the title of favorite parent from you.”

Emma hums skeptically. “I don’t know. He loves you a lot. Maybe even more than I love you.”

Her boyfriend gives her a look and she giggles as she tilts her head to the door. “C’mon. A few more things and then we have to go do our rounds.”

He hums. “Very well.”

They work well as a team.

It’s something she’d already known going into this: they’re a good team. But seeing how easily they move their things in and communicate where to put things and what to do makes it solidified, almost.

After they get all of their stuff at least in the correct rooms, Emma gets hungry, Henry starts fussing, and Killian still looks at them like they’re the most prized treasure in the world.

So, no, she doesn’t regret the impulsive decision she made to move to Storybrooke with him. She thinks it’s probably the best decision she could have ever made.

Killian drives them to Main Street and Emma begins to feel just a little bit anxious.

They have to own up to what they did and ask for their forgiveness, but it’s not going to be easy. They must be hurt and confused. Emma knows she would be.

“So what’s our plan?” Emma asks. “When we get into Granny’s and Granny looks at us and wants to know why we’re back.”
Killian takes a deep breath. “We’re back because we wanted to start new. Together.”

Emma nods. “Yeah.”

Knowing she has him in this makes her less nervous. He’s not going to leave. She’s not going to lose him. They’ve already been through that once already.

“At least this time we don’t have to pretend,” Emma says on a sigh.

“Aye,” Killian agrees. “Though, I’m not certain we were pretending the first time.”

Emma gives him a look. She might love him, but he’s an awful cheese ball when he wants to be.

“It was real for me,” he tells her as he parks the truck. He looks over at her with a warm smile. “I just want you to know that it was real for me.”

She glances into the back seat when her son babbles a little bit loudly. “Well, it wasn’t real for me the whole time. Just… some of it.” He arches an eyebrow at her. “Most of it.”

Killian chuckles. She studies him and bites down on her lip nervously.

“Kiss for good luck?” Killian asks. His pointer finger presses against his lips and she rolls her eyes.

“You’re such a dork.” Emma leans forward anyway, and Killian eagerly accepts her kiss. “Come on. I want a pile of onion rings and grilled cheese and I’m not going to get them until we sweet talk Granny.”

Killian sighs. “You’re impossible.”

“And you love me for it.”

He grins at her. “Aye. I do.”
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

an: hello everyone! This is the final chapter! I was going to post it tomorrow, but I figured that since it's done and I'm ready to give it to you, now is as good a time as any. I just want to thank you for all of your support for this story! It has been a really fun story to write, and I hope that you enjoy this final piece because I personally think it's quite lovely.

twenty-three.

David and Mary Margaret’s apartment door hasn’t ever looked daunting, but as Emma and Killian stand before it, it actually does.

Emma holds Henry in her arms and Killian licks his lips nervously, his hand clenched into a fist by his side as he prepares to knock.

“You okay?” Emma asks, seeming a little nervous herself.

He manages a smile and nods. “Aye, love, I’m just… thinking about how this will go.”

Emma takes a breath and laughs once. “Yeah.”

Their apology to Granny, Belle, and Will had gone remarkably well. Belle and Will had been hurt, understandably, but they’d forgiven them, and Belle had welcomed Emma with open arms.

They’d spent a solid hour sitting in a booth at Granny’s with them after Granny broke out a few of her holiday specials as her way of saying I forgive you, and she’d given Emma a huge hug that he was nearly jealous of.

There’s a lot riding on this apology to David and Mary Margaret. While he knows they can’t be fuming, he knows there’s probably loads of hurt and frustration between them due to the fact that they’d treated them like family for a full week.

“I’m nervous too,” Emma whispers. There’s a crease in her brow that he immediately leans down to kiss.

“We’re in this together,” he reminds her softly. “Are you ready?”

Emma nods her head. “We have to start somewhere.”

Killian knocks on the door and his heart starts to race just a little bit faster as blood rushes in his ears. It only takes a few moments, but it feels like an eternity goes by before the door swings open.

On the other side, Mary Margaret, still heavily pregnant, stands with a tiny smile on her lips. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Emma replies.

Mary Margaret glances over her shoulder and then takes a step back. “Welcome back, you guys.
We’re so happy you decided to come back.”

Killian smiles back at Mary Margaret as he steps into the familiar loft apartment. It feels like a dream, as if they hadn’t truly been here before, pretending to be married.

Things are different now, and it’s painfully obvious when Killian meets David’s eyes for the first time. David stands in the kitchen, a plate in hand, and as soon as they stand in the living area, he sets it down on the counter.

“Killian,” David says. He seems sad, mostly, and Killian nods at his best friend.

“Hey, mate,”

Mary Margaret, ever the mediator, holds her arm out. “Why don’t you sit? Get comfortable. Would you like something to drink? Hot chocolate?”

“No, I’m fine,” Emma says quietly.

Killian just shakes his head quietly and helps Emma with Henry while she peels out of her coat. She smiles at him in an attempt to calm his nerves and he smiles back softly.

It’s hard to believe that just this morning, he’d woken with her tucked into his arms. They’d exchanged soft kisses for far too long before getting up for the day when Henry decided to rouse them, and then they’d moved all of their furniture into the new house.

They’re starting new in Storybrooke, and with starting new comes this step of making things right. It was their plan from the moment Emma told him that she thought they should go back together.

But it doesn’t mean it’s easy.

Killian and Emma sit together on the sofa and David and Mary Margaret join them, sitting on chairs from the table turned toward them.

They still haven’t taken down any of their Christmas decorations, and they have Henry completely enamored and chattering while the uncomfortable silence sits in the air between he and Emma and the Nolan’s.

“So I’m sure you must’ve heard some details as to why we’re here,” Killian says, leaning forward with his hands between his knees. He doesn’t wait for them to say anything, but by the looks on their faces they must have heard something. “Emma and I are living here now. Together. Um…”

He looks over at Emma for support and she smiles softly back at him. She searches for his hand on his leg and takes it.

It provides him with just enough fuel to continue with a swell of his heart within his chest.

“Um… we’re dating now,” he says honestly. “And we’re happy.”

Mary Margaret smiles at that.

“And we wanted to come back because we realize that what we did was wrong and hurtful,” Killian takes a soft breath. “And I’m sorry I thought I had to be better than you, David. For whatever reason… I felt like after our fight before I left I needed to have it all together, because that’s what you wanted from me. You wanted me to have it all together. And when we met in New York, I didn’t. I was embarrassed.”
David exchanges glances with Mary Margaret and she gives him an encouraging nod. David bobs his head.

“I understand,” he says. “It was… elaborate and a little insane, but… I get it.” David looks between them and sighs. “I’m just sorry we couldn’t have left things in a better place when you left.”

Killian nods. “Aye.”

Emma sits upright beside him and Killian looks at her as she speaks. “I know how it probably feels, knowing you let us stay with you for a week-”

“Emma, if you think we love you any less, that’s silly,” Mary Margaret says on a sigh. “Regardless of what happened, we became friends.”

Killian has to smile just a little. Emma glances at him and he squeezes her hand.

“Yeah?” she asks, wincing. ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t want to hurt you. I just- I wanted a good Christmas for Henry because he’s never had something this nice before. Neither have I.”

His heart aches for her all over again and she shrugs her shoulders as she manages to smile at the Nolan’s.

“You guys helped me feel like this place was home, so… that’s why I wanted to come back, and I hope we can still be friends.”

David and Mary Margaret look at one another and both of them grin as they nod.

“Of course,” David says.

“You and Killian are always welcome here.”

It’s a relief to hear those words from them. He knew he didn’t have anything to worry about coming into this, but darkness is a tricky thing- it creeps into every thought and lingers.

“So can we talk about the truth? What’s going on and how long have you known each other-?”

David shakes his head, smiling lightly. “Where are you guys living?”

Killian laughs and so does Emma. He looks over at her and shrugs.

“We met at our former apartment in the city probably about a month before we ran into each other at the store. She was moving in and I came down to see if I could help her with her mattress.”

Emma rolls her eyes and groans a little. “And he was being a complete jerk so I told him to get lost and I stepped on his foot.”

Killian chuckles. He admires his Swan and licks his lips before turning back to their friends.

“So that much was true,” he says. “After that, it was just a series of me going to see if I could talk to her and Emma nearly kneeing me in the groin more than once.”

Emma punches him lightly in the arm. “Shut up. That’s not true.”

“It is,” Killian mouths to an amused Mary Margaret and David.

He straightens and looks at Emma and then at Henry.
“Somehow I persuaded her to let me help her with her shopping that morning we ran into you and… pretty much the rest you know. It was a game of keeping up appearances and somehow over the course of that week, our feelings toward one another changed and…”

Killian can’t help from smiling at Emma then and she looks up at him like she does when she wants to kiss him, a small little grin upon her sweet lips.

“When we got back to the city we spent time apart, because we were both hurting from what happened and how everything fell to pieces, but Liam asked me if I might want to come back to town and I thought it might be for the best, seeing as I thought I lost Emma and Henry.”

“But he didn’t,” Emma moves the story forward. “Because I couldn’t let go of him that easy. We stayed in the city for a week together and then we decided we should come back here because this place is… it’s home.”

Mary Margaret smiles back at them and David nods his head.

“Well, welcome home.” Mary Margaret says. “Do you think you’ll need help with your new place? Painting or unpacking?”

“We’d love to help,” David adds. “Just… let us know.”

Killian laughs and shakes his head. “No, no, mate, you’ve got your Christmas decorations up and Mary Margaret’s due date is, what, in a week?”

Mary Margaret laughs and David just gives Killian a look. “You want to help us with the Christmas decorations? Feel free.”

So they do. They take the ornaments and stow them away and pack up the Christmas lights. Henry plays in the nursery with Mary Margaret.

Killian steals a few kisses from Emma when he discovers mistletoe and she laughs happily with him. For not the first time since they’ve arrived he’s hit with the thought that it’s so good to have come back to Storybrooke with her.

As he and David haul the tree outside, they joke and tease like old friends. David claps him on the shoulder and pulls him in for a hug as they stand out by his truck and Killian has to smile just a little as they pull apart.

“It’s good to be home, Dave.”

David nods. “It’s good to have you home, Killian.”

They start the ascent back to the apartment and David looks over at him. “So, if you’re interested, I want you to know that you can come work at the bar with Robin and I.”

Killian smiles softly. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. Well, you can’t drink all of the booze before we can sell it this time, but… yeah. You can.”

Killian rolls his eyes and laughs. “Trust me, my days of drinking too much are behind me. I’ve got a family now.”

“Does Emma know you consider her that?”

He gives David a look. “Of course she does.”
David hums. “And you don’t worry about moving too fast?”

“I do,” Killian says. “But it’s not like that with Emma. I think we’ve always known we’d be together. It was just a matter of our hearts being in the right condition.”

His best friend nods. “Well, I’m happy you’re back, Killian. I missed you.”

Killian smiles at David. “I missed you too, Dave.”

David pushes open the apartment door after things get a little too real between them, but it’s fine by Killian. Their ladies are giggling over something in the kitchen with mugs pressed to their lips.

“What’s so funny?” Killian teases.

He and David exchange looks and his chest swells because he and David are actually getting along properly again. He hasn’t lost his best friend.

“Nothing,” Emma says. She sets her mug down and licks her lips. “So I was thinking we should probably get going if we’re going to get to talk with Liam and Elsa before dinnertime. We still have to get to the store and buy some things for the pantry and the fridge.”

He nods his head once and sighs. “Aye. I suppose.”

Emma licks her lips. “Henry’s sleeping so do you want to grab him?”

“I would love that.”

Emma smiles back at him as if they’re the only people in the room. It’s moments like these that he can’t second-guess things that are between them.

Even if they’d started on this wild adventure as two broken people, they have somehow found a home in each other in the end, and it’s something worth fighting for.

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“Killian, what do you think about me painting Henry’s room?” Emma asks as they drive toward Liam and Elsa’s rental cabin in the woods.

Killian glances over at her and smiles softly. “I think it might be nice. What are you thinking of painting?”

Emma hums thoughtfully. She stares out the window at the world as the truck moves steadily on the road.

“Maybe I could paint a circus of animals,” she says, a smile spreading on her face. She looks at Killian. “Because he’s our monkey.”

Killian laughs heartily and nods for a few moments. “That would absolutely work. A brilliant idea, love.”

Emma happily bites down on her lower lip as she laughs. “He’s never had his own bedroom before. We’re going to have to decorate it too.”

She starts to think about what kinds of things she’d put in his bedroom, as Mary Margaret had with her little boy’s nursery, and she gets a little excited when she considers maybe even getting Henry a themed toy box and pictures for the wall.
She imagines it’ll be fun to go shopping for things with Killian’s help. She can hardly wait to get started on making this new place a home for them.

“We should decorate your room as well,” Killian says. “You’ve only got your bed, dresser, and a night table, right?”

Emma looks over at him and shrugs. “I don’t need to. I’m fine. I don’t even have a job yet to pay for anything.”

Killian shakes his head, smiling a little. “What if I said it was your belated Christmas gift?”

She tosses her head to the side and her boyfriend just smiles more. He reaches for her hand and takes it, drawing it to his lips. He kisses her hand and it makes her heart weak.

“I love you,” he tells her as if he’s said it every day for his whole life. “And I want to give you something nice to help you start fresh.”

Emma sighs heavily, but Killian just keeps her hand tight in his and smiles softly against the back of her hand.

“David and Mary Margaret already gave us that rocking chair,” she tries to protest.

“That’s for Henry’s bedroom,” Killian says, settling their hands down on his leg. “Not yours.”

Expertly, Killian turns the truck into the cabin’s driveway and then puts it into park. He turns toward her and she releases his hand so she can pull her hat and gloves on.

“Please?” he asks, starting to pout at her. His lower lip looks ridiculous hanging out like it is, so Emma just leans forward, kisses the tip of his nose, and sighs.

“Fine. We can go to Ikea or something and you can be all masculine and build furniture for me and then we can cuddle and eat takeout.”

Killian grins wildly. He nods his head. “All right. Sounds like a fantastic plan. Shall I write it into my planner?”

Emma rolls her eyes. “Come on, Killian. We have to go talk to your brother. I have a feeling it’s not going to be as easy as David and Mary Margaret.”

She stares out at the cabin and her heart starts pounding fast. Nerves tickle under her skin and she gets chills before she steps out into the cold winter air.

Killian lifts the car seat with a sleeping Henry and carries him to the cabin. He looks every bit the doting father Henry hasn’t ever had, and while it should make her lightheaded with love for him, she’s busy drowning in uneasiness.

Emma has a hard time catching her breath, because all she’s thinking about is how completely serious Liam had been about getting them to tell the truth. He’d taken it to a level she hadn’t ever anticipated, and she still sometimes dreams of the way he’d forced them to tell the truth.

Killian insists that Liam can’t hate her like she suspects he does, but it doesn’t mean a thing coming from him because he’s incredibly optimistic about his relationship with his brother now that they’ve had their words for each other.

“Are you… is this okay?” Killian asks her when they stand at the door. He’s staring at her with a
worried look in his eyes. “If you’re not ready we can wait.”

“No,” Emma insists. “I’m fine. I don’t really know why I’m nervous.”

Killian takes a breath and releases a white puff of air. “Well, to be fair, my brother did sort of threaten you when we were here last.”

Emma looks down at Henry and then up at Killian. “It’s fine. We’re together, right? You and me.”

“Aye,” Killian grins. “You and me.”

There’s a moment they just stare at each other and it gives Emma the hope she needs to knock on the door.

In nearly record time, Elsa pulls open the door and gasps at the sight of them.

“Oh! I didn’t realize you were coming today!” She holds the door open. “Please, come in! We were just talking about how you were moving in.”

Emma enters first and Killian follows. She nervously glances around, finding Liam standing in the kitchen while Elsa smiles at her warmly.

“You guys can take off your jackets and get comfortable, if you’d like? We have fresh coffee and cookies too.”

Killian settles Henry down on the floor and she checks to see if he’s still sleeping. He is, but she knows he’ll probably wake up soon enough.

She peels out of her jacket and sticks her hat and gloves into her pockets. She hands them to Killian when he silently asks for them and then she slides her hands down her thighs as Killian hoists Henry up from the floor again.

“Come,” Liam says. “We can sit in the living room.”

So, they walk to the living room and sit together on the couch while Liam and Elsa take the loveseat.

On the floor between them, Henry slumbers with his pacifier between his lips. Emma turns to Killian, uncertain of who should start talking, because for the most part, he’s been the first one to speak, and this is his brother.

He just smiles at her comfortably and then looks at his brother and Elsa.

“So, um,” he pauses.

Clearly, he doesn’t know what to say either.

Killian clears his throat. “Ah… Liam, we’ve already explained everything to Elsa and to some extent, we’ve already made our peace with what’s happened, but we came here today to explain ourselves and… perhaps move on from the unpleasantness.”

Liam looks between them and sighs. “Alright.”

It’s then that Henry decides to wake up. He starts to kick and fuss, causing Killian to frown and they both murmur at him in an attempt to soothe his mood. As soon as Killian reaches in to grab him, he quiets down.
Killian checks his diaper and grimaces. “Bloody hell. Someone’s got to be changed.”

Emma laughs a little at Killian’s expression. “Do you want me to help or do you have this under control?”

He scrunches up his face at her. “I think I’ve got this, Swan. Please.”

She laughs again and nods. “Okay.”

Killian turns his attention to his brother and Elsa, grabbing the diaper bag from where he’d put it down on the floor as he stands with Henry in his arms.

“Do you have a bed I could change him on?”

Elsa pops up and nods. “Yes. Right this way.”

Emma waits for them to clear the room, nervously nibbling on her lower lip as she meets Liam’s gaze.

“We’re sorry,” Emma says. Her heart begins to race. “We’re sorry we lied.” She gets a sick feeling in her belly and shakes her head. “I know you don’t like me and you don’t think I’m good enough for Killian, or whatever, but… I know I was wrong, but I know that what you did to Killian was worse six years ago.”

Liam says nothing and his facial expression gives nothing away.

Emma feels uneasy, so she sucks in a breath and rambles on, “I wanted to help him because I wanted to give Henry a good Christmas. That’s the only reason. And then things changed and I guess it turns out Killian isn’t as bad as I thought he was—” She pauses and swallows thickly. “And I just want you to know that right now, what we have is real, and I don’t want you to hate me because of anything I’ve done, so—”

Liam shakes his head and cracks a soft smile. “Emma, I don’t hate you.”

Her eyes widen slightly and relief fills her chest. “You don’t?”

“No,” Liam promises. “I… I’ll admit I was hard on you. Perhaps too hard. But, it wasn’t because I hated you. I’m not foolish. I can see how you look at him and I can see how he looks at you. Clearly, you have something good. I’ve never seen my brother so completely in over his head before.”

Emma smiles at Liam’s words and nods. “He’s really happy.”

“Aye,” Liam hums warmly. “And I’d wager you are, too.”

A blush fills her cheeks and she laughs, nodding. “Yes. I am.”

Killian emerges a few moments later with Henry in his arms, much happier, and Elsa trails along after him, laughing at something he must have said.

Emma’s heart feels much lighter when she meets Killian’s gaze. A smile spreads on her lips and she waits eagerly for him to sit down beside her again. He settles the diaper bag down on the ground and bounces Henry in his lap, tickling at his sides so he’ll giggle.

He has this whole Dad thing down and she’s so in love with how easily it came to him.
“So,” Killian sighs, looking up at his older brother. “What were we discussing?”

“Emma apologized,” Liam says. “And it’s completely alright. I’m the one who’s sorry. I chased you off when all I wanted was your happiness.” Liam wears a worried look on his face. “I didn’t realize how close you had become while you were here, and Emma, I’m sorry for pressuring you. Did I ruin anything? I would feel awful.”

Emma shakes her head. “No.” She smiles up at Killian and looks to his older brother. “It turns out, what happened kind of helped us get together for real.”

Liam grins at that. “Aye?”

Emma nods as Killian says, “We’re here because we want to start new. Together.”

Elsa beams at them. “I’m glad you were able to work things out.”

Emma turns to look at Killian, finding his gaze bright as can be, his smile spread wide. She mirrors him happily and bobs her head.

“We are too.”

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After they have dinner in the kitchen nook, complete with at least two instances of Killian completely exaggerating stories from his youth just to see Emma laugh until she can’t breathe, they put Henry down for bed.

Henry loves having the both of them. He basks in all of the attention and eagerly clings to the both of them as they attempt to get him to lie down in his crib for the night.

Killian’s a sucker for Henry when he cries, and Emma gives him a warning look before telling him they need to let him do it on his own.

They split up in order to unpack the boxes in their respective bedrooms. Killian’s doesn’t require much, but as he’s hanging his clothes in his closet, he sighs because this is them, apparently, sharing a home but not sharing a bed in order to put some distance between them.

He understands it, he does, because they’ve only technically been together for a week and moving in together was a big step to begin with.

But he’ll miss waking up to see Emma watching him sleep, or waking up in the middle of the night just so he can admire her sleeping form.

He’ll miss sleepy kisses and cuddles and trying to get her to stay in bed longer and her arguments that she can’t. He supposes it’s just something to look forward to now.

Though, perhaps, he could persuade her to sleep in his bed or maybe he could convince her to let him stay with her in hers if he pushes the right buttons. Just for tonight.

Killian cleans up for bed and then shuffles out of his bedroom to find Emma. She’s sitting on the floor in her bedroom, a blanket in her hands from the box beside her, and she has her hair draped around her shoulder.

“What’s this?” he asks quietly.

Emma looks up at him, her smile faint. “This… is my baby blanket. It’s the only thing I have from
my parents.”

His heart sinks at her words, and when he steps into her bedroom and drops down to sit in front of her, he notices tears in her eyes.

“They didn’t want me,” she whispers, shaking her head with that tender smile still present.

Killian takes a deep breath and swallows. “Do you know who they were?”

“No,” she replies. She sniffs and puts the blanket back into the box. She licks her lips and puts her hands between her legs. “Sometimes I imagine them, though, if I can’t sleep. My dad was probably a blonde. And my mom probably had green eyes.”

He smiles at her words. “They don’t know what they missed out on.” He studies the way Emma’s eyelashes hit her cheeks beneath her glasses. She’s so beautiful. “You’re a wonderful woman, Emma. You’re strong and smart and brave. You’re beautiful. And I know it’s easy to think about how badly you’ve been hurt, but you don’t deserve to.”

She shuts her eyes and tilts her head downward. “Do you remember when you told me I needed to heal?” Emma meets his eyes and he nods. “I think you’re right. I needed this. I needed Christmas with people that loved me and I needed you.”

Killian swallows, becoming just a little cocky when he tilts his head to the side. “I didn’t heal you on my own. It was you, Swan. Finding yourself and embracing what you want in life.”

Emma hums. She glances up at her bed and reaches her hand out to him. Killian’s brow furrows, but she just laughs and stands, pulling him with her.

They end up lying together under the covers of her bed, almost as if they’ve both just given into the fact that this is their normal.

“Just for tonight,” Emma murmurs, smiling at him after she shuts off her lamp and settles her glasses on the night table.

Killian hums and scoots close to her, his arm going around her middle and their legs tangling with ease. He kisses the tip of her nose and then her lips.

“I wonder how many times we’ll say that before we finally agree that sharing a bed is inevitable?” he whispers.

Emma giggles and pushes at his chest. “I don’t know, but you’re only staying with me just for tonight. Because I need you to hold me and keep my feet warm.”

Killian kisses her sweetly. “That’s actually my specialty. It’s on my resume.”

“Is it?” Emma teases back.

“Aye,” he settles his forehead against hers. “My girlfriend insists I’m good at it.”

“Mm.” Emma’s fingers slip into his hair and she closes her eyes as she releases a contented sigh. “She might have a point.”

Killian hums. “Goodnight, Swan.”

“Goodnight, Killian.”
Emma wakes up incredibly early and is unable to fall back asleep.

Killian’s still out cold, lying on his stomach with his face turned toward her and his arms under his pillow. She brushes back his hair and leaves a kiss to his shoulder blade before she goes.

She slips her glasses on and shuffles out of her bedroom, intent on having a look at the seaside view at sunrise.

There are rows of windows in the living room that look out at the water, and there are oranges and reds painting the sky as the sun begins to come out of hiding.

She can imagine mornings in the very near future sitting out on the back porch with Killian and mugs of coffee. She can imagine them walking Henry down to the shoreline so he can dip his toes in the chilly water. She can imagine watching the sunset with Killian’s arms around her at night, or stargazing together.

And it’s what makes her want to paint, for the first time in a long time.

She goes into her bedroom, where Killian’s still asleep, and digs in one of her boxes until she finds her supplies, and then she carries them out into the living room, where she immediately plops down on the floor in front of the windows.

The view is what inspires her paint strokes, and she’s a little nervous because she hasn’t painted in quite some time, but she eventually gets into the swing of things, her wrist doing much of the work as she continues to look up and evaluate the beauty of the crisp winter morning.

“What are you up to?” Killian asks quietly. His voice is thick and sleepy, as if he woke up and came looking for her right away.

Emma jerks her gaze up and turns to see him, her eyes wide. She removes her hand from the painting and dips her paintbrush in water.

“I… I was just… painting.”

He smiles. He’s standing behind her, looking quite tired, with his eyes narrow slits and his breathing deep.

“Yeah?”

Emma nods. “I was painting the sunrise.”

Killian hums. He drops down to sit beside her and looks down at her canvas. She feels weird about sharing her art with him, mostly because Neal had been so weird about it when she’d try to paint when they were together.

But Killian just smiles warmly and then he wraps his arm around her middle as he kisses her temple. “It’s beautiful. You’re incredibly talented, Emma.”

Her cheeks feel hot as she stares at him. “I’m not, but thanks.” She looks down at the canvas and bites down on her lower lip. “Did I wake you up?”

“No,” he promises with a shake of his head when she looks at him. “Aren’t you tired, love? It was a long day yesterday.”
Emma shrugs. “I’m used to long days.”

He hums. “Well, I have a proposition to make.”

“Yeah?” Emma arches her eyebrows.

“Aye,” Killian grins. He leans in close to her, enough that she laughs softly. “Come back to bed with me. We can rest for a little while. Perhaps… a little something more.”

Emma laughs. “I would expect nothing less from you, my personal foot warmer.”

Her boyfriend beams at her and kisses her sweetly. “And then I can make us breakfast.”

“Hmmm. That sounds really nice.”

“Doesn’t it?” he murmurs between kisses. “Would you like to go out on a date tonight? I could show you the bar.”

Emma leans back and nods. “I think I’d like that.”

“Yeah?” Killian asks. He reaches over to tuck her hair behind her ear and then tilts his head back. “I don’t wish to tear you away from your art, so I’ll let you decide if you’d rather come to bed or not. But I’m not ready to face the world just yet, so that’s where I’ll be. Keeping it warm for you.”

Emma chuckles. She watches him stand up. “I’ll be right there. I just want to finish this, okay?”

Killian smiles at her and lowers himself down for a quick kiss. “Okay.”

She watches him walk away, and then turns back to look out at the sunrise. It’s the dawn of a new chapter in her life, and she hasn’t ever felt more at home.

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