What it means to be a Savior

by like-waves-on-the-beach (alliecameron)

Summary

Au Sci-fi. The worlds are in turmoil with a small band of rebels fighting to restore the balance. What they need is a miracle, what they get is a Savior.

Notes

Very AU. A long time ago in a galaxy far far away… This fic has been plaguing my mind for a long time. It’s kind of a cross with OUAT - Star Wars - and Star Trek. It has taken over a large part of my life and I hope you enjoy it. characteristics and relationships altered. I understand it won’t appeal to everyone but please give it a look over. Ensemble cast. Primarily Emma and Killian, but with most couples in there as well, along with some not so canon couples. Let me know, please, kudos, reviews, and comments keep me motivated and encouraged. Will also be posted on Tumblr and FFN

Special thanks to ultraluckycatnd for all her hard work beta-ing this and for her encouragement in posting. Without you, this would not have turned out as it has.
Once more into the breach

Chapter 1 - Once More into the Breach.

They moved across the surface, scrambling for higher ground. The night skies of the foreign world were illuminated by the endless firefight. Killian looked to his right and then grabbed Arthur, dragging him over the barrier as he searched for his team. Liam was still missing, and he had no idea where David was.

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“How much longer?” Penelope asked.

Liam looked at Penelope and shook his head. They were scheduled for evac in less than thirty minutes, and those minutes would fly. Chances were, they weren’t making it. He should have left her on the transport. He watched irritation and anger flood his wife’s face. She hated losing.

Setting the charges, he tossed another pack to her. The substation was key in the planet’s defenses. If they could remove it, the sub-field protecting the planet would fail and the invasion would begin. Their holding planets were already weak, and the Legion now ruled more than three-quarters of the known star systems. The war was going badly, and its end was near. Liam swallowed the bitter pill that the Royals were losing, and thus the Galaxy Wars would end soon with their surrender. But that didn’t matter. This planet was theirs.

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Killian felt the vibrations of incoming missiles before they hit. He rolled and folded into a ball to protect his softer parts. He cursed as the impact vibrated around him, the ground shaking and debris flying in all directions; he felt the sting of something burning as it pierced his side. The Legion weren’t budging. They were fighting back and holding the Royals in check. Sitting up, Killian reached behind him and pulled out a large, hot piece of shrapnel. It burned his hands and it took three tries to remove it, but leaving the shrapnel in would have been worse. The material was a liquid heat alloy that melted into the skin and poisoned the blood supply. He preferred not to have toxic material in his body.

“Arthur, let’s move. Dust-off in twenty, and we’re going to have to haul to get there.”

Killian reached for his Com officer to pull his hand free of his body. Looking down, he registered the smoking remains of Arthur and the fact that the incoming round had torn Arthur’s body into three parts, scattering pieces everywhere. Taking the com unit from his dead friend, Killian also took Arthur’s dog tags, placing one in what might have been his mouth. He didn’t know if they would, or could, clear the field and process the bodies. But just in case, it would be nice to return Arthur’s genetics home.

Killian rushed the field, creeping along the embankment, using its higher rise for cover. It was the movement of Will over the top that caused him to pause. Grabbing Will and pulling him next to him, they sheltered for a moment.

“You set them?”

Will nodded, gulping a harsh breath to fill his lungs. He had breathed in the gas as he infiltrated into enemy lines to bury the live rounds under their feet.

“Yeah, along the ridge and three clicks in. The detonation sequence is set to go in eight minutes, so
we need to haul ass.”

“I’ve got boomers on the left crawling into the field. Arthur is down; Walt took it back sixty feet, and I haven’t seen the B-boys.”

“I saw them,” David said, tumbling down the dirt bank to join them. “Bark and Brine are both toast. They took the left ridge down and out. The Legion were using the targeting laser as a heat seeker. They never stood a chance.”

Will bent his head forward as the rush of air in his tortured lungs made his dizzy. “Cap?”

“I don’t know. He and Penelope went into the access port. We’ve got to hold the line and maintain the right until he can set the charges. This substation sub-field will be re-enforced after tonight if we fail.”

“Killian.” Killian took the com unit and inserted it in his ear at the sound of Liam’s voice.

“Go, Cap. What’s your twenty?”

“Charges are set, but the Legion are moving fast. We’re coming out. Dust-off in ten. Get your men there.”

“Aye, Cap. Don’t be late, Liam.”

Killian took out the unit and looked at Will and David. “My men? Guess that would be you two.” Everyone else was dead. Hooking an arm under Will’s shoulder, Killian hauled him to his feet and dragged him along the bottom of the ridge, David crab crawling behind them, back to their landing location and the evac transport. Along the way he spotted Graham, still working on their boys who had been in the initial spill from the transport, thus taking the first direct hits. Three hulls of other transport ships were burning in the distance, their fires lighting the sky.

“Graham, it’s time!”

Graham just kept working on the body laid prone before him, applying pressure to a wound that was pumping out blood at an alarming rate and ignoring Killian’s voice.

“Graham!” The man was unrecognizable, covered in the blood of their massacred team. David looked at Killian and nodded. The two men each grabbed an arm and dragged Graham away.

“Wait, there’s someone out there,” Graham dug his heels in the soft ground, causing Killian and David to stumble slightly, Will slipped from Killian tentative hold.

“There isn’t,” David yelled. “Everyone is gone.” He looked to survey the landscape before them again, smoke spiraling up from lumps he couldn’t decipher as bodies or machine. But then a figure appeared in the distance, a lone man who watched the small group before him stumbling down the dirt slope. David tensed immediately, knowing who that man was.

“James.” His voice was low and resigned. He didn’t want this. He didn’t want this confrontation here. Now. They were running out of time.

“David.” James’ voice still held that cockiness that buzzed through David’s head in his sleep.

“James,” he answered, his eyes sliding sideways to Killian. “Move out.”

“Not on your life,” Killian returned, biting back the nagging pain in his back.
“We don’t have time for this,” Will ground out.

“I can’t let you leave,” James told them as he got closer. “You knew this as soon as you set foot on this planet.”

David acknowledge that with a tilt of his head. He’d sensed his twin the moment he’d jumped from the transport, and knew only one of Ruth’s boys would leave.

“We don’t have time for this.” Killian repeated Will’s words, all too aware time was running out.

James moved first, bringing his blaster up and aiming it at Killian. “You always were a pain in the ass, Jones,” he spat out.

David leaped before his brain kicked into gear, tackling his brother around his legs and bringing the two of them down.

“Get back to the transport,” he yelled as he rolled, and his brother’s fist collided with his chin.

“No!” Killian shouted as he attempted to rush in and help David. It was Will’s hand on his arm that stopped him.

The deck officer came down the loading ramp, calling across the barren landscape to them. “Sir. Command has ordered dust-off in three. The fleet is jumping the portal. Legion battlecruisers have just entered the system.”

Behind them, they heard the growl of David as James hit him again, and Killian turned just as a phaser blast ripped through the air. This was followed by another, along with a scream of anguish and Killian ran to his fallen cousins. He pulled James’ bloodied body off David. “Oh Shit, Oh shit. No, David. You hold on.” He watched as David’s eyes rolled up into the back of his head and hauled the man up, over his shoulder, his back screaming and his friend’s blood flowing over him.

With a swift kick in the direction of James’ lifeless body, Killian stumbled back to Will and Graham, placing David gently on the ground beside his grieving friend. Killian grabbed Graham by the face, his burned hands stinging. “Read the field, Graham. Feel it! Is there anyone left alive?”

Graham concentrated, reaching out to his fallen comrades. Nothing. Sweet death hurled them into the flight of angels, and the field was rotten with their decaying flesh. “No,” he said quietly.

Killian looked back over his shoulder. All these men laid to waste in the field, and for what? Before they could take the world, they were fleeing. James’ body laid smoking slightly from the deadly wound given to him by his brother. Killian knew all too well the kill or be killed mantra. He lifted David again, struggling with his pain and loss of blood as Will grabbed Graham, dragging the man back to the transport and up the ramp.

“Cap is on his way. We wait,” Killian instructed to the deck officer.

“But, Sir!”

“We wait!” Killian pushed Will and Graham into the transport and placed David on the floor, tugging on some restraints he hoped would secure him for the ride back. He seriously hoped David survived the trip. With a quick look at his last few men, he shoved Will in a seat. “Graham, Will sucked in the creeper gas. His lungs are fried. And David needs some serious attention.”

Graham hurried over to David and went to work, triaging him as more critical than Will at that moment. He was a first class healer, but the fellowship of death was shutting him down. Empaths
such as Graham rarely survived battle. Witnessing the fleeing of men’s spirits as they died painfully usually drove them insane. With half an eye on David, he reached into his medikit and pulled out an oxygen canister and tossed it to Will.

The pilot stepped into the hold and told Killian they had to leave or miss the hyperjump. Killian just swore under his breath. He was normally the pilot and tactical officer, but because the mission was a ‘Red Mission’ and all bodies were needed on the field, the pilot and flight officer were loaners. This had been a suicide mission from the start. Peering out in the dark, he could see the boomer creeping forward slowly along the back ridge. Taking out a control box, he hit the switch and detonated the live mines they had set. Liam, get the hell out!

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“Penelope, the back corridor is filling with Legions! We have to go around.”

Penelope nodded and, reaching into her pack, she took out an explosive charge with a delay nitro switch and tossed it down the escape corridor. Liam swore and grabbed her body, slamming her hard against the wall and shielding her as the charge exploded. The complex was deep in the earth, and the charge could have collapsed the support struts. They needed to leave. Liam looked at his timer. No time. They had less than two minutes to get out.

“Corridors cleared, honey.” Liam laughed at his wife’s tone.

Liam kissed her quickly and then dragged her behind him down the clearing corridor as the smoke and debris dispersed. The upper girders were groaning under the stress of the weakened substructure caused by the explosion. Rushing forward, he could see the access port and freedom.

Penelope heard the sound first - the strain and then crash of the rallying Legion soldiers rushing the corridor behind them - not taking heed of the already dangerous situation. She could feel the heated pulse of their pulsar rifles laying down the pursuing fire along her back. Liam turned and looked at his wife in confusion as she staggered. Reaching into her bag, she pulled out another detonating charge and he shook his head no. It would bring the mountain down on their heads.

Penelope simply turned, in her last act of life, and tossed the charge down the corridor they had just cleared. Liam looked at his wife’s back in horror. She had taken a pulsar blast in her back and half her torso and head were gone. All that remained was bloody pulp. He grabbed her close as she sank to the ground.

“Penelope!”

“Go!” Her voice was already far away and he watched her eyes roll back in her head as she slumped into death.

It was the explosion of the blast that sent him propelling towards the access port as the mountain roared and the corridor collapsed. A burning, searing pain moved across his back as he fell forward into nothing.

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Killian looked out towards the access port as the explosion was heard topside. The evac shook as a mini seismic event rumbled the ground beneath it. Killian felt the strain on his connection to his brother. No!!!!

“Sir, this ground is unstable. We have to go!”
Killian took out his gun and put it in the man’s face. “We go nowhere!” Killian turned to look at Will who took up his own weapon and took out the deck officer with a single shot. “Will?”

“I got them! Go!”

“No one leaves until I’ve got the Captain.”

Will sneered at the pilot. “We’re not going anywhere.” He lifted his gun, coughing, and motioned for the man to take a seat. “Jones!” He turned back to Will. “Be quick!” Killian nodded and ran.

Killian was through the loading doors and into the access port before Graham could look up, his attention completely on David in that moment. The area was covered in smoke and debris, and Killian coughed as the materials hit his lungs. Working his way forward and low to the ground, he came to the caved-in corridor and found his brother, Liam. Reaching down, he felt for a pulse, already knowing that Liam was barely alive. He couldn’t have felt him if he wasn’t.

Liam was unconscious and scarcely breathing. Quickly scanning the area, he saw no sign of Penelope. Knowing his brother wouldn’t have willingly left her behind, he understood for her to be another loss in the raging war. Scrambling to dig his brother out, Killian pulled Liam free and found he had a large piece of shrapnel embedded in his back. Killian, cursing against the pain in his hands, pulled it out and ripped off his shirt to wrap around Liam’s wound to try and stop the bleeding, refusing to acknowledge that the amount of blood he was seeing meant it was unlikely his brother would make it.

Picking up his brother as he had David, he slowly moved them out of the tunnel and back to the transport, his back screaming in protest. Coming up the last rise to the ship, he noticed boomers moving in from the right. They were toast. Suddenly he saw the core of them explode and a barrage of fire fight. Looking at the loading doors, there stood Will laying down a suppressing fire to give him cover.

Quickly Killian climbed aboard past Graham and dumped his brother in a chair, belting him in. Rushing back to the door, he pulled Will back and hit the airlock. The doors sealed as Killian propelled Will with him to the forward compartment.

“Graham, I’m afraid I have another for you.” Killian rushed forward pass the pilot and Will.

“Killian, Penelope?” Will asked. Killian looked at Will and shook his head. Will’s sister was dead. Will had known it, but he had to ask, to hope. Buckling into his normal seat, Killian ignored normal dust-off procedures and punched it, leaving that world of death behind and rejoining the Royal fleet.

“Omega Tango transport, do you copy?”

“This is Omega Tango transport one. We are in the air, and five by five.”

“Transport, what is your twenty?”

“Eight parsecs and ten on the outside.”

“Transport, we’ve got you in our field, but hyperjump is in two. Can you make speed to coordinates zero-two-twelve-mark-one?”

“Negative, command. We are floating armor. Best we can haul is in four.”
The command deck com officer looked at his commander. They weren’t going to make it before the fleet jumped to hyperspace.

“How many on board?” The fleet commander asked his officer quietly.

“I’ve got six, Sir. The other three ships were lost.” The commander nodded. The aborted operation was a wash. Over a hundred men had gone down with only six coming back, and now they were forced to abandon them as well.

The door to the command deck opened and a figure dressed in black Royal robes entered the room. All the men cleared their way as she came forward. She was the Eminent.

“What is the situation?”

“My Lady, the final assault crew has cleared the planet, but they left dust-off too late. They won’t make rendezvous in time for the jump, and they’ll be pulverized in the wake.”

“What unit was deployed?”

“The Jewel.”

Regina looked at the star field, then at the monitor showing the fast-moving transport. The entire monitor glowed, and she turned again to search the field for them. “Can the onboard set jump be aborted?”

“No, M’Lady. We’re locked into the fleet’s central command. The entire fleet will jump at the same time. Controlled jump is the only way to make sure that the battlecruisers and armor don’t collide on the other side of the stream.”

Regina felt the glow and pull again. She needed those men. “Give me the com.”

An officer came quick and handed Regina the receiver and scurried away quickly. “They disturbed the matrix. I need them,” she said to no one in particular. She put the com on and called through. “This is command. Omega Tango, proceed to the following coordinates...” Regina looked at the monitors to confirm. “Three-two-two-mark-seven. Do you copy?”

“Affirmative, command. That’s three-two-two-mark-seven.”

The operations officer looked at his monitor and frowned. “M’Lady, that will place them within the engine’s backwash. The hyperjump will fry their portal cells and their hull plating will buckle under the heat.”

Regina looked at the man. “Jump is in one. They can ride in the wake and maybe they’ll fry, but if they stay here they’re dead. This is a chance.”

An area on the planet below suddenly exploded and the sub-field protection grid flickered offline. They looked at the open planet and then turned away. It lay there—all ready to be taken—and no one available to do the job. It was nothing but a waste.

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Killian double-checked the coordinates and made for the backwash area of the larger battle cruiser, shaking his head. They would fry in the hyperwash when the engine heated to hyperjump. Still, he increased all energies to his shields and disengaged his engines. He wouldn’t need them. They would ride the wave and either they made it, or they were dead. At least using the extra power to re-enforce his shields gave them a somewhat better chance at survival.
“My Lady, Omega Tango has reached the coordinates and cut their engines.”

Regina nodded. “Brave man. When we come out on the other side, I want a full-spread search for them. His energy will be gone, and life support will be offline. We’ll need to find them fast.”

“My Lady,” the man affirmed as he began programming the search mode into his console as the countdown began.

“Hyperjump in seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.” Regina stood firmly upright as the ships moved into the slipstream and the ship elongated. In an instant, all the molecules of her body seemed to dissolve and coalesce on the other side.

Killian could feel the pull of space as the larger ship dragged them forward. The last thing he felt was the ripping of oxygen from his lungs.

“He’s waking, M’Lady.” Regina turned to the hospital cubicle and watched as Killian’s eyes slowly fluttered open.

“Good, you have returned.” Killian just frowned at the Eminent One.

“My brother? The rest of my men...” His voice was deep and rough as it whispered against the dryness in his throat, stripped by the loss of oxygen.

“They are recovering.” She paused, unsure of his reaction to what she needed to say, to what she had to ask. “Two are in regeneration. One man’s lungs were ripped to shreds from the inside. He’s been submerged into regeneration fluid. He should be recycled in about four days. The empath was removed to protective sheltering. He sustained emotional trauma from his empathic links. Medical is giving him a neutral environment so his internal balance can be restored.”

“My brother,” Killian pushed, fighting the swirling pain as it pulsed through his body and the fog that was currently threaten ing to take over his mind.

Regina schooled her expression, her eyes turning sympathetic. “I’m sorry, but your brother died. The medics did all they could for him, but his injuries were too severe.”

Killian just nodded. He’d known; of course he’d known. The moment he swam to consciousness and didn’t feel his brother, he had known he was gone.

“Your injuries were not light either. You took three rounds to your back. They removed residual shrapnel and want to submerge you in a regeneration tank, too. I forestalled them so you could know how your crew is; know about your brother.”

Killian’s eyes narrowed at the mythical creature: An Eminent One. “There’s more,” he croaked out.

“Commander, we have one more thing to ask of your brother; to ask of you.”

Killian looked at her confused. *What more could they want from a dead man.* “You were the one,” he said instead. “The one that told me to ride the wash.” Regina just nodded. “Why?”
“You bent the matrix. I could feel a movement in the fabric. Someone, or perhaps all of you on that ship, are important. Why is unclear, as are all things unseen. Time will play the game and the journey’s walk will write the yarn.”

“You're definitely an Eminent One. Damn riddles and parables.” Killian shook his head.

Regina just smiled at that. Yes, she found it irritating too. She could almost remember a time when she was normal, before her body was altered for the higher purpose. Now the visions and words tumbled from her body almost without her control, as if she were two people sharing a single form.

“Regina. Call me Regina.” Regina sat next to Killian’s bed. “Our lives are joined. The threads are unclear, but the twists are there. This war is over. The Legion will win, and the star systems will run red from the Dark One’s tyrannical reign.”

“You see all that?”

“Yes. It was apparent since the last full cycle.” Killian swore. A whole damn cycle? A year?

“Then my men, my brother, died for no cause?”

“No. They did not.”

“You should’ve stopped the operation. Ended the mission. What's the use of being able to see the future if you don't do anything with the knowledge you gain? My men, my brother, his wife...none of them needed to be sacrificed.”

Regina just gazed at the man and felt his anger. “Seeing a path is different from walking it. You are mistaken if you think I can alter what fate has already designed. It was my fate to save you and your remaining men; that is the truth I see. We have a journey to fulfill. This war is over and the Empire ruled by The Dark One will reign in terror, but we’re far from through. The One will come.”

“The One?”

“All is not clear.” Regina stood to leave and the men around them bowed to her. She frowned. Of average height, slim and regal, she stood impressive and strong, cloaked in black with the emblem of the offices of the Eminent around her neck. She was a genetically altered humanoid, designed to have increased mental abilities both in power and thought. Such beings were alterations of a construct and feared by most, because their power and the extent of it were unknown. Regina looked back at Killian. “You and your brother, you are Areenian?”

“Yes. And others of the crew, Will. He was...his sister was my brother’s bonded mate. And David, a cousin.”

Regina nodded. “And your mate?”

Killian just shrugged. So what? He was a freak. “I don't have one. I never bonded.”

Regina stopped at that and looked back at the man. Interesting. An anomaly. “That is unusual; a rarity. I thought such situations to be a myth.”

“Might as well be. One in every sixty billion births is born unbonded. Just my birthright.” Killian looked at the regal woman with her eyes brimming with power and intelligence. “An Eminent One. I thought you were a myth as well.”
Regina understood the man's bitterness, to be a freak among his own kind. Areenians were a warlike race that took their species to the brink of extinction over a hundred thousand years ago. They fought everyone and everything - killing their own clansmen and brethren. Civil war and blood feuds almost eradicated them. On the eve of their extinction they initiated a new system of breeding which bonded the members to a mate almost from childhood. At eight the bond would initiate and each person would find their intended. When they came of age, they married. Same-sex bonds were outlawed in an effort to repopulate their dying race, as was genocide, and Areenians never bred outside their own race.

“It is legend that an unbonded male would have strengths untold and a superior destiny.”

Killian just shrugged. Yeah, those Eminent creatures searched through ancient prophecies, always hoping to find an answer to all the chaos and bloodshed. He couldn’t care less. His own circumstances occupied his mind. It was a source of dishonor, a blight on his family name and bloodline, the humiliation of being a freak. When he came of age and his brother married, the great houses of his world hid their daughters from him to prevent him from wanting to ally with their houses without a bond. His only destiny was to be a freak and alone. “It doesn’t matter. My world was one of the first taken by the Dark One.”

Regina nodded. That was true. But at least his world still existed. Enslaved, but they existed. So many others did not.

The Dark One had destroyed numerous worlds, entire solar systems and those races had ceased to exist. He took Areenians for their warrior genetics. The Dark One was a collector of genetic material. He took the best from the genome and then destroyed what he didn’t want, genetically altering his next race of clones until there was nothing left except to fight his created super race.

“Did he take your genetics?” Regina asked.

“Most of them. Those he didn't, he destroyed. The rest he enslaved. We, a few of us, were already engaged in the war effort for the Federation, hoping that the Royals could restore the balance to this galaxy. Will’s wife was on a penal colony, one of the first destroyed.”

“I am sorry.”

“Not your fault, and Will didn’t care. He bonded to his wife at eight, married ten cycles later, and on their wedding night she tried to strangle him to death. He tied her to the bed, finished his wedding night, and the next morning called authorities to have her arrested for attempting to murder a member of our race. She has been there ever since.”

“Real love match,” Regina said with a muffled laugh.

Killian was confused. There was no word for ‘love’ in his race’s vocabulary. They married for alliances, to build bonds and strength, and to breed. But for emotions? Emotions were what brought their world to the brink of extinction. They were forbidden. It was the bond that kept a man and wife together, and in the best case scenarios there were hoped-for feelings of fondness. Killian’s own parents spat at each other when entering a room. Killian couldn’t believe that he could envy that, but he did.

Regina studied him for a moment, her mind whirling with possibilities, but she knew she could wait no longer. “Commander, one for your men was mortally wounded during the attack.”

“David,” Killian acknowledged. If Liam was already dead, she could only be talking about David.
“Yes, he needs a new organ, one that your brother could supply,” Regina said as she stood, moving
to the side as a med tech came with an injection. Killian was going to be taken to the regeneration
chamber. He was scheduled for a three-day cycle.

“My brother,” Killian slurred, fighting the effects of the soother the medics had given him in
preparation for his regeneration. “He would want to do anything he could to continue helping.
Especially for David. Dead or not.”

Regina nodded in understanding. “It is time for you to sleep, Commander. I will keep watch over
you and yours. You have my promise.”

“Wait!” Killian looked on in irritation as another soother was given to him and everything faded to
black.

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Chapter Notes

Thanks, again, to ultraluckycatnd and her beta skills, she whipped this into shape for you lovelies out there.

And thanks to those who've left kudos on this work. I appreciate knowing there are some people out there reading and, hopefully, enjoying this story. Leave a comment, it gives me a huge boost and triples my motivation.

Chapter 2 - We Are Sisters.

Six years later... the present.

David sat up in his bed sweating as his heart raced out of his chest. The last thing he saw was his face. James.

Killian stirred on his side of the room at the sound of David’s nightmare. “You okay?” he asked with tired concern.

David swung his legs to the side of his bunk and sank his head into his hands. His chest ached; a constant reminder of the trauma he’d been through, coupled with the knowledge he’d taken his own brother’s life. “Yeah,” he finally answered.

“The old dream?”

“Yeah. Sorry to wake you, Killian.”

Killian just laughed and tried to instill some humor in the situation. “You didn’t, mate. I was already up, and trying to get it down so I could sleep, if you know what I mean.”

David chuckled. “I would appreciate it if at next port you find some way to get some of the tension out. I’m sick of trying to sleep to the sound of you messing with it. Damn, I’d have thought it would have fallen off by now.”

Killian just shrugged. He was sort of a lusty guy and being unmated, he really had few options. He could pick up a bay whore who’d work him over for twenty credits, or he could use his own hand. His own hand didn’t cost him, and as far as he knew, was disease free. The bay whores were on-the-spot convenient, but looking down at them mouthing a vital portion of his anatomy had him worried where the hell that mouth had been. Kissing was unheard of, and he wasn’t sticking any part of his body in a well-used hole that more than likely would cost him lots of drugs and a real crippling disease. The problem was that Killian really liked kissing. It was something he hadn’t done in forever, and thinking of sex occupied all his free mental time. That and gambling, drinking, and... yeah, more sex.

David stood and stretched. It was still early, but he had lost his desire for sleep. He had lost his desire for everything. No sense just lying there in the dark listening to Killian jerking off.
“David?”

“No. You sleep - or whatever it is you do. I’ll be on the Conn.” David left the room, as Killian rolled over in his bunk. Closing his eyes, he couldn’t help stop the visual of Liam popping before his eyes. But Liam was dead and David was, in essence, his brother now.

A week after his regeneration and recuperation, Regina had once asked him to meet with her on Haven, the flag ship in their little fleet of battered and worn-out ships. The war was over and the Royals were coming to terms with their loses; their defeat. They continued to elude the Dark One but many were debating on how long they could escape the clutches of one of the most powerful beings in the universe. It helped, of course, that they had another powerful being in their camp.

So Killian had met with her, The Eminent One, and finally understood what had become of his brother. The medics had been unable to repair the damage done to Liam’s skull and therefore his brain, but his heart had remained strong. David has suffered greatly from his fight with James and needed a heart to survive. And so the transplant of organs had taken place, and now his cousin lived because his brother had died.

At first Killian had been bitter, refusing to have anything to do with the man. Taking Will, Graham, and a few select men, they fled, roaming the solar systems and getting into trouble. He’d once been close to David, his cousin from his mother’s side the both of them creating such hijinks in their teenage years that were still legendary on their own planet. But he was hurt that David lived while his brother had died. He had eluded David and his own crew for almost a year but eventually, the brother’s bond proved to be too much of a pull and they sought each other out, needing to make the connection for their own mental health. He’d found David still aboard Regina’s ship, Haven.

Their meeting had cemented that bond that was unique to their species and now it was as if Killian and David were true brothers; both having a connection to the other that only death could sever. The connection Killian had once shared with Liam he now shared with David, and in truth, the pain of losing Liam had lessened.

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“Captain.” The ensign on the deck stood up from David’s chair.

“Sidney, how’s the night?”

“Quiet. A Tollerian trawler was stopped by Legion security and searched.”

“Results?”

“They didn’t find what they were looking for, but they destroyed the ship with all hands.” David just nodded.

“Sir, would you like something to drink?”

“Stand down, Sidney. Go get some shut-eye. I’ll keep the watch.” The other workers on the night Bridge were stunned, especially when their Captain turned and looked at them. “All of you. It’s only a little time left in your shifts. The morning will be coming on soon. Take a break. Go.”

After they filed out, he sat and watched the skies. Nothing out there. No movement. It was always the same. Nothing happening. It was in these moments of the early morning when he liked to be alone, with nothing but the feel of the ship under his command, and the slow hum as all the day systems automatically came on line one by one.
David had struggled at first with the bonding he shared with Killian, it being so different to the bond he’d shared with his natural born brother, James.

James. David still struggled with the fact he had killed his own brother. The fact that James had chosen to fight for the Legion and not the Royals held little comfort. David had known James held an anger within him from an early age, his brother being completely different from him. The twins couldn’t have been more polar opposites. David was kind and held great strength and courage, whereas James was arrogant and conceited. James believed no one would overcome the Dark One, so he chose the Legion side to be a winner. Unfortunately, David had been pit against him, and deemed his own life more valuable, a decision that still haunted him.

With Killian, it was different. Killian held to the same ideals that David did, so that made the bond easier to live with. It was still strange to be able to feel whatever his cousin, now brother, felt, and he supposed it was the same for Killian. Killian often thought of David as an insufferable hero, always intent on helping others, while he considered himself more as a pirate, out to glean all he could for himself and his family: his crew. Killian’s faith in what he believed was right had been shaken immensely and his new crew had sailed the skies, actually taking to piracy for a time, before being brought back to the Royals by Regina.

Killian, David found, was fiercely loyal and had declined a captaincy of his own to be his second-in-command, a position that mirrored his relationship with his late brother. But the bond had saved them both, and they worked well together.

“David.”

Regina was shocked to enter the room and find the entire Bridge empty except for David. She had awakened moments ago by a wave of awareness that hit her in her dreams and carried her to consciousness. Searching the star field, she looked for a disturbance.

“What you looking for, My Lady?” David asked her with concern.

Regina frowned at the title. Everyone called her Regina now, but David sometimes forgot himself and referred to Regina as an Eminent One, the embedded properness having been drilled into him at a young age. Being born into one of the First Families of his planet, correctness and pomp were almost second nature. The natural warrior-like instinct within him being almost chivalrous, something not the norm on his planet.

But the Eminents were extinct except for her and two others, and Regina balked at her official title. They were now protected by the Dark One himself.

After the war, the Dark One had hunted down the Council of Eminence, and slowly put all the members to death, extracting their DNA, to study it in hopes of creating more. It was a mistake. He couldn’t replicate the DNA, and the added genetics to his original strains tainted his matches. All of them were misaligned and his great genetic cloning process was in peril of being destroyed. Each Eminent he killed also changed the fabric of space. Parts of their known universe began to fold and buckle, causing distortion fields and anomalous space ribbons. The best that could be surmised was when an Eminent died, his mind, which was connected to the Great Understanding, was pulled from his or her body, thus tearing holes in the very fabric of space. The Great Understanding being a place where thought and time joined with reality and space.

Afraid of buckling and destroying the entire Universe, the Dark One declared the remaining Eminent Ones protected. It was almost three years too late, and all that remained was Regina and her two remaining brethren, her family. The Dark One gave the three remaining Ones anything they wanted. As each of their members had died, they collectively increased in power, taking the
slain One’s power as their own. And whereas once the Eminent Ones were feared and held in awe, now the remaining three were even more revered. In the past six years since the end of the war, they were fast becoming the closest thing to walking Gods.

Regina didn’t appreciate the distinction. She would have sold her soul to be human again, to live a normal life and to have children. Ironically, as much power as she wielded in her body, that was the very thing she couldn’t have. And even the Dark One, a source of untold evil in their Universe, was powerless to interfere. A higher Cosmic Law left her and her kind as advisors, teachers, and seers, but they were forbidden to interfere in the lives of those around them. It was impossible, and therefore frustrating, to be able to see the future, but be unable to affect it. The most she could do was walk a path and offer a way or counsel, and so that was what she did.

Looking at the star field, she saw the bend, the disturbance. It was there. Nassoz V. That was what she sought.

“I need to go down to Nassoz V.”

David looked at Regina and frowned. Nassoz V? It was a trading planet full of cut-throats, bandits, and space pirates. The place was a breeding ground for all the rabble of six star systems. Slave traders ran Bay whores up and down the populated seaboard, spreading pestilence.

“That scum hole? What could you possibly hope to find there?”

David knew that planet well. They had almost lost Will there a few times in games of Fekite and Three-Tier poker. He almost got them all killed last time by betting their last ship in a pot. He lost. They had been stranded there until they could scrape up enough credits for a new ship, and in the meantime six of his crew contracted space herpes. By the time it was discovered, it was too late. Space herpes originated as a small micro virus that quickly evolved into something larger and no longer needing its host. It took them half a cycle to hunt down and destroy all the herpes off the ship. Killian still had nightmares of waking to one crawling up his leg. His third leg, and his most treasured part of his anatomy.

“The beginning of the journey’s end all starts with a single thread and grows in proportion, but the truth of it is finding that first strand.” Regina’s voice was serene.

David looked out at the star field before turning back to Regina and shook his head. “Right!”

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It was hours later when David tracked down his brother, standing at the monitor watching a shuttle pod take off for the planet. They had come into an orbital pattern, and it took Regina only a few moments to be granted permission to enter protected Nassozaan space. “Where’s she going?”

David looked at Killian, and headed back to the Bridge. “Nassoz V. She’s says there’s some disturbance in this space.”

“Needed to get laid, huh?” Killian said with a sly grin.

David laughed. Oh yeah. One track mind. It hadn’t taken him long to understand that side of Killian, his second in command, his surrogate brother. “No, she felt something, so she went to investigate.”

Killian looked over his shoulder at the shuttle becoming smaller and smaller as it entered the inner atmosphere of the Demon planet, Nassoz V. Cursed place.
“And you let her go alone?” Killian looked at his captain in shock.

David just shrugged and said the words he knew that would make Killian back off. “Space herpes.”

“She’ll be fine, mate,” Killian returned quickly. He actually did a little hop in his walk as he moved away, as if he could still feel those creatures moving over him.

On their way back to the Bridge, they passed Regina’s private quarters. It was the largest redesigned part of the ship, and none of them had entered it in the three years since they joined Regina’s crew. It was a source of fascination for the entire crew, and the rumors were outrageous, especially for the last half a cycle.

About half a cycle ago, Regina ordered them to detour to a special location. There, she brought on a woman, a slave some said, but others swore that it was two people. Everyone stared at the doors of Regina’s quarters, wanting to know what went on in there. But no one had the nerve to actually enter.

“Hey, mate, you want to...” Killian gestured to the door.

David just shook his head no and led Killian away. “That would be an invasion of Regina’s privacy. Remember, we work for her.”

Killian just shrugged. Sure, but there could be girls in there...or at least a girl. She shouldn’t be alone, all worried about Regina and stuff.

Reading Killian’s mind, David just rolled his eyes. It was unfortunate that Killian had been cursed with being unbonded, because he was one vigorous guy needing and wanting attention from the opposite sex. David had once been married, to a viper named Kathryn, but he had abided by the rules of marriage nonetheless. She had perished on Midas, a colony devastated by the Dark One toward the end of the war, but she had been his life mate and he regretted that Killian had never had that.

“Come on. We’ve got work.”

When the Dark One finally released her three years ago, Regina was given anything she asked for. She requested a ship, this ship, the Enchanted. It was an end-of-the-war new battlecruiser, smaller than the previous ones, used for fast running speeds and the ability to move across space at incredible distances. It’s armory and shielding were top of the line, and it had incredible docking and storage bays.

Regina took the ship and hunted down the Areenians she had found and what was left of their crew to help her run her business. Some were running as pirates when she eventually found them. She performed the brother’s bond ceremony that stabilized Killian and David, and they gladly agreed to help her. They now specialized in recovery and salvage. Legal pirates Killian liked to say.

Regina spent time researching lost worlds and their treasures, artifacts, and ancient scrolls. She even pinpointed lost vessels for them to recover and restore to their original owners for a price. After three years of work they had made a name for themselves and now, rebuilding worlds contracted them to find what was lost, or to acquire something they needed. It was highly lucrative, and between them, David and Killian had built up enough credits and wealth to buy their own ship. They chose to remain with Regina as her crew because a few years ago, it stopped being a job and they had became a family.

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Regina tracked the disturbance to a hole-in-the-wall dive offering illegal alcohol, ethanol, and synthanol. The bar was full of seedy types, many that Regina recognized as barter pirates and slavers. Walking through the crowd, they moved out of her way, afraid to touch her. Finding a back door, she located the rental rooms and entered one without knocking.

“How did you get here?” she asked quietly.

The voice was low and came from the shadows, “A Tollerian trawler. I could feel the danger, so I took a shuttle and rewrote the manifest records to remove it from their inventory.”

“The Dark One is looking for you? Why?”

“He knows.”

Regina looked at the other Eminent One. “How?” *This was bad. Very Bad,* Regina thought.

“I don’t know. I swear, Regina. I don’t know.” Zelena hated to lie to her sister about this, in this moment when her life was in the balance, but she knew the truth would hurt.

Regina paced the room and then looked back at her sister. “I believe you.”

The woman emerged from the shadows, and Regina couldn’t hide her reaction. “Oh God! You’re sick!” She looked terrible. Zelena never looked terrible. Regina rushed to her side, and gathered her sister close. Her color was pale and her red hair dull. Even the green of her eyes was washed out.

“Not sick...poisoned.”

Regina moved her over and helped her on the tiny bed. “Who? Who would do this to one of us? Not the Dark One!”

“The same. He used Mescarlini, the poison of truth. I had no truth to give, but the poison remained.”

“How did you escape?” Regina joined Zelena on the bed, wiping her sister’s sweating face with a cloth.

“I’m still who I am. I stood up and walked out. Even the Dark One would not dare kill me at his own hand. This way is more insidious and sneaky.”

“Zelena, let me take you to my ship. *Enchanted* is in orbit. I can get you there in a short time. My healer, Graham, he is special...even for his kind. He has two hearts.”

“No, the path is settled, time stretches and my destiny breathes its own breath. This is not to pass.” Zelena looked at her. Regina. Her sister. They were joined by more than power, but denied ever having a close relationship because Eminent Ones were forbidden from forming such connections. They had been separated as children but defied convention by reconnecting and building a sibling relationship out of nothing.

“Zelena...” Regina’s voice was hushed with pain. “Please let me try?”

“No, the string of my existence is short. I see it unfurling.” Zelena reached up and gently wiped the lines of worry and sorrow from her face. “I fear him. I fear he will get what he wants,” Zelena mumbled. The Dark One’s brutal experiment. He wanted his own Eminent One. He wanted the genetics, and when all else failed he used science. With Zelena’s egg and the sperm of another Eminent One, he’d artificially created an offspring. A foundling. Regina warned him that the very
genetics that allowed her body to be altered made it impossible for her, and those like her, to reproduce without lethal consequences.

Zelena’s eyes pleaded with her sister. She knew Regina had been aware of the experiment and knew of its outcome. She could also see by the pain in Regina’s gaze that the product hadn’t lasted long. “How long?”

“Just shy of a cycle.” Regina felt the pain again that she had felt as she watched her niece die. She had been carried by a surrogate mother, born, and then died. Her lifespan was barely a year and then gone. She was born an Eminent One, and what the Dark One couldn’t understand or wouldn’t understand was that she was crushed by the energies of the universe, the screaming voices echoing in her small infant head. Those same voices rose as a large crashing rush in Regina’s head, but as an adult, she controlled them.

“She was beautiful,” Regina whispered with a shaky smile.

“Of course she was,” Zelena replied weakly, her energy waning quickly. “Did you absorb her power?”

“I have no wish for more power!” Regina spat out.

“I know. But Regina, the Dark One knows that there is only one way to create creatures such as we, that there is only one way to meld his own genetics into the Great Understanding...he is looking for her.”

Regina nodded, all too aware of what the Dark One wanted, but not understanding who the her was her sister was referring to. But still she said, “I believe when we are ready, her presence will be made known to me, to us.”

Zelena smiled, please her younger sister was on guard for what was inevitable, but then her joy turned to a racking cough. “You felt it?” she rasped. “You knew he would be looking?”

Regina nodded. “He knows what he needs, he’s just not sure it still exists. But that doesn’t stop him from searching.” Her genetics, and even Zelena’s, were already too dangerous to mess with, but there was one the Dark One could control the genetics of, if only he could find that race. When he thought there were none available, he tried to create his own with Zelena’s reproductive cells. Now he knew differently. He knew who or what he needed. Her existence was only a rumor but still he searched.

“What about…?” Zelena looked with concern at her sister.

“I have them. Almost half a cycle.” Regina understood without words what her sister was asking.

Zelena visibly deflated, happy they were safe. “Our mother has much to answer for.” She paused, her mind whirling with thoughts of what could have been if circumstances were different, if their mother hadn’t have reached too far for her daughters. “The Dark One gave me the poison to get me to divulge where they are.”

Regina frowned. “You did not know. No one does, but me.”

“I know. It became apparent to The Dark One, too. He let me go, but he was worried what my death means. He soon changed his mind and sent his troops. He’s afraid I would warn you.”

Regina gave a sly smile at that. Of course he was afraid she would warn her, and Zelena had done just that, held on until their paths could cross. Suddenly she was serious again. “Let me take you to
my ship. Let me try to save you.”

“I’m not sure I could make that journey,” Zelena sighed. She didn’t want to die, she wanted to continue, to see this war to the end she could feel was out there, just waiting for all the players to be in place to come to its inevitable end.

There was a gentle knock on the door and Regina’s body instantly went rigid as she opened her mind to sense who was on the other side.

“Relax, sister,” Zelena almost chuckled. “That’s just Robin. He’s the one who helped me to this planet, helped me meet you again.” She had searched for her and her ship for days, hoping to find them before it was too late.

Regina’s eyes were hard as the door opened and a tall, ruggedly handsome man entered the room. “Forgive me,” he said with a slight bow, “time is almost up.”

Zelena looked with intent at Regina. “I want Robin to go with you,” she said. “He has a few men with him. He had much to offer, Regina. He is a good man with a good heart.”

“I don’t…”

“M’Lady,” Robin interrupted whatever Regina was going to say as he stepped closer to Zelena. “My mission was to bring you here and then return you to Varin.”

“I don’t think I’ll make it,” Zelena wheezed, her breathing harsh as she pushed out her words.

“We have to try,” Robin insisted.

“Come aboard my ship,” Regina asked again. “We have the facilities to heal you.”

“No you don’t,” Zelena answered her. “What I need is in the Durant System. I’ve chartered passage there.”

“I can take you,” both Regina and Robin said before shooting accusing glances at each other.

“You are needed elsewhere,” Zelena said to Regina before turning to Robin. “And I need you with her. Please, both of you, trust me on this.”

“I choose. Not The Dark One,” Zelena continued. “I choose when my life is over and how. I will not allow him to dictate even a moment or aspect, and I will not allow my energy to be dispersed to a traitor. I will give it to you, so you are twice as strong as Cora. Use it to do good, to help those who might defeat the Dark One and bring balance back to this Universe.”

Regina’s face showed no expression at the mention of her mother’s name. “I don’t want your power; I want my sister. If you give this up, the chance of you surviving this poison is extremely limited.” Regina couldn’t comprehend what her sister was doing, was willing to give up.

“Our mother has broken me, Regina. You need to be strong to take it all, to be the one.”

Regina shook her head, refusing to acknowledge what her sister was saying, a tear sliding down her cheek.

“Regina, there is someone…I promised to meet. That is your task now…fail me not.”

“Zelena, please God, do not leave me!”
“M’Lady,” Robin interrupted the emotional sister. “Tuck will take you to the Durant System.”

“No,” Regina cried vehemently. “She’s coming with me.”

“Regina, I am already with you...and I will never leave. What I give you is a gift, my power.” Zelena clasped Regina’s hands, holding them as tightly as possible to stop Regina from pulling them away. Regina could hardly feel them. What she did feel was a tingling sensation as Zelena collected all her power, all her essence of being, and channeled it into Regina. When the transfer was complete, Zelena sagged against Regina’s side, her breathing labored.

“Get Tuck,” she demanded feebly of Robin. “It’s time.”

Robin flashed questioning eyes to Regina and at her slight nod, he dashed from the room.

“You must go to the Solymus System,” Zelena struggled to say. “There you will find the next step in the journey. It is important. You will also find the **Olympus**... the Ship of Cities with countless treasures. It was one of The Dark One’s collector ships, taken down. You can use it as a cover.”

“Zelena...”

“I will beat this. I won’t let mother and the Dark One win, but you have to let me go to do it,” Zelena whispered.

The door burst back open and Robin reentered with a large bulk of a man behind him.

“Tuck knows what to do,” Robin said quickly as the large man scooped Zelena from the bed.

“Let me know as soon as... anything happens,” Regina instructed, not wanting to entertain the fact her sister may not survive the space travel need to get to the Durant System.

“I will, M’Lady,” Tuck’s gruff voice assured her and then he was gone, sweeping out of the room with her sister in his arms.

“I guess I’m with you now, M’Lady,” Robin said as he turned back to her, a half smile pulling on his lips.

Regina sniffled, her emotions at losing her sister again almost too much, but she covered her feelings from this stranger before her by scrunching her nose. “You smell like forest,” were her words as she fled the room.

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Killian watched the transport making its way back to the **Enchanted**. The smaller runabout was a clean, fast transport ship, and Killian resisted the urge to run down and check it for scratches and markings. Regina had been gone almost a day, and about twelve hours previously, Killian came this close to taking another transport to go find the woman, or at least retrieve his runabout. But a sense of well-being hit him, so he backed off and waited.

David suddenly stood up. “Killian, take the Conn.” Without looking back, David left the Bridge. Killian frowned. Damn Eminent Ones! They always climbed in your brain and issued instructions. Killian sat down in David’s command chair and shared a look with the helm officer. He just shrugged. **Yeah, whatever.**

David met Regina in the open flight deck of the shuttle bay. The woman looked...haggard, but
somehow different. David stepped back from her as she joined his side. Her presence...it was powerful.

“This is Robin and some members of his team. They’ll be joining the crew.” Her voice was strong but weary and David bristled with agitation. They didn’t need more men on the crew, they worked well with what they had, and the more members, the less credits and treasure for the rest of them. He smiled wearily at his last thought, not surprised the voice he heard make that comment sounded remarkably like Killian. Instead, he simply nodded to the men. “Welcome,” he said, before waving over a member of the flight deck. “Take these men to the mess hall. I’ll meet you there to discuss work placement, and quarters.”

Robin nodded once, his eyes flicking between Regina and who was obviously the captain of this ship. Once the men had moved away, Regina turned to David again.

“I need you to take us to the Solymus System, maximum speed.” Regina said quietly. She started to walk away but David put out his hand and stopped her.

“What’s in the Solymus System?” David gripped Regina harder. The woman’s body was shaking, and the sensation of energy was racing under his hands.

“The Olympus,” she answered, her voice seeming to lose its strength. Regina refrained from telling David the real reason, that there was some mysterious person they were to meet there. She was too tired to explain, and the increase of body energy from Zelena was leaving her weak. She needed rest. Time to let her body absorb and balance to the new strength.

“The Ship of Cities?” David stood shocked. During the war, the Dark One had plundered and stolen numerous worlds’ private artifacts, relics, and crown jewels. He removed their immense wealth and stockpiled it on a huge freighter ship that never made its final destination. It had been helplessly caught in a battle between the Legion and the Royals, and barely made a jump through hyperspace to escape. Where it went down, no one knew. Except Regina, it appeared.

“The amount of credits...the wealth...” David was stunned almost into silence. The amount of salvage credits they could command to return so many worlds’ lost treasures was too staggering to comprehend.

“There will be no selling, only offers of gifts,” Regina ordered wearily. They would accept whatever a world could afford for their lost treasure from that ship, and whatever it was, it would be enough.

David stood still and looked at his boss, his partner, and his friend. After three years they had developed a quiet relationship and friendship. But this Regina was suddenly different from the woman who left to go down to Nassoz V.

“What? Regina...”

“We will return each and every treasure to their rightful owner. The spoils of war will not bloody us. Those worlds lost or destroyed, their treasures will stay here until I can make arrangements for them. Perhaps a museum or memoriam, in order that the identity of their people will not be lost to all time.”

David nodded. His own world’s treasure was there, stolen by the Dark One. His people were still enslaved under the Dark One’s rule, as was the known universe. They weren’t in a position to pay a large bounty to have their prized possessions returned just so the Dark One could come in and take them again.
Regina tapped David on the shoulder in a friendly fashion, and with affection. “Do not worry. We are picking up a new client as well. Prepare guest quarters with additional heaters if possible, and have Will convert the back hidden bay for the treasures that survived the crash of the *Olympus*. We will need to keep them hidden in case the Dark One’s people search the ship.”

David’s body stiffened, as did his face, the scar on his chin, a parting gift from his brother, James, appeared frighteningly stark in contrast to the rest of his skin. “They wouldn’t dare.”

“Oh, they would. The Dark One is seeing the end to his dream of a world cleansed of genetic impurities.”

“They wouldn’t touch the *Enchanted*. She is a protected ship, that of an Eminent One.”

Regina just shrugged as she and David walked towards her quarters. “New rules. The Dark One knows that I know what he seeks... that I hold some of what he needs. He will not stop until he achieves his goal.” Regina stumbled and David caught her.

“Regina?” David looked at her. She looked drained.

Regina just straightened herself and looked reassuringly at David. “I am fine. I need to sleep, to rest and let my body balance itself with the Universe.”

David frowned in concern.

“But, there is something you can do for me, David.”

David waited.

“Open up a new set of quarters on my deck, joined to my room and large enough for two to live comfortably. I need to remove my guests from my quarters for a while. I need to be alone.” Regina didn’t bother to mention that she needed to hide them even more than she already did.

“Your guests?” David’s curiosity got the better of him. Not servant or slaves?

Regina found the energy to smile at him. “Come with me.” She led David to her quarters.

Killian was going to be disappointed he missed the opportunity to actually see the inside of Regina’s quarters. And once inside, David knew that Killian was going to be more than just disappointed. He was going to be angry that the opportunity was missed. Women. Two to be exact, both equally beautiful.

“Regina!” They both said at once as they quickly went to Regina and hugged her. Then suddenly, they both seemed to become aware of David.

David stood still under their regard. Both women were beautiful, one tall with long, flowing brunette locks with a hint of red around the ends, the other shorter woman had a short, ebony pixie cut that framed her exquisite face perfectly. They both held a hint of mischief and a spark of stubbornness.

“David, my sisters, Ruby and Mary Margaret.”

The girls looked at him with open inquisitiveness as Regina indicated each of them. Ruby was the one with long hair, a smirk on her lips and a sense of wildness about her, while Mary Margaret looked serene, almost regal.
“Hardly sisters,” Ruby grunted.

“It’s complicated,” Mary Margaret offered to David in explanation. She turned back to Regina. “What is going on?” she asked quietly, searching Regina’s face for her sudden admittance to their existence.

“The Dark One knows you live,” Regina said to Mary Margaret.

Both girls stepped back in alarm. The Dark One. He was the monster under the bed, the story that parents told their children to make them behave. The Dark One wanted Mary Margaret for her ability to bear children; to be a genetic bridge of sorts. Regina had snatched her from Cora’s grip, from her mother who wished to destroy the girl. The personal cost Regina had paid was immeasurable, and both knew if she were handed over to the Dark One, her life would end. Mary Margaret had refused to go anywhere without Ruby, her life-long friend and confidant.

“How?” Ruby’s tone was angry almost in a snarl. “How can that be? Our incredibly smart ‘sister’ removed all traces of our very existence. How can he know?”

“Cora.” Regina said the name simply and with hatred.

Mary Margaret’s whole body did a shake. “Cora?” she asked unbelieving. She looked at Regina with pity and fear. Cora had done everything to propel her daughters into greatness, and somewhat created what stood before them now out of her own ambition. She knew how much Regina mourned that her mother wanted power more than she wanted her daughters.

“That bitch. She hated us, all of us,” Ruby spat out.

“Zelena is deathly ill,” Regina continued, well used to Ruby’s outbursts about her mother. “The Dark One tried to kill her with poison. Mescarlini, the drug of truth. She came to warn us. Cora told him everything…”

“How could she,” Mary Margaret whispered. The woman she had at one time looked at as almost a mother figure, had betrayed them all. All in the name of wanting more.

“Zelena passed her power onto me,” Regina said. “She’s not sure she’ll survive. She’s gone searching for the cure.”

“Is there a cure?” David asked, inserting himself into the conversation.

“I certainly hope so,” Regina answered weakly. She turned back to the two girls. “This is David, the Captain of the Enchanted.” The three passed pleasant nods in greeting before Regina continued. “Get their quarters ready. I need to be alone.”

David nodded and left the room. Mary Margaret watched him leave before turning back to Regina. Six months ago she had taken them from a protected world onto the Enchanted so she could have them near. After the Dark One slowly killed all blood-relatives of the known Eminent Ones, Mary Margaret and Ruby had been sent to this special world with a cloaking field, and there they lived in exile for over ten years through the war. Their only contact had been other Eminent Ones.

“Go pack,” Regina instructed. “Your quarters will still be connected to mine, but I need to raise a special field around it in case we are boarded and searched.” The field would serve as a cloaking system to remove the patterns of life. She walked away and stood looking out at the stars with her hands clasped behind her back.

“Regina, I’m sorry about...” Mary Margaret interrupted Ruby with a shake of her head. Now
wasn’t the time. Regina’s body was glowing, resonating sorrow. She was barely controlling it and Mary Margaret was well aware of how much Regina hated to show her emotions to others, no matter how close they may be.

“Let’s go pack,” Mary Margaret smiled slightly. “Think, Red, we finally get a change of scenery! We need to decorate.”

Ruby nodded and went to go pack her belongings. Mary Margaret turned back to Regina and sighed. She wanted so much to console her, to tell her Zelena would be fine. Regina’s sister had bounced out of almost dire situations; way too many to count. She just hoped history would repeat itself again. For Regina. She had lost too much.

Mary Margaret went to her and hugged her from behind, resting her head on her shoulder. Suddenly Regina turned and swept her up in a full hug, and Mary Margaret felt the shaking of her body. Her beautiful face became marred in a frown as she felt Regina’s raw power vibrating against her.

After a beat, Regina pulled away. Mary Margaret stood uncertain whether to stay or go, but Regina looked remote, too far away to touch. Mary Margaret quickly squeezed her shoulders and then left the room.

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Chapter Notes

Thanks for the comment and the kudos. Don't be shy, let me know what you think. Thanks, again, to ultraluckycatnd for her constant hard work on whipping this into shape for all you lovelies.

Chapter 3 - Convergence

“The Solymus System? Dammit, David, that system was decimated by the war! Nothing grows or lives there anymore. It wasn’t blown into non-existence, but it should’ve been.”

David just nodded at Killian’s words. He remembered the day when the Dark One blew holes into the helicon layer of that system’s sun. It created negative helium wells and hydrogen leaked from the star’s field, dampening its energy and progressing it thousands of eons forward towards its death. All the outer planets lost the necessary elements for survival, and became large ice planets unable to sustain life. Soon, the closer planets cooled, too, changing their entire ecosystems. Mass death of species occurred. The sun would be dead in another hundred some years. The only planet that could hold life was the closest to the dying sun, and even there, half the year its slow rotation made it hard for the world to sustain life during its winters.

“We’ll plot the course and lay it steady to helm. Looks like we have a meeting with destiny in the dead Solymus System,” David relayed to the people gathered before him on the Bridge.

The rest of the crew looked at their captain, then quickly went back to work. David wasn’t one to explain everything he did to every member of his crew. He only required they follow his orders without question and to do their jobs. In return, he protected them fiercely, refusing to abandon or leave any of them behind.

The only one who challenged the captain was his First Officer, Killian. But even then, Killian was unwavering in his loyalty to his captain, a captaincy once offered to him which he had refused. David depended on Killian’s sheer stubbornness to keep them all alive, and in the years they had stood side-by-side, Killian never let him down.

“Fix the extra staterooms,” David continued. “The guest we’re looking for in the Solymus System needs a large set of rooms, and Regina wants extra heating power to the suite turned on, plus the replicators.”

All eyes turned to David suddenly. The Enchanted was a large armory battleship, renovated to gut her lower decks for cargo and salvage. Her landing bays had been altered, increasing them by almost double her regular compliment. To keep the running speeds as high as possible, half the ship was shut off until needed. All crew members shared tight quarters, including the Captain who shared his quarters with his new brother. Replicators were voted an unnecessary expenditure of energy and were used almost exclusively in Sick Bay or when an emergency occurred.

The very fact David wanted the replicators switched on in this new suite meant one thing. This
guest was special.

“And the extra staterooms connected to Regina’s?” Killian asked curiously.

“They’re to be duplicated to Regina’s stateroom in all regards.” David nodded to his helmsman.
“You have the Conn.” Looking at Killian, he motioned for him to follow him out of the Bridge.

“David?” Killian’s face wore an expression of sheer puzzlement as he followed David off the Bridge.

“Sisters. They are Regina’s sisters. At least that’s who she says they are. I feel there is a tale there, though. I’m not sure if they will finally join the crew in the mess, or whether they will continue to remain isolated. But, Killian...” David waited until Killian stopped skipping next to him. “Don’t make a fool of yourself over them. Regina might not appreciate it too much having you mooning over, and after, her sisters.”

Killian frowned, a look of indignation on his face. “Hey! Mate! I’m not that bad.”

David just rolled his eyes. Yeah, yeah he was. Being born cousins, and through death being carved into brothers, he’d known Killian his entire life. He knew being left unbonded and footloose made Killian very isolated, and he craved affection, a bond. The only bonds he was able to make tended to be sexual, and with all the time they spent in space moving from one job to another, even those were too few and far between. David tempered how soon he needed to stop for shore leave and time off for his crew by Killian’s bad attitude and hyped-up horniness.

The only other person worse than Killian was Will. Sometimes they were neck and neck in the race to get laid, but one truth remained. In a real race between them with only one possible unattached female, Graham usually snuck in with his shy smile and took the prize. They couldn’t beat Mr. Empathy with his two solid hearts exuding charm and wit. Killian couldn’t seem to understand why pointing at his dick and wiggling his eyebrows suggestively didn’t bring women running.

They entered main engineering and David spotted his Chief Engineer immediately. Will. He was a man’s man. His entire department hung on his every order and command, and David suspected it was because more than half of them owed Will their entire credits for five years lost in poker games. Will never collected. He just liked to win.

“Will.”

“Cap, got the specs you asked for. The new open quarters are going to be a problem. I don’t have the heaters needed, and the replicator can’t give me a unit big enough to heat the forward compartment. Best I can do is leave it at an even day temperature, and not drop it at night with the other units. The heaters will compensate, but not by much.”

David nodded. At night, the Enchanted’s normal operating systems were powered down, and it was a cold sleep. It conserved energy and allowed their power systems to cycle through self-diagnostics with just a skeleton crew watching them.

Killian frowned looking at the panel of schematics. “Couldn’t you reroute the power relays and take it off the main junction, giving the rooms their own internal controls?”

“Looked into that. It would take rewiring three decks and two subdecks. I can’t splinter the junction except at a power node. We moved them all around when we created the new landing bays and storage areas. Best I could do is a reroute from hydroponics, but they are pushing power quota already on the fresh food supplies, and decreasing their power would threaten the plants.”
David shook his head. They couldn't risk their fresh food gardens. The crew had voted for cramped living quarters and low energy heating at night to allow for the internal gardens that fed them fresh vegetables. The only other option would have been to live off replicated food, and even that was a costly energy use.

“I don’t know who the guest is, but do what you can. Next main port, try to find us some individual space heaters. They’ll just have to cope until then.”

“Aye, Cap.” Will looked at Killian and David. “Can I borrow the broody one for some help? I’ve got three coolant leaks, and the third deck landing bay is down. I could use some extra help.”

David nodded. “Yeah, keep him. The busier the better, otherwise he’d be outside the new stateroom embarrassing me to hell and back.”

“Hey! Mate!” Killian resented that. Though he already planned to take flowers by just as a warming present. Nothing more. Maybe. Just a look-see.

Will laughed and watched David disappear from the room. Hooking his friend and partner in crime’s arm, he demanded the real scoop. “What’s up?”

“Regina’s been hiding girls!”

“Girls...as in more than one?” Laughing, Will led Killian off with him to check on the down landing bay.

“Put it back in your pants, short-eyes. They’re her sisters or something.”


Killian had to agree. Messing with sisters was taboo, unless it was leading somewhere. They were Areenians, so breeding outside their race was unheard of, so that just left sexual alliances and quick relationships, but nothing permanent. Despite David’s worries, Killian wasn’t planning on moving into the women’s rooms with charm blazing, and birth control in hand, not that birth control would work. He respected Regina too much for that. He just wanted to look. His spank bank reserves were low, and this looked like potential material.

“So, what do they look like? Are they all Eminent like Regina?” Will probed. “Because her regalness is pretty up there on the hotness scale.”

Killian just shrugged, taking a diagnostic tool from him and scanning the bay’s internal sensors. “No clue, mate. All Dave said was they’re beautiful.”

“Beautiful?”

“Yeah. I hear one had long brown hair.”

Will smiled big. “Damn, I’m already in love! Remember that last bay whore I tangled in the sheets with?”

“The one with the third boob, and green dreadlocks?” Killian asked with a sneer.

“Yeah.”

“Scary,” Killian added, grimacing.

Will just laughed. “I’m saying...”
David rolled over at the sound of his bedside com system calling him. Killian just grunted from his side of the room, and turned in his bunk to cover his head with his pillow.

“We’ve entered the Solymus System, Sir.”

David acknowledged. “On my way.” He sat up on the side of the bed and rubbed his face, fingering the scar in his chin. Standing, he quickly went into the bathroom and washed his face to wake himself.

“Come on, Jones! Wake up. We’ve gotta go.” Killian just grunted and refused to move.

“I know you’re awake,” David persisted.

“No you don’t, brother. Definitely asleep here.”

David just laughed at Killian, that feeling building within him whenever Killian called him brother. It was a habit they had both slipped into. They had started life as cousin but now the bond they shared because of Liam’s heart made them brothers in every sense. As always, Killian always clung to bed as long as possible, and when awake, he tried to stay awake as long as possible. He was the walking example of inertia. When at rest, he remained at rest, and when in motion, he stayed in motion.

“Suit yourself. I understand Regina is bringing her sisters with her to look at the system,” David goaded with a sly smirk. He chuckled under his breath when Killian was suddenly at his right arm following him to the Bridge, still pushing one leg into his worn, leather pants. The night crew was still running normal operating systems, and the Bridge officer ordered all day Bridge functions online when David and Killian entered the Bridge.

“Captain and Commander on deck.”

Killian just smirked at that. He pulled some night shifts. Supposedly, it was the turning of command to the Captain by announcing his arrival, and it also sounded official, but actually it was a way to remind the crew that they needed to be on alert. Time to put away the reading material, and the cards.

David took his chair, Killian took his security and armory station, checking his sensors and his weapons. Moving his sensors to maximum, Killian scanned for Olympus’ remains. The downed freighter had never sent out a distress or homing beacon, but its warp core should be generating a signature radioactive field even now, years after it went down.

“I got it, Cap,” Killian said, double checking his sensors. Thank God. First planet. He hadn’t been looking forward to a salvage operation on a dead ice planet.

“First planet? Tell me it’s the first planet,” David said with hope.

“It is.”

David mumbled thanks under his breath to that which was holy. He hated ice salvage as much as Killian. They had salvaged materials from asteroids and space anomalies in the past, and the salvage was always fraught with perils.

“Aye, we got lucky, but just. Linius I is just now passing into its winter orbital. We’re catching it before it becomes harsh and brutal. It will still be a cold son-of-a-bitch, or at least cold enough to
pearl the nipples on a large breasted wench.”

Regina entered the Bridge. “Always a way with words, Killian.”

Killian just snorted. “Aye, took top marks for it in school. My instructor’s comments were always about how descriptive I was.”

Regina laughed. “I’m sure.” Looking at the system they were entering, Regina turned to talk to David. “How long, David?”

“We’re twelve clicks on the outside. Running speed is half impulse.” David turned in his chair as Regina took her favorite seat equipped with scanners and science sensors.

Killian looked up from his sensors and systems to notice that Regina was alone. No girls. Meeting his evil brother’s eyes, Killian just glared. Lying bastard. David turned his seat around with a smirk, almost hearing Killian words through the brother’s bond in his mind.

Regina watched as they slowly moved through the dead system, scanning for lifeforms and the wreckage. As they came upon the first planet, she felt it. The entire view screen seemed suddenly to increase in intensity, and the world seemed to bleed into a blackness that was too brilliant to behold. Regina knew she was the only one on board to feel this, and she was impressed. It wasn’t any one she knew who created this illusion, but the generating energy and power of their new guest was extremely impressive for a non-Eminent.

“Captain, I’ve got a lifeform.” David turned to look at his front helmsman and nodded. Both Killian and Regina quickly rechecked their sensors and found the same energy signature.

Killian swore under his breath and then aloud. “The lifeform is at the wreckage.”

The entire Bridge sighed with disappointment. They were awarded credits based on their position in the crew, with bonuses if they were on shift at the time of acquisition. This was big. But rules were rules and in salvage, the first rule was finders-keepers. The first person to locate a wreck was the owner, and this wreckage had an owner since the person below already found it. The Ship of Cities had just passed right out of their hands.

“That’s our new passenger. I need a scanning team, engineer, and medical in case our guest needs medical treatment,” Regina ordered before she noticed the dejected crew members. “Rest easy. This person is our newest client. The job is a big one with many rewards, and with owning the wreckage to the Ship of Cities, they can afford our asking price.” Regina only hoped what she said was true. She had no idea who, or what, they were going to encounter down on that planet. She headed for the door, ignoring the suddenly bright faces of the working crew. David motioned for Killian to go with Regina, as he called for other crew members for the landing party, including Graham and Will.

“Archie, scan the surrounding stars with sensors on maximum spread. I want to know if we’ve got company.”

“Aye, Cap.”

David pushed his communication link. “Killian, I want your men on full com. No one is to wander off field more than a ten haul.”

“Aye, Cap.” Killian looked at his assembling team. David was right. Pirates and space dogs monitored salvage ships like the *Enchanted*, following them to possible huge rewards and then attacking, trying to relieve the rightful owners to the salvage of their haul. He knew this all too well
as, at one time, it had been them who were the pirates and space dogs. David didn’t want to lose anyone, so he ordered them within an easy distance of their transport. The scanning party would map the wreckage site, check for radiation leaks, and secure the area for recovery teams. Killian took his pilot seat and prepped the engines for space drop, his co-pilot, Jefferson, settling into his chair beside him.

“Let’s do this clean, Jeff.” The man next to Killian just nodded and chuckled. After three years in Killian’s presence and right hand of his runabout, *Jolly Roger*, he never knew them to do anything clean. Killian looked into the back deck as the loading doors were secured, and he was given the high sign of all secured. Killian laughed and punched it. He loved the feel of power and control of the ship under his hands.

“Right, Killian. Frosty and clean. She’s parvo on the left, and I’ve got shakes and shimmies to the right,” Jefferson said, checking his sensors. “She’s already icing in the higher stratosphere.” Killian just nodded, swearing. It was going to be cold.

“We’ve got gimbal lock,” Killian called out, looking back at the strapped in crew. “Hold on tight, boys, this is going to be a shaky ride. We’re riding an ice storm in.”

Graham pulled his seat strap tight, and looked over at Will. The man was asleep. Reaching over, Graham pulled his friend’s belt tight, and pulled out some special gum for nausea. The damn shaking took out his stomach every time. It wasn’t his stomach. It was everyone around him fighting the motion sickness. Taking a piece, he passed it to his right, and then left around Will. He didn’t bother to wake Will. The man had a cast-iron stomach. The only thing that ever bothered Will was losing a hand of poker while holding a straight flush, three tiers high.

Graham nodded to the new man on the salvage crew, a man who had joined the *Enchanted* at the request of Regina. Robin, so far, had kept to himself. He and his men preferring to socialize among themselves then fully integrate into the crew.

As the ship began to bounce with the pressure of the entry, Graham and the others reached up and grabbed the hanging straps to steady themselves, just as the runabout turned sharply to the side. Ignoring Killian’s cursing as an indication of their situation, they closed their eyes and rode it out.

“Do all salvages go like this?” Robin asked Graham, trying to make conversation to ignore the feeling of sudden death that rose within him.

“Only the exciting ones,” Graham grinned back.

“Jeff, what have we got on the right airlifts? This crate is shaking loose,” Killian bellowed.

“Injectors are frozen. I can’t move them. We’re a floating can,” Jefferson rushed out checking his systems, and pressing hard on the emergency release. No response. “Um, Jones, this tub’s going to crash.” Killian just smiled and shook his head no. Jefferson looked at him sharply as the man started humming under his breath with a smile on his face. Crazy bastard.

“It will be a hard landing, but we’ll make it easy.” Killian called out orders as he navigated around a rising wall of ice. They punctured the lower atmosphere straight into the eye of an ice storm. Killian checked his console and beacon markers. They were almost over the site.

“Balls to the walls, boys! We’re hitting turf hard.”

Killian watched the field of ice coming up fast. The surface was closing in less than 200 meters when the cross winds hit them. Pulling back, he compensated, hitting the ice shell and cracking it
at an angle as the runabout hit the full tarmac created by the original landing of the *Olympus*. They were down, but forward momentum was too great, and they slid forward.

Jefferson cursed and assumed the crash position as piles of debris were coming closer. They finally stopped, mere inches from the *Olympus*. Jefferson opened one eye as he clenched and swore, waiting for the grating noise of metal on metal that never came. It was Killian’s slap to his shoulder that got him moving.

“Come on, suit up in environmental gear. We haven’t all day to let you sleep.” Killian got out of his seat and moved out of the cockpit into the forward compartment, a wide grin on his face. *Now that was fun.*

He called out orders as he moved down the aisle through the men. “Full environmentals. It’s cold out there. Jeff, de-ice the lifters, and check the heating grid. Full heat to keep her from freezing. I want an upward punch-out. Check the power coupling on number six. It got a red bus light on the way down. Pull and replace.”

Graham checked his external monitors. “Killian, there’s a lot of nitrogen in the mix. We may need to use breathing units as well.”

“You heard the doc, suit ‘em up,” and he tossed a unit to Robin while grinned at Graham. “Just as well. Breathing the cold air straight could freeze our lungs to hell and back. Where’s Regina?”

“Here.” Regina came out of the back compartment. “I have a full section of intact hull three meters over, semi-buried in ice. I have two possible entries. Bring fire sticks. They’ll burn in nitrogen-rich atmospheres. Light a path for at least six hours.” Regina read her hand unit. “There’s another ship, lightweight and functioning, about twenty off our aft bow.”

“Your friend?” Killian grabbed an extra weapon and strapped it low on his leg next to his usual pulsar handgun.

Regina settled for a moment, closing her eyes and concentrating on the space around the downed *Olympus*, and then nodded. “Yes. But they don’t know who we are, so be prepared for conflict. Approach with caution. I am getting a life reading, but it is weak.”

“How long were they waiting?” Robin asked, looking at the concerned look on her face.

Regina just shrugged. “No idea. Let’s go.”

Killian moved to the hatch, hitting the release and the door hissed opened. Regina looked back to make sure Graham was coming, worried they would need him for their client. When she turned back, she was stunned to find Robin out on the ground, his hand held out to help her from the craft. She scowled at him and jump down herself. Will whistled a tune as he packed his gear. He would’ve stayed with the runabout if there was any real damage since transport out was the most important, but they needed him to possibly power up remaining systems on the *Olympus*.

Thankfully, they were close to the large hull of the once great *Olympus*. Connecting a support line to the side of the runabout, Killian moved towards the ship with his men coming out and attaching to the line. The outside area was white everywhere. The blowing winds and ice was making visibility almost zero. Reaching the entrance, he cursed when he noticed the hatch was frozen shut. Using a small explosive charge, he blew it as the rest caught up with him. Attaching the support line to an inner structure, Killian unhooked his safety attachment and entered the structure.

It was dark and cold, with the sound of creaking metal bending under the weight of the ice and
wind. Killian reached into his side pocket and pulled out a fire stick and, striking it along his leg, he dropped it on the ground as the others followed him and spread out.

“Graham, how many life signs?”

Graham looked at his monitor confused. “A lot, but the only one reading humanoid is in front of us about three stations in.”

They continued along the abandoned corridors that were steep and slanting at an alarming rate.

“Will, hook us up a lead line. The corridor floor is slick with ice.” Will nodded, and they slowly continued down the corridor that almost had a forty-five-degree angling slope. They stopped when they came to a cross corridor.

“Killian, I think Main Engineering is to the right, and the War Bridge to the left.” Killian nodded at Will. He would know. He studied the ship as soon as they knew they would be salvaging it.

“Take Engineering, and I’ll take the Bridge. See if any of the onboard systems still work. Keep an eye out for our guest.”

“Aye, Commander.” Will motioned for half the men to follow him. Graham stood sweeping the decks for life signs. “Killian, the extra life signals are below us. There are many, and they’re moving fast.”

Regina came up to them. “I think they are sea creatures.”

Killian, Graham, and Robin looked at Regina with looks of inquiry.

“Sea creatures?” Robin’s voice sounded doubtful.

“The ship hit the surface at an angle. It’s embedded in the ice. It must have hit an underground river, and the lower decks are flooded. Over the years, the natural sea creatures would have taken over the corridors and decks as part of their world,” Regina explained with irritation.

Killian swore. “Great, there goes part of the salvage.”

Graham just shrugged. “It’s not like it was ours anyway.”

“Aye, but that small ship isn’t going to be able to haul much, and they might have made a deal to help with the transport of the rest.” Graham acknowledged the truth to Killian’s words. Credits. Killian and Will both understood money and bartering. It’s what kept them all alive over the last six years since the war ended.

They found the Bridge and all stood silent. Half of it was flooded, and the other half showed a blown-out deck where ice and wind were entering. Backing up, Killian sealed the door to keep the cold from seeping too far into the rest of the remaining ship. Moving back along a parallel corridor, they searched room upon room. Three rooms into it, they began to find storage bins with treasure, all of them carefully labeled.

Will’s voice came over the com link, around the same time weapons firing could be heard from the other end of the ship. “Killian! We’ve found our guest. They’re not happy! I’ve got three men down. I need Graham, and some help would be nice!”

Killian and the others turned and ran towards the corridor Will and his men took. Along the way, they split up into parallel corridors to approach Main Engineering from two ways. Regina took
half, with Graham and Robin, and Killian took the rest.

Killian’s corridor was shortened by flood waters. Sending his men to alternate corridors, Killian knew that Engineering was on the other side of the wide expanse across the flooded waters. He could hear shouting voices and weapons discharging. Taking his weapon in hand, he waded through the icy waters toward the main doors to Engineering, cursing at the icy water. Along the way, he could feel things in the water brushing up against him. A large side swipe almost knocked him off his feet as another one pushed him from the side.

“What the fuck!” Stepping fast, he quickly waded through waters almost over his chest. Shivering and shaking, he came to the doors. Jammed. It was the movement of water that had him looking back. He could see something large approaching him fast in the water. Taking his weapon, he fired point blank at the creature. It diverted away. Quickly reaching into his pack, Killian pulled out a set of electro-magnetic handles and attached them to the metal doors. Using all his might, he pried the doors open, trying to hurry. He could feel the swell of the water, the movement of it as the creature made another run. Wedging his body between the semi-opened doors, he turned and shot at the creature again, but not before it butted him through the doors and under the water.

The first thing Killian saw was what appeared to be a blackened object. It took mere seconds for him to realize he was looking down the mouth of a large sea creature ready to engulf him. Kicking backwards, he took his pulsar handgun and fired numerous rounds into the mouth of the monster. Pushing upward in the water, he headed for the surface as other sea creatures, large and small, swarmed to the now dead creature and ripped it to shreds.

Killian surfaced in Main Engineering in the flooded areas. Heading for the edges of the water, he rushed out of the water behind a main bulkhead. Looking at the situation, he scanned for their guest. The dark figure was up and to the right of his position keeping the others pinned. Moving slowly as possible, mostly because his entire body was frozen solid, he came up behind the figure and grabbed it in a stronghold. The smaller body wiggled, and reached back to grab him between his legs and, with strong hands, squeezed.

“Son of a bitch!” Killian almost doubled over from the gripping pain. He released his captive, but not before the body grabbed him again and he felt himself being tossed over a shoulder. His brain ignored the flip, and reached for his other weapon strapped low on his leg. His other hand reached out to grab a leg and sweep his assailant off their feet at the same time.

His body hit the floor hard with an umphing sound as the air in his lungs was knocked from their depths. The full weight of his attacker hit him in his midriff, once again knocking his balls up his throat. Ignoring the pain, his watering eyes cleared enough to see a pulse laser handgun in his face, the exact same place his gun was in the unknown guest’s. They lay upon each other in a standoff, each with a finger on the triggering mechanism of their weapons.

“Killian! No!” Regina rushed forward. “Both of you! Hold it.” Regina turned and addressed the dark clothed figure in a helmet with black visor. “The Eminent One, Zelena, sent us!”

The dark figure, once coiled firm and ready to fight, moved its knees to straddle Killian’s form, not once taking the weapon from his face. It looked up at Regina quickly and noticed the obvious look of an Eminent One. Slowly, it moved its firing finger from the trigger of the gun and moved off Killian, backing up for safety, but not putting away its gun, just retreating a safer distance. Reaching up, it unfastened and removed its helmet.

Killian watched as a flood of damp hair was released from the helmet. It was damp and blonde, clinging to the face and jaw line of a beautiful green-eyed woman. Killian’s body responded immediately despite the cold, and the flooding of his blood into his groin reminded him that he had
taken two major hits to his balls and penis. Groaning, he moved to the side and rolled over, still gasping for breath. Son-of-a-green-eyed bitch.

“You’re not the One.” Her voice was sultry and husky, almost smoky and rich with tones deep and breathless.

Regina advanced slowly, her hands held out. “No. You were expecting my sister, Zelena. She sent me in her place.”

The woman frowned, ignoring the man she had fought, and slowly stood up, holding onto a bulkhead for balance.

“She wouldn’t do that. Not unless...”

“Zelena is desperately ill, fighting off the effects of Mescarlini poisoning and searching for a cure. I am...”

“Regina. If you're Zelena’s sister, then you would be Regina.” The woman nodded. She holstered her weapon, and with her teeth, pulled off her gloves. Moving to Regina, she stepped over Killian and held out her hand.

“Emma.”

~°~
Chapter Notes

Thanks for the kudos and the comments. I appreciate them so much. It gives me a boost to know there are some people out there who are enjoying what I write.

Thanks again to ultraluckycatnd for her taking this epic tale on and being the beta to my crazy mind. You're awesome my friend.

Hope you enjoy this chapter. Also posted on FFN and Tumblr

**Chapter 4 - A Journey starts with a single step.**

Regina took the woman’s hand and shook it. Looking deep into her eyes, she searched for the reason she had been unable to mentally reach her to tell her they were friends. The woman before her was definitely an enigma. “I am sorry we’re late. Zelena is deathly ill, so she searched for me and sent me to help you.”

Emma looked at the stately figure before her. Her aura was certainly powerful, tinged in regal purple and glowing in a way that only an Eminent One's aura would glow. She recognized her immediately for what she was. Her full lips and powerful dark eyes were offset by her obsidian hair that curled at her shoulders. All in all, she was a beautiful, exotic woman with a gleam in her eyes that spoke of power with a hint of playfulness. Zelena had that same twinkle. For a moment, Emma lowered her head, her heart mourning to hear her friend was ill, but something moved along the fringes of her own perception. Zelena? Before she could speak, the man at her feet made a noise. A groan.

“Aye, marvelous. Everyone just ignore me! I’m only lying here in pain and freezing my bloody arse off,” Killian coughed out.

Emma crouched down next to the man she had tossed and almost killed. “You okay? They still in your throat?” she smirked, unable to keep the amusement from her voice.

Killian’s blue eyes narrowed and he reached for his gun again.

“Whoa there, partner. Let me look at you,” Graham quickly said, interceding before Killian decided to shoot the young woman. Graham tsked at him as he got closer. “Killian, no shooting the client.”

Killian growled low in his throat and lay back.

Their client sat down on the ground next to him, her body beginning to shake, and Killian finally registered her wet hair. Looking at her critically, he noticed the perfect whiteness of her skin had a bluish tinge to it. “You were in the water as well?” At Killian’s question, Regina immediately turned to look at the woman and watched as she nodded.

*So, he wasn’t just a stupid enforcer with a blaster,* Emma thought as she struggled to stopped the
shiver that threatened to run through her. The man had some brains, and probably even used them from time to time when his body wasn’t trying to combat the pain of a crushed set of male genitalia. She studied him, appreciating his muscular build. She had never heard him move up behind her. Actually, she missed him telegraphing his intent or presence. That hadn’t happened in a long time. He had ink black hair and a day or two’s worth of stubble, but it was the striking depths of his incredibly blue eyes that held her attention. He looked all rugged and strong, but his features had a continuity about them; a belonging. There was a faint scar below his right eye and his lips were full, soft, and totally kissable. When his tongue came out to poke at his lips, very aware of her regard, she felt responsiveness run down her body. Men weren’t supposed to look like tough angels.

He squirmed under her gaze and then cursed his reaction. “Hey, I said...”

“Yes.” Emma was shocked at her husky-sounding voice. Clearing her throat, she spoke more firmly. “Yes, I was in the water. All the lower decks are flooded.” Without her helmet to close the unit of her thermal suit, she was starting to adapt to the surrounding cold. Her body temperature was dropping fast.

Graham looked at the woman and frowned. Quickly giving Killian a neural block in his lower spine to deaden the pain in his groin, Graham turned his sensors on Emma. “Your core body temperature is dropping fast,” he gasped with concern. “How long were you in the water?”

Killian frowned as her small body began to shiver and shake at an alarming rate.

“Yes.” Emma was shocked at her husky-sounding voice. Clearing her throat, she spoke more firmly. “Yes, I was in the water. All the lower decks are flooded.” Without her helmet to close the unit of her thermal suit, she was starting to adapt to the surrounding cold. Her body temperature was dropping fast.

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Killian frowned as her small body began to shiver and shake at an alarming rate.

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“Too long. It took me three trips to find what I was looking for and I still missed one.”

Loudly, Will stumbled into the room, Robin following him with a curious expression on his face. Giving Killian an amused look, Will dropped a load of manuscripts at the woman’s feet. They were all in protective casings.

“Those are mine!” she growled out through chattering teeth, a trembling hand reaching out to grasp the case closest to her.


Emma looked at the man in irritation. He had touched her property! Steeling herself and swallowing her natural instinct to beat him upside the head, she tried to quell the rising coldness of her body and the internal shakes. Fuck. Her systems were starting to shut down.

When the casing dropped from her weakening grip, Graham made another sound of distress. She was sinking fast. They needed to warm her up. This was more than hypothermia. “I need to get her back to the Jolly and then to the Enchanted. Her temperature is dropping fast. Warm saline bath and heaters. I don’t get this. It’s not hypothermia.”

Emma ignored Graham and looked at Regina. “I need that last manuscript. It’s essential. This job is a search for three missing gems of immeasurable importance, then one last task to neutralize the imbalance of power and restore the natural order. I need that manuscript.”

“Love, you’re not getting it,” Killian said sharply with a quick shake of his head.

She turned to look at him. “I...”

He cut her off. “No one! Not one of my men is risking their life in that freezing water, and definitely not with those creatures.”
Emma turned back to Regina. “Everything else on this ship is yours as payment. There are thirty-seven unflooded cargo holds, each with treasures unimaginable, all packed and waiting to be taken.” Her speech was stunted as her body shook with the cold, but she managed a weak smile when Will made a squeak of delight.

Killian scowled as he took out his com link. “Command.”

“Go, Killian. What’s the situation?” David’s voice was quick and to the point.

“We’ve found our newest client and the area is secure. Send down as many recovery teams as possible. We need a warming unit from Sickbay and a full size bed. Have them bring it down and install it in the back compartment of my runabout.” Killian looked at Graham who nodded. That should work. “Tell them to be careful of the cross chop coming in. They’ll be riding an ice storm all the way and lifters freeze on the drop, so coat them in liquid heat before starting.”

“They’re on their way,” David acknowledged and Killian could hear him giving orders.

“What’s the field look like?” Killian asked, his gaze flicking up to Regina. He had a suspicion if anything was approaching, Regina would know, but it didn’t hurt to double check.

David’s voice came back. “The system is clear, so we still have time. Let’s clear the salvage and chalk up some distance from this dead system.”

“Agreed.” Killian turned off the com and tucked it back in his pocket before turning to Graham who was tending to their new client. Her body was shaking so much he could almost feel the shivers from where he was lying. She was next to him, gasping for breath, as her skin turned even bluer.

“They’re bringing a warming bed,” Killian said, looking at her with concern.

“She’s dropping too fast. I don’t get it!” Graham muttered as he continued to monitor her, giving her a shot of adrenaline to speed up her metabolism, thereby generating more heat.

Regina was looking at Emma’s manuscripts, frowning. Will took off to organize the crews into starting the recovery process, leaving Robin, who was still unsure about his position within this group, behind.

“I need that last manuscript,” Emma said through chattering teeth.

“I said no!” Killian shot back. They sat facing each other, both refusing to back down. Emma flicked her eyes down and looked at the oxygen supply of her environmental converter around her neck. She just barely had enough. Looking at him again, she shrugged. Grabbing his face, she leaned in and stared him in the eye. “I have a feeling you’re going to be a handful.”

She was suddenly up on her feet, and Killian didn’t register she was stepping out of her protective suit until she stood there in a flimsy white thermal body stocking that clung to her body. In a flash, she picked up her weapon, fit the breathing apparatus into her mouth, ran, and dived into the cold water.

“Son-of-a-bitch!” Killian struggled to his feet, combating the nerve block Graham had given him which was making his legs feel like rubber, prickling with tiny nerve endings. He quickly removed his bulkier outer clothing as Graham injected him with adrenaline to speed up his body's metabolism. Regina quickly attached a ripcord to Killian’s body as he hurried to follow their disappearing client.
“Killian!” He turned back to Graham just as Graham tossed him his forgotten weapon. Killian adjusted his own breathing apparatus, and dived in after her.

The lower decks were strangely dark, but iridescent from some unknown source. Going through the only possible access port from Engineering, he came out in the corridor of a lower deck. With no idea where she had gone, he kept watch for large moving objects. It took him almost a full deck of storage rooms to find her. She was in the second to last room, struggling to remove another protected manuscript that was jammed.

Sensing the movement of water, she suddenly turned, aiming her weapon at him until she realized it was him and not a sea creature. He moved her aside and struggled to remove the bloody manuscript. Looking at her, he was shocked at how blue she appeared.

Suddenly her body stiffened and her arm came up. Killian finally got the manuscript free in time to turn and see her shooting at a huge sea creature approaching them fast through the water. Taking his weapon, both of them shot at it until it was dead, but with the fallen creature came a flurry of activity as its blood called to other predators. They couldn’t leave the way they had come.

Seeing an access junction in the corner of the bay, Killian passed her the manuscript before ripping its cover from the wall. Pushing her inside, he quickly followed. Keeping an eye on her body, he rushed through the smaller, tighter passages, swimming as quickly as he could with the limited leg room. He noticed her using her free hand to pull her body along with the sides of the ship. Tucking his weapon into his waistband, he followed her lead, catching up to her quickly.

They came out in another flooded corridor which was teeming with underwater creatures. Luckily, most were ignoring them. Killian pulled himself from the access port, but when he tried to follow her, he couldn’t. Turning, he saw the cord that Regina had tied to him had become tangled down the maze they had just swam through, keeping him bound. Emma must have sensed he wasn’t following, and she turned to see him trying to untie the cord with his frozen fingers. Swimming to his side, their eyes made contact before she looked down. The water had tightened the knot, and both of them were too cold and too numb to really feel or operate their fingers. Killian snapped his head up, and Emma saw fear move across his face. Turning, she saw a large sea creature bearing down on them. She reached for her weapon, only to find it was gone. She had dropped it in the access corridor to free a hand to pull herself along, while holding the manuscript tightly with the other.

Killian was still trying to free himself but he couldn’t move, truly anchored by the rope. Emma grabbed the weapon from his waistband, turned, and fired repeatedly. The blood would bring others, the smaller fish and creatures were already feeding on the downed animal. She spun back and shoved her manuscript in his hand, handing him the weapon to keep an eye out for others.

Sinking lower in the water, she struggled with the tight knot that held them captive there. She couldn’t leave him behind, not even for her cause. She could feel the movement in the water, the increase in activity and him firing over her head, and she could feel panic start to set in. There was a touch to her head and she looked up. He gestured for her to leave him. She shook her head no. He motioned to the corridor filling with more of the same creatures, and gestured for her to leave again.

Again she refused. In what was fast becoming a watery grave, their eyes fought a fierce battle, wild blue fighting with sea green, both refusing to stand down until finally, in a gesture of sheer annoyance, she took his gun from him and aimed it at his lower body. He closed his eyes as she blasted through the safety cord, releasing him.

Taking the manuscript from him she returned his gun. Taking his hand, she swam for another
corridor, pulling him after her. He kept his eyes trained behind them, shooting the creatures following them. As they died, the crowd behind them slowed as they stopped to feed on the dead bodies. Killian and Emma moved through the corridors as fast as they could, until he noticed she was faltering.

Looking at the environmental unit on her neck, he saw the red indicator blinking empty. She was out of oxygen. When she started to panic, he pulled her to him, putting his mouth over hers, and he breathed oxygen into her lungs. After a short time of buddy-breathing, he looked at her and she nodded that she could go on. They progressed slowly, moving upwards through the flooded deck, searching for oxygen and freedom from the water. It was slow going, what with killing creatures that had large mouths and lots of teeth, plus having to stop and breathe for her. Finally, he found a set of doors semi-open with a strange gleam to the top water.

Daylight!

Pulling her with him, he broke for the surface. He dragged her out of the water, and they both lay on the deck just clear of the water, panting for breath. The cold and nitrogen in the air burning somewhat, but it was better that having no air at all. Oh, damn! They were in the burned out Bridge from earlier in the day! Killian cursed under his breath. He had sealed the doors from the other side, and the crushing winds and ice were hurling into the room, dropping the temperature even more. With their wet bodies and almost no real clothing on, both were shivering to death.

It was her gasping breath that reminded him of the high nitrogen mix in the atmosphere. Her environmental unit was still empty. Gathering her close, he joined their mouths, breathing oxygen into her body. She was losing ground fast; her skin was so much colder than his. Taking his gun, he shot at the closed doors with no effect. It could withstand a full cannon laser blast. They were dying and he knew it.

Emma reached for his hand. Putting her hand over his, she turned his arm away from the closed doors to the open rip in the Bridge that was allowing the elements in. Putting her finger with his on the triggering mechanism, she made him shoot through the hole to the outside.

Smart. She was smart. His men and the recovery teams were setting up full recovery perimeters and loading the artifacts and treasures off the _Olympus_. They would see the energy blast fired from his weapon. She was almost unconscious, dying. He gathered her close and breathed into her mouth again, trying to keep her warm with his own cold body. Fuck this. _Regina! Regina, pick up that bloody mental phone of yours and get your arse to the fucking Bridge!_

He kept cursing Regina out in his head while breathing for the both of them and shooting through the open side of the ship. Her body was so small compared to his - and way too cold. He could feel unconsciousness threatening him as the pull of darkness increased and his breathing labored against the cold. If he stopped, then she died. _Regina_. Killian stopped and tried something he’d never done before. _David..._

~*~

Graham and Regina pulled on the safety cord. It wouldn’t move. They’ve been down too long. Graham checked his sensors on his hand unit, and medical scanner. Too much movement below, but he could still read two humanoid life signs.

Robin came up to them. “Should we go after them?”

Regina shook her head no. “We do not know where they went. With all the sea life down there...”
“I’ll follow the line,” Will butted in, concerned for his friend, his family.

“Sir! Topside says they’re picking up energy readings off the port side. They’re coming from a hole in the hull of this ship.” Regina, Robin, and Will looked at the young crewman and then at each other. Regina grabbed the manuscripts and shoved them in her pack, then gathered up Emma’s clothing as Graham grabbed Killian’s.

“It has to be them.” Will rushed from the room, as Regina paused. She tilted her head slightly, as if hearing something from far away. Regina.

The com system came alive. “This is David, where is Killian? I can barely feel him. Regina, dammit, respond!”

“David, it’s Will. Killian is missing.”

“We’re picking up huge energy blasting from the portside hull,” David said rechecking the science sensors himself.

Regina came alive and rushed from the room down the corridor. “The Bridge. They came up in the Bridge.”

Will followed, with Robin and Graham trailing after him. “Then why didn’t he join us? One of those bloody sea creatures must have taken a bite out of his arse.”

Regina just shook her head. “He can’t. He sealed the Bridge from the other side.”

They made it down the side corridor to the main one from which they had entered the ship. Grabbing the safety ropes tossed along the forty-five-degree angled corridor, they used the ropes to keep themselves from sliding further into the bowels of the ship. Crossing to the other side corridor that led to the Bridge, they ran, using the walls to keep them steady.

Will and Robin worked fast to release the frozen lock while Graham scanned the other side with his medical scanner.

“Hurry, Will. One’s not breathing and their life signs are almost gone.”

Regina tried to open a time-space corridor to the other side so they could walk through, but she couldn’t. She didn’t have enough control, and the last one she opened seemed to just appear at her will.

Will just swore and sped up. The doors were finally freed and he and Robin pried them apart. They rushed in to find Killian leaning over Emma, his body covering hers, kissing her.

“We rushed in here just to watch Killian mack on the girl?” Will said with disgust.

Killian lifted his head at the sound of Will’s voice. “Graham...oxygen. She ran out awhile ago.”

Graham rushed to their sides, as Killian rolled off Emma’s body and lay gasping, trying to breathe for himself for a change. Will and Robin came to him and helped him back into his clothes. Putting hands under his arms, they dragged him out of the Bridge into the more sheltered corridor. Killian’s whole body was shaking. He couldn’t feel his hands or feet; actually, he couldn’t feel his entire body. He was numb.

Regina helped Graham with Emma as Will began to rub Killian’s arms and legs to get the circulation going again.
“Just because ya already kissed her, don’t be thinking she’s yours,” Will commented, his eyes scanning Killian with concern.

Killian looked at him and his eyes darkened. Will just swore under his breath. Damn, already?

Something told him that his friend was going to be lacking humor in regards to this woman.

Will looked up as Regina and Graham came through the doors carrying Emma. They laid her down next to Killian who turned and looked at her, concerned. They had put her back in her heated environmental suit, and Graham put a new environmental unit on her neck. She was breathing again, but still unconscious and blue.

Graham worked on her furiously, talking to himself the entire time, as Regina went back to reseal the doors. He found the temperature control on the suit and turned it up. She must have used it before the other three times she went into the water to stabilize her body temperature. Graham began packing small heating packs into her suit to increase her temperature.

“I don’t understand why her body isn’t compensating for the cold and increasing the shivering effect with a push in metabolism. The adrenaline I gave her isn’t even touching her, except to speed up her heart. I can’t give her anymore.”

Regina came back to join them. “I think it is her nature to take on the surrounding temperature.”

Graham looked up confused. “What do you mean?”

“The manuscripts she was so intent on retrieving. They were Gaian.”

The three men looked at Regina in shock. That was impossible! Gaianosis was the first planet that the Dark One destroyed before the war started. That world and its entire star system had been pulverized and sucked into a negative energy sinkfield - a black hole. The Dark One had turned his newest deadly weapon on their sun and blew a hole in its middle. The collapse of the giant star into itself was so great in mass that its gravitational field wouldn’t let even light escape. It took out countless surrounding star systems as the gravitational pull of the black hole overwhelmed the stable orbits of nearby systems. It was the mass destruction that began the war - that and the Dark One raiding worlds for genetic materials for his cloning project.

Even the Dark One had been surprised at the power and destruction of his new weapon. The loss of genetic material and the loss of the Gaian homeworld was a terrible lesson. Gaianosis had been an anomaly. The inhabitants were evolved far beyond their surrounding worlds.

They were capable of space travel long before the others, but as a race they tended to avoid traveling in space by conventional methods. They were fabled to travel great distances in a wink of time. A cold-blooded race, their internal bodies did not self-regulate their body temperatures, but rather took on the temperature of the surrounding environment. The coldness of space was almost too much for them to withstand.

“Poikilothermic?” Graham scanned the surrounding temperatures and then her body. “Gaian. No one knows their physiology. They weren’t very forthcoming about themselves with other races.”

Regina nodded. They were a once-silent race, keeping all matters about themselves hidden from outsiders. But their silence ended there. They helped all those who needed help. Their loss to the known universe was mourned and the outrage brought on by their destruction brought the rest of the universe to the brink of war that lasted almost ten years.

It appeared that their newest client was the last surviving member of a now extinct race. She and
she alone held all their collective knowledge and history. She also was the last surviving genetic representative, and thereby priceless to the Dark One. Regina felt a strange common fellowship with the woman.

“We need to get both her and Killian to the runabout and put them in the warming bed. She’s been cold for too long,” Regina ordered.

“I’m fine.” They looked down to see that Emma had regained consciousness. “Where are my manuscripts?”

“I have them.” Emma looked at Regina, her gaze critical as though she was searching for something, then simply nodded. They were safe with her.

Killian looked over her face and body. She was still blue and shivering, but at least she was breathing. “You’re not okay, love. Regina, get us out of here before she decides to take us for another swim.”

Her eyes narrowed at his tone before she turned and ignored him. Graham, Regina, Robin, and Will helped the two to the end of the corridor and into the larger one. Killian looked up the forty-five degree sloping incline and groaned. He wasn’t getting paid enough for this shit.

Graham looked at the woman. She was still shivering. They had lost the helmet to her environmental suit, so he couldn’t close it.

“I don’t know that it’s a good idea to take her outside. Her suit is open and her body will adapt to the outside temperature. I’m not sure her body and heart can take more stress. It’s been pushed to the limit already.”

“She is sitting right here, thank you. I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t talk about me in the third person.” Emma leaned against the wall, looking up the incline. She could make it if they’d just let her get her breath back. Her lungs felt like they had exploded in her chest. They burned with every inhale and exhale, and she was still coughing up water.

Killian took out his com. “Report. What is the status of the recovery teams?” Killian waited for his main recovery officer to come back with a report.

“Commander, we set up a protective field and installed heaters. The protective areas are already warmer. Twenty-three of the thirty-seven storage bays have been emptied. Apollo is already on a turnaround trip, and the other two ships are loaded and ready to take off.”

Killian did a quick calculation. The Apollo was their largest recovery ship and commanded the most storage space, but even she couldn’t hold fourteen more storage bays.

“Send the other two ships to the Enchanted. I want them unloaded and back as soon as possible. Is the Tyche up and working?”

“No, Sir. She is still in dry dock for refitting of blown power couplings. Her aft shields took damage on the last job.” Raiders and pirates only attacked the smaller recovery ships that Enchanted housed in her immense landing bays. No pirate would take on the full battleship with her armor and weapons, so the smaller recovery vessels were their best bet.

Killian swore. That meant they only had Hermes and Ares available since both Tyche, one of their larger ships, and Metis, their newest, were still in dry dock for repairs.

“Do what you can.” Killian closed the link at his officer’s affirmation. “David?”
“Good to hear and feel you, brother.”

“Aye, no big. Just took my weekly bath early.” Killian ignored David’s chuckle, a warmth rushing through him. “Do me a favor and light a fuse under the recovery team to unpack the Hermes and Ares and send them back. I don’t like this ice planet.”

“Will do. Stay dry and warm.” David disconnected. David looked at his com officer and nodded for him to send the orders as he searched the scanning fields of the system, looking for raiders.

Killian looked at Emma again. She was still resting up against the wall, appearing to be asleep. Killian then turned taciturn eyes on Will.

“Dammit, Will! I thought you’d have all the ships ready for recovery!”

“Little shorthanded right now, Killian. I’ve got the normal crews keeping Enchanted operational, and all the landing and light craft mechanics working around the clock on full shifts.” Will frowned at Killian, who seemed to be warming after his ordeal, but was still shaking. “You’ll remember that half my crew is missing in action. We left them on Riodan on our last six days off.”

Killian just grunted. Yeah, forgot about that. They had lost half their engineering and mechanical staff on their last six day shore leave. Will’s boys had gotten into a little brou-ha-ha in a local cathouse and gaming establishment. The result was the shutdown of the house, with half those involved incarcerated for half a cycle. That had been over three months ago, and they couldn’t pick up their missing crewmembers for another three months. Repairs and refitting had been slowed by working with only half staff.

“We’ve got to move her, Killian.” Graham scanned Emma again. She was warmer, but her body kept trying to adapt to the cold ship.

Killian looked up the long inclined corridor, watching his men emptying and moving cargo out of the storage bays. They could move now, and the sooner the better.

“Oh, let me go first. You tie a support line to her, and help walk her up and out of the Olympus,” Killian ordered.

“She can walk. Thank you.” Emma opened her eyes and regarded the irritating man closely. “It’s only a steep incline, not a mountain. And I’ve been here over three days climbing in and out of this ship. I’m cold and tired, but I’m not helpless.” She stood up to make her point. “Regina must go first. She’s carrying my manuscripts.”

Killian stood up as well. “By all means, love!” He added extra emphasis on the word. “We’d not be wanting anything to happen to those.” Killian’s sarcastic tone took on a heavier angry sound to it. She was so irritating. He liked her better when she was unconscious. “Get going, Regina.”

Regina turned and began to walk/climb, with Robin following close behind her.

Graham looked at his two patients and frowned. “Neither of you are in any shape to make the few meters walk to the ship.” He looked at the woman’s shaking form and frowned yet again. “The outside cold could be deadly to her.”

Emma looked at the doctor. “I’m not going to your ship. I’m going to mine.”

“The hell you are!” Killian practically shouted. Killian reached over and gestured for Graham and Will to start up the incline. “Get going. She’ll be alright outside. Recovery has set up heating units inside the protective shield. It’s warmer and not so stormy as when we set down.”
Emma brows furrowed in confusion. “What do you mean ‘inside the protective shield and heaters’?”

Killian just shrugged. “On an inclement planet we set up a forcefield protection grid to shield our salvage and our ships in case pirates follow us in. Inside the grid we turn on outside heaters attached to our ships that warm the area within the forcefield. It sets up a mini environment, and allows our recovery teams to move faster and more efficiently without combating blinding ice and winds.”

Emma actually cursed aloud, causing the three men to stare at her in real interest. “You can’t be that stupid!”

“What?” Killian took offense.

“Do you have no concept of where we are? The Olympus went down in the iced ocean of Linius I. This isn’t just a ship buried in the ground connecting with an underwater river. It’s an...”

“Ocean!” Killian looked at Will sharply. The other man nodded. “Go!” Killian looked at Graham. “You, too.”

Graham nodded and grabbed one of the safety lines and began following Will out of the ship, trusting Killian to see to Emma’s safety. She took a cord as well and Killian was bringing up the rear, when suddenly the ground shook. The Olympus’s decks shifted and moved, knocking their feet out from under them. Graham and Will above them lay on the deck holding onto their lines, and Emma, who was just above Killian, looked back in time to see Killian’s hand slip from his line as it snapped. Another worker above had used the same line and the added weight snapped it from its mooring.

The darkness at the bowels of the ship and end of the corridor was now approaching. It was the ocean’s water as the Olympus slipped free of the ice that had held it for years and continued to sink into the ocean. As Killian scrambled for another safety line, Emma reached down with her free hand and grabbed his hand just as his body started to slide down the incline towards the icy waters. The added weight on her arm made her grunt in pain. The Olympus’s deck was no longer at a forty-five-degree angle, but sixty and the deck was sinking rapidly into the water. Killian felt it sloshing at his feet.

“Let go of me!” Killian demanded. “The added weight will snap your line, and you can’t climb one-handed while you're holding me.”

“No!” Killian looked up into her eyes, stormy and fierce. Bloody hell! She was trouble - stubborn and determined. But so damn beautiful, and possibly the last thing he would see in his short life. He could think of worse last images.

Killian swore and tried to reach another line, but he was afraid to move too much. Her hold on him was tenuous and her hold on the cable even more so, and she looked like she would let go to grab him. Grabbing the bottom of her line, he pulled himself up enough to relieve the pressure on her hand and slowly climbed up and over her body as the ship shifted and sank even more. Looking up, Killian saw that both Will and Graham had cleared the corridor. As the ropes released in slack, they both slid downward.

Their legs were back in the water, and Killian thought about climbing up, but with their combined weight on the line he didn’t want to chance it. The best bet was for him to release the rope and let her climb free, and then when she cleared the corridor use the rope to climb out himself.
“Don’t even think about it!” He looked at her stormy eyes. How could she read him so completely? “You go, we both go.”

“This is stupid! You can’t take the cold water, but I can. We’re not both going to make it, and you holding onto me means you can’t climb.”

“Then we climb together, and you can stop trying to sacrifice yourself for me. I don’t know you. You don’t know me. Stop being so damn honorable!”

Killian just snorted. Honorable! He had no intention of dying, and he had every intention of demanding payment from her in the future in some form or other.

“Love, this isn’t me being honorable or altruistic. I expect to be fully compensated for the pain you’ve been in my ass.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Whatever! If a reward is what you want, then reward is what you’ll get. But you better start climbing because I’m not leaving you behind. And stop calling me love. I’m not your love.” She snorted as he cussed, trying to find some purchase on the slick icy deck with which to pull himself up and over her. *Pain in his ass?* She thought she had established herself as a royal pain in another part of his anatomy as well.

They both slowly climbed as they heard Will and the others trying to get a handle on the rope from above to pull them up. They were clear of the water, and halfway up the steep slope, when they both paused to breathe. He had managed to get himself above her, but just barely. They laid side by side, panting. Her hands were so cold, she wasn’t sure she could hold on much longer. To make matters even worse, her face was practically resting on his stomach.

“What’s your name?”

Killian looked down at her, hearing the muffled sound of her voice against him. “What?”

“Your name. I want to know your name.”

“Why?”

She made a sound of exasperation. “So I can say a prayer for you when you die?” She snorted. Big boorish boob. His parents probably didn’t bother to name him, but just stuck to ‘Hey you.’

“Killian. My name is Killian.” He looked up and saw Will’s head as he tossed a new line down to them. This one was more than likely on a winch so they could pull them up. “Why didn’t you let me go? You don’t know me. I tried to kill you a few times today. So why risk your life for a stranger?”

Emma looked up too and relief passed over her face as Killian reached out for the other line, and secured it to his body. As he dragged her with him, she put her arms around his neck and held on as the rope pulled them up.

She mouthed her answer into his neck where she lay against him, cold, and still breathing hard. “I’ve seen too much death...more than I can stand. I could happily live a thousand lifetimes to never see it again.”

Killian looked down at her. God, she was so cold. Looking up as they inched forward, he hoped Will hurried. She needed to get warm again, soon.

He couldn’t understand her. This sense of loyalty and honor extended to a stranger. In his world,
they barely extended that much to known family members. Husbands and wives were, at times, barely able to tolerate each other enough to actually procreate. Killian never walked far for a stranger, but kept his friends and family safe, along with those he considered his responsibility. She didn’t even know him, and this was the second time she had saved his life within a few hours of meeting him. She hadn’t even known his name. Killian didn’t allow himself to forget that she had almost gotten him killed a few times, too.

Will’s hand reached over and grabbed Emma from Killian’s arms as both grabbed a hand from Graham, and Robin reached for Killian. Pulled to safety, Killian breathed for a few moments as the ship around them groaned and creaked, slowly moving downward. His legs were so bloody cold from where they had dangled in the water that he was stomping them for feeling. They were on a side corridor leading out, and walking on the wall now.

He turned and took Emma from Will’s arms, lifting her up into his. Ignoring her protests, he and the others took off out of the Olympus.

“Shut up!” Killian looked at Will. “Will, the others?”

“Done. The Apollo was loaded with six more storage areas before they were forced to abandon the recovery. That was a total of twenty-nine.” Killian nodded. That left eight lost. The trick to a successful recovery was learning not to be too greedy, and keeping their teams protected and safe at all times.

“The Jolly?”

“Jefferson has it ready to go, just waiting for us. The ice field has already cracked up to a thousand meters out. This whole section is going to go.”

They hit the outside when Emma struggled out of Killian’s arms. Killian lost his grip and cursed when she planted her feet on the ice and tried to turn away from him. He stopped her as she turned to run.

“What the hell is your problem? There is no more time for your protests and antics.”

“My ship! I’ve got to get to my ship.” She struggled to get free of him.

Killian grabbed both of her arms and shook her hard. “There is no time! It’s twenty clicks out on a cracking ice field. It’s too late. Let it go.”

“The hell I will!” She stepped hard on his instep and pulled away. Giving a growl of anger, Killian nabbed one of her arms and pulled her back around. The last thing she saw was his fist before unconsciousness took her over.

Killian swept her up in his arms as she collapsed.

“Shit, Killian. Hitting a lady?” Will swore under his breath as Killian tossed her unconscious form into his arms.

“This she-devil ain’t no lady. Put her in the warming bed and tell Jeff to take off.” Killian turned in the direction Emma had been heading.

“Where are you going?”

Killian just kept cursing as he ran. “To get her damn ship! Now go!” Dammit, she was putting his life in danger again.
He could hear the ice cracking under his weight, and some areas were already puddling with water. They had thoroughly weakened the ice field with the onboard heaters. Reaching her ship, he actually admired its clean lines. A top class fighter in a design he had never seen. Scrambling up to the cockpit, he found the release hatch and pulled himself inside.

More cursing. It was a tight fit. No doubt designed with its real pilot in mind. Killian studied the control consoles as the hatch closed. The symbols were foreign to him, but searching the field he easily found the engines, which fired up immediately. The language was unreadable, but fighter crafts tended to be designed the same way, despite different builders. Moving the lever for the vertical lifters, he was shocked to see his afterburners fire. Bloody hell! Okay, some things weren’t universal.

Killian punched it. The afterburners further weakened the ice and as he lifted off, he felt the ice cave in behind him. Circling the recovery site, he watched *Olympus* slide away to her final watery grave. In another hundred years, this entire ocean would be nothing more than sheets of solid ice, and *Olympus* would remain there for all eternity.

~*~

Will entered the Jolly, Killian’s runabout, carrying Emma. He followed Graham to the back compartment to lay her down in the heated warming bed. Watching Graham for a moment as he stripped her down again to her white bodystocking, he finally patted his friend on the shoulder.

“Is she going to be okay?”

Graham nodded. “I think so. Her heart took some stress, but once she’s warm again everything should be okay.” Graham looked at the woman, still unconscious. “I can’t believe Killian hit her.”

Will just shrugged. He was having a hard time with it as well. Killian was nothing but a lover of all females and generally treated them with respect. Hitting them weren’t really part of his normal method of dealing with them. Will did remember the few times Killian felt like killing his wife...but that was years ago now.

“I wasn’t. Their fighting wasn’t just vocal, but mental as well. I think he was angry at her, and it only increased given the hard-on he was sporting while trying to get to her vehicle.”

Graham looked at Will sharply. “Aroused? By this slip of a girl?”

“Major woodage, and his mood was getting ugly.”

Graham laughed at that. “Guess this is one lady we won’t be competing over.”

Will just rubbed his chin with a gleam in his eye. “Oh, I don’t know about that.” He turned to go to the forward compartment. “Call me if you need me. I’ll be in the cockpit with Jefferson.”

~*~
Thanks to all taking a chance on this fic. I knew Sci-fi is not everyone's ideal genre so I appreciate those who are taking the time to read it. Leave me a comment so I know you're enjoying it and thanks for the kudos.

Special thanks to ultraluckycat and her hard work in betaing this monster. You're amazing!

Chapter 5 - The Mission Revealed

Killian took some time getting used to the controls of the smaller ship. It was actually a work of art. Small in design, but fast with tight controls. Its power source was a mystery to him, but he suspected it had more power than even the Enchanted, with twice the running speed. There was a co-pilot's chair behind the pilot’s, stuffed with her belongings. No doubt all she had left of her world. No wonder she was reluctant to leave it behind.

He located the hyperjump mechanism, but also found something different next to the normal slipstream. This ship looked powerful enough to make it from one corner of the known universe to the other, which was unheard of in a ship of this size.

“Killian?”

Killian looked around trying to find the com control to respond to David’s hail.

“David! You have to see this baby! She’s a total wet dream, and then some.” Killian ran his hand over the console dash and was glad he hadn't left it to sink to the bottom of the ocean.

David actually smiled at the sound of Killian’s enthusiastic voice over the open com. “Well perhaps if you’re finished playing with it, you could dock it in fourth level aft bay?”

Killian reluctantly turned the ship towards the Enchanted’s coordinates. He had taken Emma’s ship out for a little test drive, from one end of the star system and back. David was no doubt seriously wanting to put distance between them and this dead system. Killian finally lined up the ship for landing.

It was no surprise that David was waiting for him when he disembarked from the fighter. “I was worried about you, Killian.”

Killian just patted his captain on the back as they exited the landing bay. “Have someone take all the belongings from the back of the fighter to our guest’s quarters, and I want the whole ship in quarantine. Scan it for bugs, and let me know how it checks out,” Killian ordered the deck attendant.

“Yes, Commander.” The man looked at David and nodded “Captain,” as he walked away to find some workers.
“Quarantine?”

“No more space herpes or any other creepy crawlies.”

David laughed at that. “You realize that space herpes is originally transmitted sexually, right?”

“Dave, pilot that ship, and I promise you it will be the closest you’ve gotten to an orgasmic rush in years. It’s like sex in space. I swear if I catch anything from piloting myself in that...”

“Oh God! Don’t even tell me you jerked off while piloting that ship.” David just rubbed his face at Killian’s sheepish expression.

Killian’s face made this strange grimace and he just shrugged. “What? No! Of course not. The cockpit was too tight.”

David looked at his new brother and shook his head as they turned towards Sickbay to check on their newest passenger.

“You’re sick...totally mental. You realize that, right?”

Killian just laughed at David’s assessment. As they entered Sickbay, Killian’s laughing decreased as he looked around for her.

David looked around as well. He was curious about their new client, the owner of all that wealth, and the person who could get his second-in-command to willingly dive into sub-arctic waters. David had heard Will’s report, and his curiosity was more than just a little piqued.

“Graham? Where is our guest?” David asked as Graham finished his work on a crew member that had been wounded in their altercation with Emma.

“She’s still in the warming bed. I decided to leave her unconscious while someone was out there joyriding in her ship. Didn’t see any reason to give her more cause to be upset.” Graham looked at Killian in amusement. Big kid. He had felt Killian’s reaction at the mention of Emma’s ship.

David just gestured for Graham to waken her. Graham took an injector and lifted the heating bed’s lid. David’s eyebrow went up at his first sight of the woman. Looking at Killian discreetly, David suddenly understood much. Regina’s sisters were beautiful in some very conventional ways, all their features coming together to create them. But this woman was beautiful. Her features were wonderfully perfect, and totally fantasy worthy. Her nose was small and delicate, perfectly balanced. Her body was lean and compact, but gloriously voluptuous in its proportion to itself, with legs that seemed to span her entire length. And then she opened her eyes and stared straight at David.

Did he think beautiful? He quickly amended it to gorgeous - breathtakingly gorgeous. Her eyes. They were the most alive, watery green with flecks of gold, and seemed to burn with the fire of life. She didn’t wake confused and disoriented, but ready to fight. David let a small smile move across his face.

“Welcome aboard the Enchanted. I’m the Captain, David, and I believe you’ve met my Commander, Killian.”

Her eyes looked at the man standing next to him, and they narrowed. Sitting up gingerly at the side of the heating bed she fingered her sore jaw with a bruise on it. David watched amused as she stared Killian down, oblivious to the fact she was in nothing but a tight white bodystocking.
We’ve met - of sorts,” she ground out. David smiled even broader at that. Obviously, Killian had left an impression.

“You ship has been brought aboard. It’s in quarantine right now to check it out for any bugs, but your belongings have been placed in quarters for you on C Deck.” David missed her sharp look at Killian. “I understand that you’re not able to self-regulate your body temperature. I’m afraid the Enchanted gets cold at night, but my engineer has fixed it so that your quarters will still run the day temperature, which, granted are still cold, but not as cold as the rest of the ship. Next port of call we’ll see about finding some individual space heaters.”

Graham interrupted David. “What about this heating bed? She could sleep in it at night and program whatever temperature suits her needs.”

David just shook his head no. “We thought of that. The heater bed needs a special power relay only found in Sickbay and the runabouts. Power on C Deck isn’t enough to power the bed.”

Emma hopped off the bed and was annoyed to find her legs still rubbery. Killian grabbed her and straightened her. She knocked his hands away and used the bed to steady herself.

“That’s alright. I’m sure normal operating temperatures will be sufficient.” Emma looked at Graham and gave him a genuine smile that seemed to captivate the males in the room. “Am I free to go to my quarters?”

The silence dragged on until David jostled Graham. “What? Oh! Yes...of course. You check out fine, just a little cold, but otherwise, perfect.”

“Thank you.” Emma pointedly ignored Killian and smiled again for David. “I don’t suppose you could direct me to this C Deck and my belongings, or to the Eminent One?”

“Yes, delighted.” David went to the Sickbay doors and waited for his guest. She started towards him, but suddenly stopped.

“Oh, I almost forgot.” Pivoting on her left foot, she swung around so fast that no one registered the movement at first, not until Killian was knocked back against the wall, and he slid down to rest on the floor. He never saw her fist hit him, but he could feel it through his entire jaw. She packed quite the punch.

Shaking her hurting hand, she went and stood over him, straddling his legs and looking down at him. Slowly, she crouched down.

“That was for hitting me on planet. You want to hit me? Next time make sure we're both aware it’s going to happen, and we at least have some type of understanding.” Killian just stared at the angry woman, barely registering what she was saying. The word ‘understanding’ meant ‘sex’ in his vocabulary, and that had some impact. “And this is for saving my ship and my life.”

The first touch of her mouth against his own carried Killian so far beyond rational thought that he may as well have been a completely different person. He couldn’t comprehend that this wasn’t just them sharing breath, that she was actually kissing him. She flicked her tongue out, licking Killian’s lips before forcing those lips apart and invading his mouth. She smiled when she faintly heard Killian’s gasp of shock, the strangled whimper he gave as her tongue stroked against his. Killian’s hands tightened painfully at Emma’s waist, but she didn’t care. She slid her hands through his silky hair and hungrily devoured the mouth of the man that had just saved all that was left of her people and her most prized possession - her ship. He tasted like heaven and home and Emma lost herself in that sensation for just a second.
Killian didn't so much respond to her kiss as he did react, unable to prevent the deepening intimacy of her touch. The shock held him captive under her mouth. Shock then ran into awareness that he could do this forever, and as his eyes closed and he tried to join her in the kiss, she stopped, pulling away from his lips. He couldn’t stop his tongue from poking out and running across his lips, as if trying to capture that last taste of her. “That was…”

“A one time thing,” she finished before he could say anymore. She then quickly stood and stepped away, following David out of the room as if nothing had happened.

Stunned by the sudden unexpected loss of her, Killian stared up into Graham's face in bemusement-only to see his friend’s thoroughly amused face. "Oh crap, Graham!" Killian cursed, his eyes flashing with a mixture of surprise and bewilderment. "What the hell was that?"

Graham just laughed harder. Reaching down he gave Killian a hand up. "What do you mean? I believe it’s called a kiss."

Killian shook his head violently. "I’ve been kissed before and that wasn’t just a kiss...I mean it wasn’t..." He swore under his breath. “I think I’ve been... ravished!"

Graham fell over laughing against one of his sickbay beds, and the furrowing of Killian’s eyebrows made him laugh even harder.

David walked with the woman to a lift. They were both silent, lost in their own thoughts. Finally, they entered C Deck, and David showed her to her quarters. Her quarters were on the same deck as his and Killian’s, Will and Graham’s, and Regina’s. Most of the higher-ranking officers were assigned to living quarters on that Deck. Stopping at the newly opened stateroom, David punched in an access code and had her place her hand on the door.

“That will activate the door to your hand only. The only other way to enter is by a security override.”

Emma nodded. “Security? And that would be?”

David almost hated to tell her. “My Commander.”

She looked at him and frowned. He enjoyed the marring of the smooth lines of her face. It gave her a mischievous look.

“The big lummox I left on the Sickbay floor?”

David smiled. “The same.”

“Damn,” she whispered under her breath. “This just keeps getting better and better.” Emma looked around the rooms they entered. They were servable. Nice, but plain. “Maybe I should explain...”

“No need. I know Killian. The story will be told many times over and over, and every time it will get more unbelievable.”

Emma actually smiled at that. “I’m sure. There’s something about him, something that tells me to keep my even ground around him, keep him unbalanced. Just instinctual response, I guess.”

David nodded. Killian had a way of overwhelming a situation. “There is a replicator installed and working. You can program your favorite foods and such, or you can join the crew in the mess. The food isn’t the greatest, but most of it is surprisingly fresh. We make an effort to restock food supplies at every stop, and our hydroponics bay provides us with fresh fruits and vegetables.”
“That’s impressive.”

David just shrugged. “We’ve been working almost non-stop for three years. That’s a real long time in space without going home. Replicator food gives you what you want at the moment, but after a while, it stops tasting like anything. Every crew member rotates and works the galley, so if you want to be added to the list, just talk to the steward. I do suggest that you avoid eating the days Killian or Will cook…it’s usually inedible.”

“The replicator energy drain can be immense. I think I’ll eat with the crew, and my cooking…? I think I can give your Killian and Will a run for their money. I can’t cook.”

“I guess it was too much to hope. My wife used to terrorize the entire crew during the war with her rendition of reconstituted rations. It was grounds for divorce.”

“Does she still cook?” Emma asked distractedly.

“No. She died toward the end of the war.” Emma looked at the man and speculation filled her. He still talked to his dead wife, very much the way she talked to her dead people.

“The dead walk with us every day. They are sometimes the reason we continue to live.” Emma said knowingly as she looked through her belongings that had been placed in the rooms. The buzzing of the door announced a visitor, and David went to answer it.

It was Regina.

“I am sorry, I don’t want to intrude.” Emma just smiled and gestured her into the rooms.

“Not at all. I believe the Captain was just about to ask me important questions, and it’s perhaps best you be here as well.”

David looked at her and his eyebrow went up. She was intuitive.

“It’s about this journey...” Regina paused, uncertain how to continue.

“I need to retrieve three gems, and then I need to find something stolen from my world before its destruction.” David sat on the edge of a table and listened.

Emma watched him from the corner of her eye. He was different than his brother. He seemed to have more control, with a touch of softness to his face, but that boyish softness was marred by a scar along his chin and surprisingly it was...intriguing. It made him look strong and edgy, authoritative and decisive. His hair was sandy blond, which intrigued her because his brother’s was solid black. He had the same blue eyes, not the same dazzling color of Killian’s, but bright blue nonetheless.

“You know where these gems are?” Regina asked.

“Technically, no. Not yet. That’s why I spent almost six years searching for the Olympus and the lost manuscripts. It was my luck that they were submerged underwater. I wasn’t even sure that the Dark One hadn’t taken them, and that they weren’t lost for all time.”

David was intrigued. Pirates and salvagers had looked for the downed Olympus for years as well, but none had located her before.

“How? How did you locate her?”
Emma started to search her bags. “It wasn’t easy. I plotted all starfields within an equal distance of where she entered the slipstream. Her systems could only tolerate so much distance, which still was immense. Then I removed all star systems that were heavily populated with a sophisticated sensory net and available tracking.”

David smiled at that. “Because a system with tracking technology would have picked up the Olympus when she came out of the stream, and they would have tracked her to her crash site.”

“Exactly. No one reported it, and in six years none of the treasures were sold on the open market or in underground bartering shops. But even after removing all those star systems, it still took me six years of space travel and endless star systems to pick up her warp core signature.”

Regina looked at the woman in admiration. It wasn’t just the dedication, but the sacrifice. Gaians didn’t like space travel, and yet she had spent six years doing exactly that. The worlds she must have mapped, the other treasures and relics she must have found. Her knowledge was immeasurable.

“About payment...” Regina had already talked to David, but Emma forestalled him.

“I told you, you can keep the salvage.”

“It is too much.” Regina said as David silently watched the interplay.

“No, it’s not. It’s not enough!” Emma rubbed the back of her neck and sighed. “Look, we’re talking about treasure I would’ve never taken or used. I was going for the manuscripts and nothing else. Nothing else concerned me. I’m paying you with treasure and wealth that I’ve no real claim to. It was never mine.”

“Regardless, the salvage is yours. You found it when no other could,” David reasoned.

Emma stood up from her searching with arms at her hips and a determined expression on her face. “I don’t care. Keep it! Keep it all. Money, credits, and wealth have no meaning for me.” She watched him ready to argue and interrupt her. “Listen, this was never the method with which I planned to pay you or your crew. This little adventure? It’s not little. It’s not something that’s going to start tomorrow and be complete in a week.”

“What are we talking about here?” David asked quietly.

“We’re talking about a long dangerous mission. We’re not just going to park it in a system, run down, grab a gem, rejoice and go to the next. I have to translate the manuscripts to determine the first gem’s location, and from there we pick up the key to decoding the second manuscript, and so on and so on.”

“So we are waiting until you have finished decoding the first manuscript? How long for that?”

Emma just shrugged. “No clue. So in the interim, I suggest you process and contact the worlds those lost treasures belong to, and continue your normal work and contracts like I’m not here. Once I need something or know where our destination is, I’ll let you know.”

Regina was understanding what she was saying. It had taken her six years to find the manuscript, and it could take longer for her to find her gems. Still... “The price you are paying is too much, Emma. Passage to three places, and living on Enchanted is hardly worth what you have already paid and what you will pay in the future.”

Emma just shook her head and found what she was looking for. “No, it’s not. The salvage was
unexpected and never meant to be the payment.” Emma handed Regina something wrapped in a special cloth bag. “This was.”

Regina unwrapped the bag and stared at it in shock, as did David. “This is a stroynium power node.”

“Actually, no. It is a stabilized stroynium-uranium-curium power node approximately 3 kilos. The casing is designed to let it lie dormant for eons without interacting and losing its yield. The amount of becquerel associated with the radiation is unmeasured.”

David took the node from Regina. “This is worth more credits than all the treasure of the Olympus ten-fold.”

The node was a radioactive combination isotope that had all but been conquered by them centuries ago. Once engines began to use antimatter and crystalline isotopes that generated more power than the old ones, things like uranium, plutonium, and even curium passed from use. It wasn’t until someone discovered that by introducing isotopes into a containment field of an antimatter reactor, or even the slipstream core, they could repower dying core crystals and even restructure them once they had fractured.

Those isotopes were searched for and mined to the point that they no longer existed in nature. The loss of them made worlds try to create them artificially, but they were manufactured with no real results. The manufactured isotopes didn’t affect the power structures, but rather, helped to increase their breakdown.

“Is this the real thing, or manufactured?”

“It’s real. Give it to your engineer, have him test it,” Emma told David as she sat down on the edge of a table.

“Where did you get this?” Regina had only seen a stroynium node added to a reactor core once. It increased yield by a hundredfold, and gave two extra years of energy to the ship. This was more.

In their universe, energy was in great demand and short supply. During the war, all the reactor crystals and sources of energy had been scavenged to fuel and power the battlecruisers. The universe left in its wake was fast depleting its known power sources. That was why they conserved their power on Enchanted.

“Where I discovered it is unimportant. It was to be your payment for your assistance on my quest.” The two stared at her in confusion. This was far too much to pay for a simple recovery mission.

“What aren’t you telling us?” David felt suspicion creeping up his neck and spine.

“I’m going to take away the Dark One’s weapon of destruction, and in the process, most or even all of your crew could die.” Regina and David stood up at that. The Dark One. She was planning on taking on the Dark One! “So you see, I’m not asking just for your help, but possibly for your lives. And believe me - all the treasure of the Olympus, or even this power node can’t be payment enough.”

David walked over to the woman and pushed the node back in her hands. “There is no need for payment. Whatever it would take, whatever the cost, this crew would pay it to see the Dark One defeated. There isn’t a single man or woman aboard this ship who hasn’t lost everything they loved, lost their worlds, family, and way of life to the Dark One’s rule.” David looked the woman in the eyes. “Keep your payment, your treasure. This is a mission we’d do for free, no matter how
long or what the cost.”

“Rebels instead of mercenaries?” Emma took his hand in hers and put the node back into it. “Rebels are more dedicated and much more to be trusted, and I thank you, but keep the payment and the node. Returning the treasure will be a good excuse to enter systems that are the Dark One’s strongholds, and the node, once introduced to your engines, will activate your power structure for a minimum of five years. More realistically like twenty-five. Give it to your engineer. Tell him the outer casing is stable and will let him store it indefinitely until it is needed.”

David took the node, but kept one of her hands. “What do you get out of this? Your people are all gone. Lost.”

Emma stared down at their joined hands, and then at his face. “I do what my people would have done sixteen years ago when this war started. I’m returning the balance of power to this universe.”

“So, you’re a rebel as well.”

Emma just shook her head and went to stare out at the stars. God how she hated space.

“No. I’m a Savior.”

~*~

David and Regina finally left her quarters. Neither talked as they walked to Engineering to find Will.

“Is she the One, Regina? The One you've looked for since you saved us all those years ago?”

“I am not sure. She is strong and holds a power that is unclear. Her people, they were different. So many legends and tales about them.” Regina rubbed her face. “One thing is clear. The path we started years ago, the one that led me to you and the others, is tied to her. She is another piece to that puzzle.”

“Then where she goes, we follow?”

“No. Where she goes is where we were going as well.” Regina frowned at the revealing matrix. “The path is cloudy, but the players - like strings - are defined. We have a destiny.”

~*~

Two weeks later, the ship had resumed its normal operations. The recovery crews were cataloging and processing the salvage from the *Olympus*. They had already identified and contacted eighty-seven worlds to negotiate the return of their relics. Some immediately made offers while others wanted to know what Regina wanted in return for their property. Of those who made offers, twelve worlds were already in possession of their treasures without any counter-offers made.

Sometimes the offers were for food and material, raw materials or technology, and sometimes for actual credits. In between the return of the treasures, the *Enchanted* also picked up a small contract. In all that time, Emma remained holed up in her rooms translating her manuscript. She came to the mess and ate with the crew, but almost always apart. She was friendly enough, and was slowly learning everyone’s name, but she remained isolated.

As promised, she pulled her shifts in the galley, and after convincing the cooking crew she pulled rotation with that her cooking was dismal, she was assigned to cut and prepare the vegetables for cooking and salads. She was treated with great respect, since many saw her as they saw Regina -
something untouchable. Being the last remaining Gaian made her a source of interest and speculation.

Killian watched her, as did others. And David watched Killian. Killian’s fascination was increasing, as was his arousal. That kiss Emma had given him had done nothing but increase his interest. David watched, both amused and worried.

Emma was making great strides towards becoming part of the crew after two weeks when it was Will’s and Killian’s turn to work the galley. No one had warned her. Over the years the two were kept together so they only messed up one night of eating and not two. All the crew members kept an eye on the rotation and stockpiled food from the previous night to tide them over on the nights Killian and Will were in charge. Emma sat down and stared at the concoction on her plate with a touch of trepidation. She looked up and moaned as the two men waited for her to try it.

Sighing in resignation, she took a bite. Controlling her features, she swallowed the vile stuff and smiled at them. She caught looks of sympathy from other crew members discreetly disposing of their food, and eating what they had stashed from the night before.

“How was it?” Will asked anxiously. “I told Killian not to add too much of the beetamon root, but he felt it would give it a nice woodsy taste.”

“At least I didn’t dump so much salt in it that it killed the flavors,” Killian countered.

“That was just to combat the sugar. I told you that guava juice was too sweet, but did you listen?”

Emma interrupted the two men as they argued over their culinary mistakes. “It’s a lovely stew.” She was going to hell for that lie.

Killian frowned at her. “It’s a chili.” Killian took a taste and his face clouded. Hitting his friend across the head. “Dammit Will, you made our chili into a stew! Now we’ll have to start over.”

Emma wasn’t surprised when people in the mess started fleeing for their lives. Joining the two men in the kitchen, she placed her plate on the counter and looked in the large pot.

Will looked at her with his most charming of smiles. Women loved domesticated men. “Would you like some more?”

Emma quickly put her hand over her full plate and shook her head. “Tempting, but...no. I’m basically a vegetarian.”

Killian looked at her critically. She looked smaller than he remembered, and she was dressed in layers of clothing and leather to stay warm. He still could detect a shiver.

“That’s why you’re so skinny.”

Emma shot him a murderous look, ready to demand he take it back. She wasn’t skinny. She was thin.

“I’m not skinny.” She ignored his snort and looked in the pot again as Will stirred the mush in it. “Though the meat in your stew...um...chili was quite...flavorful. What was it exactly?” Her stomach was still rolling from the vile stuff, and her mouth tasted like something died in it.

“Zatirean warthog. Killian and I caught it while we were on their world last week.”

Emma looked at the two men. “Last week? You refrigerated it, right?”
“No, we hung it.” Will said smugly.

“Aye, we gutted it and hung it in one of the back landing bays to let it drain. That’s supposed to take out the gamey taste.”

Emma stroked her chin. “I heard that!” The two men looked at each other in self-congratulations. “But isn’t that supposed to be with a salt rub at the same time or smoking?”

“Um...salt rub?” Will asked. Killian frowned.

“Yeah, to cure the meat?” Emma thought about it for a second. “Oh, it probably doesn’t matter since the landing bays are so cold, it has to be about the same as refrigeration.”

“Aye, sure it is, love,” Killian said suddenly brighter. That was a relief, especially after the last time when he and Will put half the crew down with food poisoning. All they needed was to give them botulism.

Emma narrowed her eyes at his use of ‘love’ again. “Well, either way, congrats on scoring some real prime meat. I understand Zatirean warthog is a delicacy. A very robust meat and the only thing you need to take to do is to be sure to remove the sebaceous glands.”

Killian raised his eyebrow and looked at Will, then said not so discreetly, “Sebaceous glands?”

“Sure. You had to have smelled it coming. They're notorious for their overpowering smell.”

“Oh yeah, a right stinky fellow he was. That’s how we tracked him. Killian started retching about thirty meters off. The fellow was snoozing, stinking up the place when...bam, we nabbed his ass.” Women loved adventurous and fierce hunter men. Will smiled his charming smile again.

“Shut up, mate.” Killian turned concerned eyes on Emma. “What about the sebaceous glands, lass?”

“Oh, just that you know you’re supposed to remove them, or they taint your meal. All that nasty stinky oil just bleeds into the pot and...” Emma stopped talking as she noted their horrified expression.

“Remove them?” Will looked at the pot in horror, and the three looked in it as he stirred taking a real smell. All three backed up.

“Uh oh!”

David, Graham, and Regina were entering the mess as the last of the diners rushed out in a mass exodus. David heard Killian’s ‘Uh oh’ and immediately turned around, as did Graham and Regina.

The three of them walked away not saying anything.

“So Sickbay replicators for dinner?” Graham asked quietly. The other two just nodded.

~*~
The Cold Solution

Chapter Notes

This story was heavily influenced by the Star Wars trilogy - I grew up in a male-dominant environment so there wasn’t a lot of ‘girlie’ movies shown in our house - and Princess Leia was my first role model. So you can appreciate my heart break at the news of Carrie Fisher’s death. I dedicate this work of fiction to her, and the inspiration and courage she gave me, to believe I could be whatever I wanted to be.

Thanks to everyone leaving comments and Kudos, and to those who have also read my CS christmas fic - Holiday Interlude - I really appreciate your support.

Huge thanks, as usual, to ultraluckycat. You are awesome to put up with my wacky writing. Virtual Hugs!

Chapter 6 - The Cold Solution

Emma lifted her body from the semi-comfy chair and moved to the porthole to stare at the stars. It was already late into the night, and she was tired. But her body was so cold that she couldn’t sleep from the shivering. She hadn’t slept in almost a week. Instead she had stayed up and tried to translate the manuscript.

The yellow manuscript was first. The language was in the symbols and language of the Ancients. She had studied it since she was twelve, when she was first sent away to begin her training. The language was correct and she read it easily, but the meaning was lost to her. It was complete gibberish.

Her head hurt. The headaches, they were getting worse. She needed sleep, and soon. Giving up, she reached for the com unit.

“Graham?”

His sleepy voice came over the com and Emma felt badly. She must’ve woken Will as well since Graham and Will were bunk mates.

“Emma? What’s wrong?”

“Can you meet me in Sickbay?”

“I’m on my way.”

Emma left her room and quickly went to the lift. Leaning against the wall, her shivering had become more severe as she stepped out of her quarters into the main decks. Her quarters maintained the day temperature around the clock, but the rest of the ship was powered down for the night. By the time she made Sickbay, Graham was already there, and not surprisingly Will was as well.
Graham took one look at her, and felt what she was feeling. The pain and the cold. He rushed to help her into the room.

“How long?”

“How long now. Can you give me something to make it go away?”

Will watched them confused. He couldn’t feel her headache so he had no idea what they were talking about.

Graham pushed her down on a bed, and loaded a sedative and analgesic into the injector. Emma hardly noticed he gave her anything. She was too busy freezing to death. Will was shocked at the whiteness of her skin, and the visible shaking of her body.

Heaters. He had forgotten. “Oh, God, Emma, I forgot about space heaters for you. I’ll check for some at our next...”

“It’s okay, Will. I’m fine. I just have a headache.” Emma rested on the bed, but she was too cold to stay put. “I think I just need to go back to my quarters. Graham, how long until this takes effect?”

“About five minutes, but I really think you should spend the night here. I can set you up in the heater bed.”

Emma sat up slowly. “I’d rather be somewhere isolated and alone. And in a couple of hours your day staff will be in, and I don’t plan to wake up.” Emma got down with Will’s help. She smiled at him gratefully. “I’ll be fine.”

She quickly left before either man could protest.

It was hours later, and the unusual appearance of Graham on the Bridge, before anyone questioned how she was. David turned in his chair at the marked silence that fell over the Bridge.

“Graham? Can we help you, doctor? You’re a long way from Sickbay.”

“I must’ve taken a wrong turn.” Graham said smiling. He’d been on the Bridge many times, but it wasn’t part of his usual haunts. “I was wondering if I could borrow Killian for a little while.”


“What’s up, Graham?” Killian asked as they left the Bridge.

“What’s up, Emma.” Graham led the way to the lift to go to C Deck.

“What’s up, Emma?” Killian quickened his pace. “What’s wrong with her?”

“I can’t find her.” Graham waited until Killian requested C Deck. “She called me last night because she had a terrible headache. She looked cold, tired, and in pain. So I gave her a sedative and something for her headache. When I went to check on her, she didn’t answer her door.”

Killian shrugged. “Maybe she felt better and went to do something. Did you check hydroponics? Or maybe she’s poisoning someone in the mess?”

“I checked all her usual haunts plus a few she doesn’t usually frequent. Nothing.” Graham stepped off onto C Deck. “Thing is, we know so little about Gaians she could’ve had a bad reaction to the medicine last night.”
Killian just nodded and stepped up to her door. They rang for entrance, but there was no response. Killian entered his security override and they entered. The front rooms had the manuscripts and translations everywhere. Killian left Graham in those rooms and went to check the bedroom. The bed wasn’t slept in. No Emma.

Killian called his security teams to search for Emma and report back to him. Sending Graham back to Sickbay, Killian promised to find her and bring her to see him.

“I just want to check her over,” Graham reasoned.

“Understood. I’ll bring her, don’t worry.”

“She can be stubborn.”

Killian just snorted. He and Emma were still having a merry war between them, but things were better since the warthog cooking session. She was still a pain in his ass...and in other places.

“I said I’ll bring her.”

Graham looked at his friend suspiciously. “Just promise me you won’t hit her again.”

Killian grimaced. “What? Do I look like a beater of frail creatures?”

“No, just of obstinate, opinionated, and stubborn ones.”

Killian had to concede the point. Holding up a hand, “I promise to not hit her.” He watched Graham walk away.

Killian went back to this post on the Bridge and waited for reports from his teams as they searched the ship. Nothing. He ran a sweep for her Gaian life signs, and again nothing. Calling Regina, he made sure Emma wasn’t visiting Regina’s ‘sisters’ in their cloaked rooms. So far, Emma had yet to meet them, just like everyone else on the ship. Even though they finally had their own rooms, Regina still kept them hidden and under a tight rein.

Killian was beginning to worry. She couldn’t have left the ship. He would’ve been informed. Thinking for a moment about where she could be, he excused himself from the Bridge and went to check out a hunch.

He stood looking at her ship in the aft landing bay. It was truly a thing of beauty. Climbing into the cockpit, he found her. The now empty co-pilot’s seat reclined back as did the pilot’s seat to form a long narrow bed. It must have been where she slept when on long space flights while the ship was on autopilot.

Opening the hatch, he tried to wake her.

“Emma.” Killian reached and jostled her, watching for her quick weapon hand. “Emma, come on...wake up.”

The onboard heaters were on and she was sleeping comfortably. Killian looked around for the landing bay crew. The aft landing bay wasn’t really in use so it took a few moments to find someone. Requesting a real platform, he waited until he had something firmer to stand on than a ladder to get her out. He would’ve left her there to sleep in the warm cockpit of her ship, but he had promised Graham, and her running engines were a work hazard.

He powered down her ship, and then lifted her out of it. It was either the drugs or a testament to
how tired she was, because she never stirred. Waiting for the platform to take them down, he searched her face. She looked too small and too pale. She moved in her sleep and moved her arm up and around his neck.

Walking quickly, he carried her to Sickbay. It was hardly an effort, and her lightness worried him as well. Graham was waiting as he entered the medical lab.

“You found her!” Graham opened the warming bed he had ready as Killian placed her in it. “Just tell me you didn’t knock her unconscious.”

Killian just gave his friend a disgusted look, and then walked out without a response to the question. Not this time.

Graham kept watch over her until she woke a few hours later. Sitting on the side of the bed, she stretched and rubbed her eyes, confused as to where she was.

“Feel better?” Emma turned to her head to see Graham. Nodding, she got out of the bed. “What do you want to eat?” He was standing at the replicators. He ordered hot tea first and handed it to her.

“This is fine. I’ll hit the crew mess on my way back to my quarters.” She frowned at her husky voice still full of sleep and cleared her throat.

They both turned as Regina entered Sickbay. Emma just groaned. Great. Another person to question her.

“Regina, can I help you?” Graham was confused by the conflicted emotions running off Regina’s body. Regina never telegraphed her feelings. She was too controlled. Graham couldn’t pick up her empathic readings normally, and even Emma was hard to do. Now people like David, Killian, and Will, whose people outlawed emotional displays, were a cesspool of thoughts and feelings - all hot and intense. They hadn’t learned to guard their more baser emotions, and lately all three of them had Emma issues in some shape or form, with Killian’s being the more...erotic.

“You okay, Emma?” Regina asked quietly.

“I’m fine. I had a headache. Graham fixed it, but whatever he gave me made me sleep a nice long sleep.”

“You were sleeping in your ship, Emma. That’s where Killian found you.” Graham said as she suddenly turned and looked at him. He noticed a blush running up her neck, and suddenly he felt a wave of embarrassment running off her body.

“Killian?”

“I was concerned when I went to check on you, and you weren’t there. He had his people searching the entire ship until he finally found you. I think he would have left you alone to sleep it off, but the engines running in the landing bay were a safety hazard, and he promised me to bring you here.”

Emma cursed under her breath. Great, now she had something else to thank him for. He disturbed her with his deep penetrating gaze all the time. And since the whole cooking thing, she hung out with him and Will more and more. Will was harmless, flirting outrageously, but Emma took his teasing like that of a big brother. Killian’s regard had nothing brotherly about it.

“Why your ship? Are you tired of the *Enchanted*?” Regina sat on the bed and searched her face interested in her response.
“No. Of course not. It’s just that I’ve not been sleeping lately due to the cold, and it gives me a headache. I just need rest and to feel warm. My onboard heaters kept me warm in space, so…”

Regina shook her head. “We were supposed to get you some individual heaters. We didn’t. I apologize.”

“It’s okay, really. I thought the normal day temperatures would be okay, but I didn’t consider the fact that I’m usually moving around and doing things. At night, lying still, it just seems so much colder.”

Graham thought out loud, “You could sleep here in Sickbay until we can get your heaters. The warming bed works here, or maybe we can find a way to have Will rig an energy supply to your room that would run the bed there.” Emma just moaned. She didn’t plan on being that much of a bother.

“Body heat.” Regina said making both Graham and Emma look at her.

“Excuse me?”

“Body heat. You need a bedmate, someone whose body will generate a temperature that your body will automatically adapt to and simulate.” Regina thought about it for a second. “My sisters are close to your quarters, but they can’t sleep in your rooms since I want them behind the dampening field. The Dark One will be actively searching for them. The first thing he’ll do is scan the ship for their signatures, and if he detects them, he’ll board. He wouldn’t dare board unless he was certain.”

Emma just shook her head. “I can’t move in with your sisters. I need the extra space to translate my manuscripts. That takes space and concentration.” Emma smiled at the man. “Though I wouldn’t mind meeting them, maybe having a talk.”

Regina nodded. “They would like that. Being confined to quarters has them stir crazy.” Actually, the whining and boredom was beginning to affect Regina. She needed to find a better solution, a better place for them.

Emma smiled at Regina as she headed for the door. “Let me know when I can meet the sisters of the Eminent One. You know where I live.”

“Emma, we haven't found a solution to your heating problem.” Graham was exasperated. She was going to walk out and he’d see her in a few days when the lack of sleep and cold brought her back with another headache.

“Sure we did. Body heat. I’m going to work on that.”

Graham didn’t know whether to be relieved that she was better, or worried about what she was going to get messed up in. Emma. She was fast becoming everyone's mascot. Her enthusiasm and unquenchable interest was a source of amusement and amazement as well. A part of her seemed tough and seasoned, almost jaded, but then a hidden part of her shone through, like a child all excited by a new world. An enigma, and twice as deadly. She kept them all on their toes.

“Nice of you to come check on her. Don’t tell me she’s wormed her way into your heart as well,” Graham teased.

Regina just smiled. “She is an interesting woman. Hydroponics swears that since she started helping them, everything grows twice as fast.” Regina rubbed her forehead. “Actually I came to see you about me.”
Graham frowned and tried to sort the emotions coming from Regina. “What’s up?” Regina was never sick, and she healed at an amazing rate.

“I am not sure. Lately, I have felt nauseated and sick. I feel tired. I am irritable and not sleeping well.” She didn’t bother to mention that her sisters’ endless chatter, and Ruby’s endless bitching was putting her teeth on edge.

“Why don’t you lie back and let me look you over.” Regina nodded and moved back waiting to be poked and probed.

~*~

Emma found her way to the Bridge. Standing in the lift door, she waited to be noticed as she took in the big area. David’s communication officer noticed her first. David became aware of his irritation and swiveling in his chair, turning to see her there.

“Emma?” It was his day for unexpected visitors.

“Request to enter your Bridge, Captain.”

“Granted.”

Emma smiled and noticed Killian’s brooding look. Making a face at him, she came in and looked around at all the different stations. David watched in amusement as she slowly made it down to his command chair.

He stood up when she got up there. “So this is the big chair, huh?”

“Yeah.” David smiled when she looked at it and back at him. He nodded. “Go ahead.” Emma gave a small bounce of glee and tossed herself in the chair. David had a hard time keeping track of all her questions, and stopping her from pushing all the buttons on the console, as she used her feet to move the chair about.

Emma was suddenly up and wandering around stopping at different stations. David didn’t care as long as she stayed out of his chair. It was like she had a hundred hands. David tried to work, but like the other people in the room, she was a source of amusement and he couldn’t help but watch her.

“So what does this do...um, Leroy? It’s Leroy, right?”

“Yeah, Leroy. No, don’t push that...” The lights on the Bridge went out and everyone startled in silence.

“Oh! That was me. Sorry.” The lights came on and Emma looked at David and smiled sheepishly. Glancing over at Killian their eyes locked and she turned away.

Wandering over to his security station, she reached out a hand to touch something, when he slapped it away.

“Don’t touch.”

Emma put her hand under her arm and pouted. “I wasn’t.” He just made an ‘uh huh’ sound and continued working. Emma looked at him, and then turned to ignore him saying under her breath, “Spoilsport.”
Killian looked at her sharply, and she continued to ignore him. Emma’s eyes scanned his station and sensors. Reaching out a hand again, she pointed at a sensor.

“I told you not to touch.” His voice had a touch of exasperation. David's chuckle from his chair didn’t help matters.

“I wasn’t! I just want to ask what that is.” Emma frowned at the sensors. They were so different from those on her ship.

Killian looked at what Emma was pointing at and swore. “David, we’ve got a Legion scanning array coming up.”

David swiveled in his chair to look at his brother. “How long?”

“Eighteen parsecs.”

David swore and called through to Regina to warn her to make sure her sisters were under wraps, and then hit an alert button to get the working crew to close up the hidden cargo bays in their cloaking fields.

The Bridge was suddenly very busy. Emma looked around in confusion. “What’s going on? I don’t understand.” Everyone continued to work, and Killian continued to ignore her. “Killian?”

“It’s a Legion sensor net. After the war, the Dark One placed sensor grids across the known universe. You’ve probably run into them a few times.”

Emma muttered a ‘Not likely’ under her breath. “And?”

“He monitored and classified all ships. These arrays run sensors over ships as they pass. They would find the Olympus cargo and Regina’s sisters in an instant if we didn’t hide them.”

“Then just bounce the sensor wave.”

Killian looked at her in confusion as did David and a few other crew members. Emma just sighed.

“Read the incoming sensor wave. Its harmonic frequency has to be able to penetrate your shields. But if you meet the wave front in a frequency adulation that is running perpendicular to the incoming wave...”

“It would bounce off.” Killian said.

“Exactly. It creates a foil or mirror effect, and the information it reads will be its own returning sensor wave.”

“That would make us virtually invisible to the sensor net.” David said impressed. The concept was so simple and easy. “Leroy...”

“Already on it, Cap.”

“I would still take precautions. This ship is so big that the outer shields are probably not uniform. And some of the harmonics will be off, so some of the wave might penetrate. I’m uncertain how much though.”

David nodded. It was a given. They all worked in haste while Killian finished closing down all areas they didn’t want scanned. The Dark One used the scan to locate beneficial genetics as well. So it was good that Regina’s sisters were behind a dampening field. Suddenly Killian’s body
stiffened. *Emma!*

“David, how unique do you think the Dark One would find the only remaining Gaian?”

David turned in his seat and looked at his brother. They shared a silent communication. He would find it very unique indeed, and utterly investigational. David just swore. The scan might all be deflected, but then again some might penetrate.

“How much time?”

Killian checked his consol. “Eight parsecs.” David swore again.

They didn’t have time to close her in a dampening field. They couldn’t risk opening any of the ones already closed.

Killian looked at the woman with concern. She was exposed. The sensors would pick up her genetic pattern as anomalous.

“Emma, earlier when you were sleeping, I scanned the ship trying to find you but my sensor couldn’t locate your life signs. You were in your ship sleeping.”

“Yes.” Emma looked at him confused at what he was trying to get at or wanted to know.

“Why? Why couldn’t I read you?”

“My ship is made of a special alloy, and the engines produce a phase shift. It’s almost like a plastic aluminum that seems transparent. Sensors bend around it.” Emma frowned.

Actually, the shields emanated a phase variance that made all attempts to probe her shields to flow around the shields in an almost liquid medium until it reached around them and continued almost undisturbed, which read the ship as invisible. It’s how she had avoided the Dark One’s sensor nets over the past six years. They couldn’t read what they couldn’t understand.

“Killian!” David’s voice warned.

“We’re gone.” Killian grabbed Emma’s hand and pulled her with him off the Bridge. They needed to make the aft landing bay in less than six parsecs.

David watched Killian and Emma leave and ordered his speed cut to open the field a little, giving his brother more time to get to Emma’s ship. They couldn't go full stop because the sensors would read that as an indication they had something to hide.

Killian and Emma hit the landing bay in a full run. Killian went up the ladder first, opening the hatch and jumping inside starting the engines. Reaching for Emma when she got to the top of the ladder, he pulled her inside the craft literally on top of him. The hatch closed.

“David, we’re in.”

“Made it with under a parsec to spare.”

Emma struggled on top of him. “You could have put the seats up.” They were both lying flat out in the makeshift bed that he had taken her from earlier.

“No time.” Killian grunted as she shifted around trying to find space and room. He was big and he took up all the free space. “Careful with that knee!”
“Sorry.” Emma couldn't decide what to do with her arms and hands. She was lying full length on top of him, so she curled one up on his chest, and wrapped the other around his neck. “I know why I needed to hide, but why are you in here with me?”

“Because when we detected the sensor array the ship went on alert. All hands converged away from areas that needed to be hidden or battened down. This landing bay is barely used. So a sensor sweep putting me in an empty bay next to an invisible ship wasn’t where I wanted to be.”

“Okay.” Emma could kinda see that. “So you and your crew seem to do this a lot, or enough to have an established drill.”

“We do. This time it was made more difficult with Regina’s sisters aboard, all the hidden treasure from the Olympus which is strewn about as it's being worked on, and then there's you.”

Emma thought about it for a moment. “You’re smugglers.”

Killian just laughed. “Perhaps, in a way. I like to think of us more as pirates. If you look at it from the Dark One’s point of view, meaning anything he wants that we hide is like smuggling, then yes, we’re smugglers. But all our contraband is on the up and up, however we give the Dark One no reason to want it or take it.”

“Like me.”

Killian looked into her eyes. “Yes, like you.”

Emma sighed and shook her head, and finally just laid it against his chest. The small cockpit was nice and warm, and she was still tired. “I don’t understand any of this.”

“The Dark One’s great plan?”

Emma just nodded. “I was twelve when I left to begin my training. It was just before my people died. I remember the day it happened. There was a Hushing. It was as if billions of voices rose in protest, and then winked out of existence...silenced. I didn’t understand what happened exactly, because I was too young. But my masters did. The Temples were quiet for a hundred days in prayer, and I just knew that, whereas once I was part of many, suddenly I was alone.” Emma’s fingers plucked at his shirt’s front. “I’ve been alone since.”

Killian moved his hand along her back in comfort. Being alone for life was something he could understand completely. “When did you return home?”

“The war just ended. It took me almost a year to piece together what exactly happened to my people, to search all the places they normally visited to make sure that no others survived. It didn’t matter, because I already knew I was the only one left.”

“I’m sorry.” Killian hated that his people were enslaved, forced to work in the Dark One’s forces and treated barely as property, but at least they existed and there was always the hope of freedom, emancipation.

“It’s not your fault.”

Killian looked down at her quiet, small voice. There was the wetness of tears on her cheek. Wiping them away, he tried to find something to distract her, to take her mind off her loneliness.

“So where is this place you trained?”
Emma avoided his eyes. “Somewhere...else.”

Killian smiled at her avoidance. Trying another question. “Why were you on the Bridge earlier?”

“Oh, I came to find you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, but then I got distracted. All those interesting stations. My ship is so small and streamlined. Do you think David will let me learn the different stations?”

Killian thought about it, remembered the havoc she wreaked and then answered honestly. “Not a chance.”

“Why not? I’m an experienced pilot, and...”

“And you’re a menace.”

“I’m not!”

“Aye, love, you are. Let’s see... In the short time you've been here you opened a bay door, cut environmental to three decks, put the crew on Red Alert, then Yellow and back to Red, you killed the energy to the Bridge, turned off the deck lights, disengaged the shields, and...”

“I was curious.”

Killian actually laughed at that. “You certainly were.”

“They were honest accidents.” Emma looked up at him. He was lying back with his eyes closed. “They shouldn’t make red buttons. Red always attracts the eyes.”

“Uh huh.” Killian wondered if they had cleared the sensor array yet. “So why were you looking for me?”

“Oh! I forgot again.” Emma suddenly lost her courage.

“Emma.”

“It was nothing. I mean...not really. I just wanted to ask a favor of you.”

Killian opened his eyes and looked down at her. A favor?

“Ask.”

Emma was suddenly not sure that it was such a good idea after lying on him in close quarters, but then again, he was incredibly warm, and so...big.

“Well, you know I’m not able to regulate my own body temperature.”

“Caught that fact when you insisted on swimming in sub-arctic waters and turned a nice shade of blue.”

“Hey, you weren’t exactly looking pink.”

“Emma!” Killian could feel that nigging irritation rising.

“All right! So anyway, I’m not doing well at nights, even with my rooms at day temperatures. The
cold keeps me awake and it results in headaches from sleep deprivation.”

“Hence your earlier jaunt to Sickbay and then coming here to sleep.”

“Right.” Emma cleared her throat. “So a solution was suggested, and I was thinking...I mean after considering all my options and such, that perhaps...that you would be...I mean...”

“Just ask already!”

“Will you be my bedmate?”

~*~
Living Arrangements

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year guys!

I thought I'd update a day early and before the madness starts.

Thanks for your support with this fic, for reading and commenting, and for the kudos. Its awesome!

As always, a huge thanks to ultraluckycat and her continue support with this adventure.

Hope you all have a fabulous New Years Eve. Play safe guys!

Chapter 7 - Living Arrangements

“Killian, we’ve cleared the sensor array.”

Killian was too stunned to respond to David’s voice. Staring at Emma, he wasn’t sure what to say. Her bedmate. That meant sleep with her...in her bed...mate.

Emma released the hatch and powered down her ship. Sitting up, she quickly got out and looked at him, still lying there stunned.

“You don’t have to answer right away. But I’m really in need here, and you fit my requirements.”

“Requirements?” Killian could believe his voice actually squeaked. What the hell? Gaians had requirements?

“Yes. I think you’d be perfect, and I know that I don’t have much to offer, and I’m asking for a tremendous favor, but...”

“You seem very...um,” Killian cursed under his breath. He could feel the heat of embarrassment rising up his neck, and now she had him stuttering. “I just mean you seem to have quite a bit to offer.”

Emma smiled at that. “I was hoping you would think so! I mean...I know you share a room with David, but my rooms are larger I gather, so you’ll be trading up for more space. I noticed my bed is much larger than the standard bunk, so the room factor added in as well should be a bonus.” Emma reached over and slapped his chest lightly. “And...and there’s an online replicator!”

Killian just nodded. All those were definite benefits, but she was missing the most obvious one. Sleeping with her. Killian had never had a steady bedmate or relationship before, so he remained silent. Part of him didn’t want her to know how inexperienced he was at this, and her forthright attitude made him believe that this was a common occurrence among her kind.

Emma jumped down and waited for Killian to join her. After he closed the hatch, they headed out
of the landing bay. Killian was quiet and Emma kept looking at him as he walked her back to her quarters.

Emma frowned. “Look, you don’t have to say yes, or even agree right away. I mean, I’m being a fool for thinking that you don’t want to continue to share quarters with David.” Emma placed her hand on the pad to open her door. Moving to stand in the open doorway, she was silent. “Just think about it.”

Killian nodded and started to leave. When he heard her sigh, he turned around, reached out, and pulled her close. Looking down in her wary eyes, he quickly moved in and pressed a kiss against Emma’s mouth, tongue searching, exploring then tasting her tongue against his. The passion began to burn, building up to a roaring inferno. Killian was starting to be rough, more than he wanted to be, but something drove him to it. He held Emma pinned to him, devouring her with his mouth. She took it, seeming to thrive on it just as he did, almost lost in the moment. Just as suddenly as he started kissing her, he stopped.

“Yes,” he said, and walked away, leaving Emma holding onto the side of her door for support with her other hand touching her mouth.

“Yes?” Her voice struggled to form to word. “Um, Killian? Yes?” He was gone.

Dammit. Emma went inside and sat down, just to quickly stand up again and pace. What the hell was that kiss about?

~*~

Regina wandered around in her dark rooms. The nausea had become worse since they passed the sensor array. Graham had barely started a full diagnostic physical on her when she was alerted to the approaching array. She had rushed back to her quarters to make sure that both Ruby and Mary Margaret were safe.

Regina’s hand hit the wall in a loud smack as dizziness and nausea hit her again. Rushing into the bathroom, she vomited again. Sitting on the floor she rested for a short time trying to get her stomach under control.

“Regina?”

Regina just groaned as Ruby came through the door and found her. Rushing to her side, Ruby crouched down beside her.

“Regina, oh god...are you okay?”

Wincing, Regina stood on shaky legs. “Yeah, just a little unsteady.”

Ruby helped her to her bed. Watching her roll over and place an arm over her eyes, she rushed back into the bathroom and rinsed out a cloth with cool water. Sitting on the side of her bed, she slowly washed her face.

“You’ve been sick a lot these last few weeks. M and I are concerned.” Ruby frowned. Her relationship with Regina had never been perfect, Ruby resenting the situation Regina and her mother had put Mary Margaret in. At best, she and Regina had been civil around each other.

“I went to see Graham earlier, but was interrupted.”

“The alert?” Regina just nodded. Ruby reached down and took the covers and pulled them over
her. Kissing her cheek, she left her to sleep. It wasn’t a surprise that Mary Margaret was standing in the door watching them.

“Sick again?”

Ruby nodded. Looking at her friend, she suddenly looked down at the floor.

“I’m a terrible person, M.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes...yes I am. I hated her. Zelena, I mean. I hated her because she was one of them...because she was everything I wanted to be.”

Mary Margaret pulled Ruby into the other room and sat with her on the sofa. “Ruby, god, you don’t want to be like them...like Regina. Look at how lonely her life is. They stole her life, and her future. She can’t fall in love with a man, she wants children so badly and that’s something she will never have. They stole that from her.”

“I know.” Ruby just looked at the dark bedroom. “I guess part of me felt that if I was ‘more’ then I wouldn’t feel so alone in this life Cora has thrust on us.”

Mary Margaret understood exactly what Ruby was saying. Regina was certainly ‘more’ and Mary Margaret had been made ‘more’ through her connection to Cora, Regina, and Zelena, her status on her world, and her ability to adapt genetically to any other species. Ruby had been caught up in everything through her childhood friendship with Mary Margaret.

“I know. But don’t wish to be Regina. Since the day Cora realized she had that extra chromosome, her life changed. They altered her genome, who she was, and made her someone else. Her life stopped being hers that day, and she sacrificed everything when she realized Cora knew about my genetic ability and rescued me from a fate worse than death.” Mary Margaret grabbed Ruby’s hands. “Don’t make her sacrifice be for nothing.”

Ruby wiped away tears from her cheek. “I’m just angry. Angry that you’re hunted. First they wanted to kill you, and now they want to rape you of your genome. It’s just been so long since I’ve been anything or anyone. We’ve lived in fear for most of our lives.

“I’m sorry,” Mary Margaret whispered. “Sorry that you have been brought into this.”

“Don’t say that,” Ruby all but spat out. “This is not your fault, not one bit.”

Mary Margaret took Ruby’s shoulders and gave her friend a watery smile. “It will get better.”

“How do you know. How can you believe that after everything?”

“Because I have hope,” Mary Margaret answered simply. “This can’t be all there is for us.”

They both turned when they heard Regina groan in agony in the other room. Ruby jumped up and headed for the door.

“Ruby. What are you going to do?” Mary Margaret wringed her hands together.

“I’m going to go find this Graham person, and you’re going to stay with Regina.”

“You can’t go out! Regina will be upset, and she’s already not feeling well...”
“I don’t care” Ruby hesitated for just a moment, and then headed for the door.

“Ruby!” Mary Margaret watched the door shut behind her friend.

Emma heard the scream and came to look outside the door. She saw the tall brunette woman leave Regina’s quarters across from her own. Frowning and uncertain what to do, Emma did what she always did – she acted.

“Can I help you?”

Ruby turned to look at the blonde standing in the doorway. She was like a perfect picture of delicate bones and features offset by soothing green eyes. Ruby just shrugged.

“If you know a doctor named Graham, then yes, you may help me.”

“Then you are in luck, because I very much know a doctor named Graham.” Emma smile faded. “Are you sick?”

“No. Not me.”

“Then your sister or Regina?”

Ruby straightened to her full height and looked at the doll-like creature down her nose, imitating Regina’s most haughty of looks.

“You know of us?”

“Of course. Regina promised to introduce me to her sisters. So you’d be either Ruby or Mary Margaret.”

“Ruby.”

Emma smiled and held out her hand. “Ruby. And I’m Emma.”

“I need to find this Graham person...fast.”

Emma took the woman’s arm and led her into Regina’s quarters. When they entered, Mary Margaret stood.

Emma hit the com system. “Graham?”

“Emma? Another headache?” Emma smiled at his voice.

“No. I’m in Regina’s quarters. One of her sisters insists you come immediately.”

Emma looked at Ruby and gestured to the com.

“It’s my sister, Regina. She is sick. Very sick.” The woman shared a look with Mary Margaret. “I think she’s dying.”

Graham swore. “I’m on my way.”

Emma rushed into the darkened room and searched for Regina on the bed. Placing her hand on her forehead she was concerned at the clamminess of her skin. She was sound asleep and didn’t seem to know she was there.
“Emma.” Emma stood when Graham called her name.

“She’s asleep.”

Graham approached the bed with caution. He was reading the sleeping Regina, and the tiredness and nausea was overwhelming. The headache was like a mini explosion in the back of her head moving forward. Emma quickly stood and grabbed Graham before he fell.

“Graham?”

He just shook his head to clear it, and quickly put up a mental shield from Regina’s emotions. It was wrong. Regina was normally impenetrable, too hard to read, but her emotions were all over the place. Confused.

“Emma, could you...” Graham gestured for her to leave him with his patient.

“Of course.” Emma started to leave, looking back in concern. “I’ll just...go. You know, I think I’ll take her sisters to the mess and threaten them with food poisoning, giving you some time with Regina.”

“Thanks.”

Graham waited until Emma left the room before injecting Regina with something for nausea and her headache. He then woke her.

“Graham?” Regina slowly opened his eyes.

“Hey. So I take it that we need to finish looking at you.”

Regina sat up a little feeling a little better. “What? How?”

“Your sisters and Emma. I guess one of your sisters took off out of here to find me, but found Emma instead, who returned them to your rooms and called me.”

“Ruby. It had to be Ruby.”

Graham just shrugged. “Let's get you to Sickbay for that physical.”

“My sisters...”

“Emma has them. She’ll show them a good time to keep them from worrying, and bring them back safe and sound.”

“They are outside?” Regina sat up in alarm, pushing herself off the bed.

“Whoa, calm down! You didn’t think you were going to keep them hidden away forever, did you? They’re with Emma. She’ll keep them protected.”

“But...”

“No buts about it. Let’s get to Sickbay before the medicine for nausea wears off.” Regina stood up and weaved on her feet as Graham steadied her. Graham was right. His empathy must have alerted him to the fact that Regina’s body was already clearing the drug.
“Regina isn’t going to like this.” Mary Margaret protested, looking around in interest despite herself.

Emma chuckled as the woman put on her disdainful look and appeared unaffected by being out of her quarters for the first time in over six months. Ruby was the opposite. She was all over the place, looking at everything and asking many questions.

Emma watched them talk to the mess crew and get food before she put a call through to David.

David’s no-nonsense voice over the com actually made Emma smile.

“Go.”

“David, it’s Emma,” she replied just as curtly, but with a smile on her face.

There was a moment of silence. “You're not coming back to my Bridge, are you?” David asked cautiously.

Emma swallowed her immediate indignant retort and instead, responded to the humor of the situation.

“Not immediately, no.” His sigh of relief had her eyes narrowing. David and Killian may not be bound by actual familial ties, but in so many ways, they were the same.

“Did you need something?”

Emma decided not to take offense until later. “Actually, this is just a call for your edification. I’ve got the Eminent sisters, and I refuse to give them back.”

David frowned at his com and then looked at his brother. The woman was a loon. “What?”

Emma just laughed. “I just wanted to let you know that Regina’s sisters are with me in the dining room, and outside their normal protected quarters.”

“Understood.” David rubbed his face and fingered his scar. “Where is Regina?”

“With Graham. She’s sick.”

That made David stand up and take notice. “I’ll check on the situation. Thanks for the information.”

“No problem.”

David looked at his brother and frowned. Killian? A normal Killian reaction would’ve been to immediately insist on rushing to the crew mess to stand guard over Regina’s sisters just in case of trouble. Instead, his horndog friend/brother seemed preoccupied and lost in his own thoughts.

“Killian?” David’s frown deepened when his brother had to force himself to pay attention.

“What?” Killian's distracted voice was bothering David.

“Let's go check out the situation.”

Killian nodded and followed his brother from the Bridge. “What situation?”

David stopped. “Okay, what’s going on?”
Killian just grimaced and shrugged. “Nothing. Why?”

“Why?” David laughed at that. “First, Regina’s sisters are out and about on the ship, and you aren’t there, Mr. Johnny on the Spot, to check them out. Then, Regina is sick, and you’re not your usual...space herpes...it has to be. Instead you’re distracted. I’d even say daydreaming.”

“Daydreaming? I don’t daydream!” Killian and David continued walking. They took the lift to Sickbay. Killian stopped his brother outside the door. “I’m moving out of our quarters.”

“What?” David stared at his brother incredulously as he entered Sickbay.

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Graham ran the full scan twice while Regina tried to resist the nausea. She failed.

“Oh god! I am sorry.” Graham patted his friend on the shoulder and handed her a vomit bowl.

“Don’t worry about it. We get a little of everything in this place.” Graham caught one of his assistant’s eyes and they acknowledged his need for a cleaning crew.

“I don’t remember the last time I was sick. Maybe when I was a small girl, before the change?” Regina laid back and put her arm over her eyes. “I do not remember it being this miserable.”

After the mess was cleaned, Graham stood beside his friend and watched her with a slight apprehension. This wasn’t going to be easy.

“Regina, tell me what happened the last time you saw Zelena, before she died.”

Regina closed her eyes. “I tracked her down when I felt a disturbance. She was sick. Dying from poison. I think she might have been able to hold off the effects for a long time, but she had another purpose.”

“Purpose? What purpose?”

Regina sighed, almost as if she was in pain and resigned to it. “When one of us dies, our energy...our essence seeks out the remaining members of our kind. Zelena knew she was poisoned and that one of her murderers was Cora, our mother; the only remaining Eminent other than myself. She melded her essence into me, so Cora would not benefit for her treason.”

Graham moved his mouth around in thought and crossed his arms in front of him. “So instead of holding one-third of all the essence of the Eminents, you hold two-thirds?”

“Yes.”

“I think what’s happening to you is your body is settling into the power you now possess,” Graham hypothesized as Killian and David entered Sickbay. “It’s a lot of power, Regina, more than you should have. I’d be more surprised if your body didn’t struggle with it.”

“What can be done?” David asked quietly.

“She needs as much rest as possible. Let her body regenerate, if you will, to embrace her new strength.” He turned back to Regina. “It will happen. If your body were to reject Zelena’s power, it would have done so by now.”

“How?” Killian asked, intrigued.
“She would have died,” Graham answered simply.

Regina swallowed nervously, not realizing she had put herself, her crew, at so much risk by accepting her sister’s essence.

“You’ll be fine, Regina.” Graham patted her arm reassuringly.

“Could one of your sister take some of your powers,” David asked, hoping to relieve his friend of her sickness.

Regina shot out a snort of laughter. “I have to confess. They’re not really my sisters.”

“What?” Killian and David exclaimed at the same time.

“Mary Margaret is the daughter of the man my mother married later in life, just before the war, so I guess we’re stepsisters or something.”

Killian and David continued to look confused. Stepsisters, or brothers, was something unheard of on their world. Couple’s mated for life, whether they got along or not.

“When Cora sided with the Dark One, she raped Mary Margaret’s world, took everything of worth, every treasure, and killed her father. Once allied with the Dark One, she learned about his passion for genetics, his ambition to great more Eminent Ones. She remembered Mary Margaret had a gene anomaly; that she holds genetics that can bridge all others. She is the key in his ambitions. So, I took her and Ruby, her closest friend, and I’ve kept them with me. Passing them off as my sisters is the best way for people not to ask too many questions.”

She paused, glancing up at the three men she considered just as much as family as Mary Margaret and, by extension, Ruby. “I’m sorry I lied to you, but it was necessary.” She hoped when the real truth came out, they would forgive her again for not being completely honest with what she was telling them now.

David listened quietly. “You did what you thought was best,” he said, understanding completely. “And we will protect this Mary Margaret just as much as we protect you, and others.”

Graham looked back to Regina. “What about Emma?”

Regina looked confused for a moment before understanding what he was asking. “She’s a possibility.”

Killian looked quizzical for moment before he caught on. They were discussing Emma taking in some of Regina’s powers. His reaction was surprisingly brisk and almost violent. “No! Absolutely not!”

The other three men looked at him in confusion at his intense response.

Killian scratched his forehead and frowned. “Emma’s genetics are equally unique. If the Dark One ever scans her, she’ll be hunted. Losing the entire Gaian genome was a devastating loss for him, and Emma is like a glimpse of dessert. Adding your eminent powers to that would be icing that cake.”

“Killian is right.” Regina laid back to rest and think. “Sooner or later, Cora will sense the great power in Emma anyway.” At the men’s lost gaze, she continued. “Emma resonates something that could be greater than an Eminent One. She could be even more than I am, she could be something the known universe hasn’t seen in eons. Adding my power to that could be devastating for her, and
the universe.”

David looked at his sick friend. “How long before Regina is back to normal?”

Graham just shrugged. “It’s unprecedented. There is no way to tell, but I have no doubt she will recover. She’s lasted this long. If the power was going or kill her, it would have done so by now.”

David and Killian left Sickbay with Regina to escort her back to her rooms. When Robin passed them in the corridor, David smiled and asked the new crew member to escort the Eminent One. Regina bristled at the request.

“I’m quite capable of returning to my quarters,” she gritted.

“Of course you are, My Lady,” David schmoozed, slipping back into his formal tone with her. “But I would prefer to know you are safe for the time being.”

“How about I walk several paces behind, m’lady,” Robin offered with a sly grin. “That way you can convince yourself I’m a mere peasant.”

Regina just huffed as she turned and stalked, as best she could with a nauseated stomach, back to her rooms with Robin grinning as he followed her.

“Killian?”

“Hmm?”

“Do our lives seem a little strange lately? Hidden sisters that aren’t really sisters, the last remaining member of an unknown advanced race, an ill Eminent, and now you’re moving out.”

Killian just scratched his brow. “I don’t know. Sounds kind of normal, or same-old stuff. We’re setting down on Palin II in about ten days, and things should look a little more routine.”

David just laughed. Palin II was their next scheduled supply stop, and it was anything but routine. The last time they had stopped there, Regina had gone missing and Will almost got married without realizing it. Graham had shacked up with a native healer who ended up wanting one of his two hearts.

“You’re avoiding telling me, aren’t you?”

“What?” Killian looked at his brother and then grimaced. “Okay, maybe a little.”

“What’s going on?”

“I’m moving in with Emma.” David stopped dead in his tracks, and just stared at him. “Hey, she asked me! I swear!”

“You two fight and bicker constantly, and you go out of your way to irritate her.”

“That’s not true. She’s just such an irritating person at times,” Killian said, brooking no argument, but she did have some redeeming qualities. “Though her ship is totally worthy of worship.”

David just shook his head and continued to the crew dining room. That explained Killian's sudden lack of interest in Regina’s ‘sisters’. Emma? David just added this to his list of strange and bizarre events.

Then he met the women again and added them to his ever-changing bizarre life. They were in the
dining room laughing and talking to crew members, the most prominent being Will. One was quiet and polite, while the other was flirting outrageously with Will.

Killian quickly looked around and found Emma in the kitchen having a very private intense conversation with the cook. Moving through the room, he leaned against a wall and listened.

“No, I’m positive they baked them on a bed of salt, and after they were done, rubbed them with a cloth that removed the outer peel. Then, they sliced them up and served them in the green salad.”

“My mother always peeled and boiled them.”

Emma pointed at the man’s hands. “I understand that following old traditions is important, but the bleeding beetroot leaves stains everywhere if you try to peel it before cooking it.” Emma gestured to the man’s red stained hands. “Supposedly, the salt bed you bake it on absorbs the red liquid and keeps your pan clean.”

Leroy looked at her and tipped his head in speculation. “I thought you didn’t know how to cook?”

“I don’t! Really, I don’t, but I’ve always been curious and took great pains to watch how people do things.” Emma smiled her most engaging smile. “Aren’t all these different cultures and ways of doing things so much fun?”

“Fun?” The man looked at her skeptically, but her smile disarmed him and he soon found himself smiling back. “So just wash them and bake on a bed of salt in the oven? Then rub off the peel?” She smiled and nodded.

“What are ya doing?” Emma turned to see Killian and quickly lost her smile. Shuffling on her feet, she decided not to let him bother her.

“Just talking shop.”

Killian grimaced. “I’ve seen your cooking. This can’t be shop, but an intent on making mischief.”

“Not true! I was offering some sage advice gained from my last six years of traveling.”

“Uh huh.” Killian took her arm and helped her from the kitchen. “Let's just keep your cooking to your assigned night, love.”

“I was just observing.”

“Uh huh.”

“I hate it when you do that!”

Killian stopped and looked at her confused. “Do what?”

“That, ‘uh huh’, Emma is getting into trouble. ‘Uh huh’, she is touching things again. ‘Uh huh’, now I’m going to have to put her in a corner and keep an eye on her.” Emma jerked her arm away. “Stop being so condescending and preachy. You’re not my father!”

“I know that. And I don’t act anything like a father to you.”

“Do too! All … there goes Emma again stuck in the access panel between deck three and four, or…or ‘Emma, I want you to wear this anklet which will give you an electrical jolt if you should enter areas where you will cause problems.”
“The anklet was a good idea, a sort of learning device.”

“I’m not a pet needing training!”

Killian just made a snort of derision. “I’m just trying to keep you out of trouble and from hurting yourself, love.”

“I’ve lived twenty-eight cycles still functioning fine, thank you. I think I can handle it.”

“Oh!” Killian looked at her menacingly. “What about the airlock in the forward manifold array?”

“That was an accident! I told you, I tripped and grabbed the lever to save myself.”

“And almost blew yourself out of the airlock.”

“I held on!”

“The access crawl space...”

“I wasn’t stuck! I told you, I was just realigning some power couplings.”

“Did Will ask you?”

“No, but...”

David watched his brother and Emma for a moment and just shook his head. Impossible. They would kill each other in no time, or he’d find Killian back in their quarters, bitching.

“Do they always fight like that?”

David looked at the woman standing next to him. Mary Margaret, quiet and discreet.

“Pretty much. Not really fighting as much as disagreeing violently.”

“They do it well. How long have they been together?”

David frowned and shrugged. “They aren’t together, well at least they weren’t until today.”

“Interesting. It seems like he’s trying to protect her, and she’s trying to get him to give her some space.”

“Something like that.” David smiled at the woman momentarily. “You really shouldn’t be out of your protective quarters.”

“I know. But Emma said that she was in danger, too, and no one pushed her into a large dampening field, and that if things became a problem ‘the big bore butt’ would find us.” Mary Margaret actually laughed. “I take it he is ‘the big bore butt’?”

“Evidently.” David scowled at the arguing two. They seemed to be enjoying themselves too much. “I guess I need to take some precautions with Emma as well.”

David turned to see his Chief Engineer whispering in Ruby’s ear. Great. He was floating a crate full of giggling couples. “Will, I hadn’t realized you were off duty yet?”

Will quickly got to his feet at David’s words, and sheepishly looked around. “I was just getting a quick ...cup of coffee.”
David’s eyebrow went up.

“And now that I have, I’m on my way back to work.” Will smiled at Ruby, and was quickly out the door taking a few of his men with him. Ruby just sat, sullen and pouty over the loss of her companion.

“That wasn’t very nice,” Mary Margaret observed, noting Ruby’s displeasure.

David just shrugged. He was running a ship, not a dating service among the stars. “Job description for Captain didn’t list being nice as a prerequisite.”

“Doesn’t mean you can’t cultivate an obvious good trait.”

David looked at her again and fingered his scar. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Do that.” David managed not to smile at her haughty tone. She was a piece of work, refusing to concede to anyone.

“So I just came to check on you and your ‘sister’,” he used air quotes, “and let you know Regina was heading back to your quarters.”

David smirked as he watched racing emotions across the woman’s beautiful face. She had forgotten about Regina.

“Ruby! We need to go.” The brunette pointedly ignored her. Mary Margaret quickly excused herself and moved across the mess hall to her friend.

David critically watched them, noting the differences between them. Mary Margaret was quiet, but she held a reserve of strength. And Ruby, who appeared more brash and self-assured, seemed to need attention and reassurance.

“I don’t want to go back. I like it here.”

“Ruby, Regina is on her way back to the rooms. I want to know what’s wrong with her.” Mary Margaret tried to keep her exasperation from her voice, because it only made Ruby even more stubborn than usual.

“Okay, okay. But let me finish my drink. I can’t believe that after all this time, all you can think about is returning to our prison.”

“I’m not! I don’t want to go back either, but Regina isn’t feeling well, and...”

“Save it.” They stared each other down, but they knew that they would return to their rooms.

David just silently watched.

Killian looked at Emma and frowned too. She was in as great a danger as Regina’s non-sisters. They had all lost too much to the Dark One and his genetic purity. None of them were willing to lose more.

“You should be behind a dampening field as well, and not allowed to roam the ship unprotected.”

“Too bad. I don’t care. I won’t become a prisoner in that cold crypt.”

Killian grabbed her arm and forced her to look at him. “You weren’t there. You have no idea what he does to those whose genetics he strips. If you did, you’d have more fear.”
Emma removed his hand from her. “I know enough. True, I didn’t live it day by day as it was happening, but I came home to it. I almost steered my ship down the black hole that was once my world, my people, and my parents.” Emma shoved a finger into his chest. “Don’t tell me that I understand nothing of pain and what this war cost.”

“Emma...”

“God! You piss me off.” Emma started to move away when he stopped her.

“And you are infuriating. So I take it you no longer want me to move in with you?”

Emma was startled at his question. “I didn’t say that. I... of course I want you. To move in, I mean.” Closing her eyes, she leaned her forehead on his chest unaware of his softening regard, but feeling the hand he moved over her bent head. “I’m alone and it’s the way it has to be, working to restore and fix what has already cost too much.”

Killian lifted her head by her chin and looked in her eyes. She was tired. He could see it in her eyes, and feel it in her body. It wasn’t defeat, just weariness. What weight she carried, he didn’t know, but it was a heavy burden.

Lowering his head to kiss her, Killian's face moved closer until his breath was a warm, moist touch on Emma's lips.

"You’re right, and I’m sorry," Killian said, just as his mouth moved to cover those glorious lips. Any hesitation that might have been present disappeared at that exact moment. One of Emma's hands came up in protest, but soon slid down to a muscular shoulder and began to knead as the other moved to cradle the back of Killian's head. Killian’s hands moved to rest around her slender waist pulling her closer to his body.

Tongues met finally as mouths slanted, grips became tighter, breathing became unnecessary, and the first taste created an addiction Killian didn't ever want to rid himself of, even if he could. God, he loved to kiss! It was almost the only thing he had been permitted to do when he was younger. No woman on his world would’ve dared to become more intimate than that because they were already promised to a bond mate. But a heavy kissing and petting session with him was like being bad, and there were lots of girls who wanted to feel that way.

Emma was different. She didn’t need him to make her feel anything, and somehow there was something much more honest about the way he could overwhelm her. He felt as if Emma was discovering every nook in his mouth, and so he proceeded to do the same thing to her. It became something akin to a race to see who could feel every surface, find every dark corner first.

When blackness began to fall, Killian felt her pull away to pant into his mouth. A low moan of passion mixed with a pout of chagrin, and he pulled her head the last inch forward so their foreheads were resting against each other. They panted together for a few more seconds, slowly calming down as they ran their hands across each other's body. Killian knew the moment that Emma began thinking again, and he waited for her reaction. It didn’t take long.

“What is...” Emma cleared her voice to try to remove some of the husky sound. “What’s with all the kissing?”

“I like kissing.” Killian said releasing her when she moved away from him. “Anyway, you started it.”

Emma’s brows furrowed. “I did not! You kissed me once before and you just did it again.”
“You kissed me first in Sickbay!” Killian’s eyes narrowed, suspecting she was going to just shrug it off. “You ravished me!”

“What?” Emma looked at as if he were insane. “It was just a kiss.”

“Then you admit it!” Killian snorted. *Just a kiss?* He’d like to see what she considered more than a kiss.

Emma literally stomped her foot. “I admit nothing. You’re delusional.”

“I’m delusional? You’re afraid.”

“Afraid? I’m...”

“Hello?” They both stopped and looked at David who was standing there watching them, as was everyone else in the room.

Emma felt the rush of blood to her face. She had completely forgotten where they were and how public it was. Shooting Killian a look of pure fury, she stalked off.

“Think we can escort these women back to the protection of their rooms?” David asked Killian with amusement.

Killian was confused for a moment, and then realized who David was talking about. “Yeah, whatever.”

After they deposited Mary Margaret and Ruby to their respective quarters, Killian and David headed back to work on the Bridge, for which David was eternally thankful. All this little stuff was giving him a headache.

“So you're really going to move out?”

Killian just grunted.

David laughed to himself. An hour ago he would have sworn it was a bad idea, and probably could’ve given detailed reasons for why it was wrong. But after watching them fight and then kiss in the dining room, both oblivious to everyone else, David felt happy for his brother and envious at the same time. Killian had never had anyone to lose himself in before, and even though David had had Kathryn, it was never that type of relationship.

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Emma’s sitting room was covered in her translations. They were finished, but still gibberish. Fussing with the order of the words, she tried to unravel the location of the first gem, but it still eluded all possible combinations. She had unearthed some of the locations and coordinates, but the final ones were still undeciphered.

Emma had searched her possessions to find her holographic helper. It was a computer-generated star map that allowed her to plot the possibilities along the way as she translated. She thought she had located five known points, but she was missing the remaining two. She currently had it switched on, and the air before her was covered with images of galaxies and stars.

It was the opening of her door that made her stop working. Killian stood there with a bag over his shoulder looking at her, waiting.
“If you’re coming in, then you’ll need to walk over the threshold,” Emma offered before turning her head back to her star map.

Killian entered and tossed his bag on the floor. Emma was curious and twisted her head to see what he had. Killian just knocked the stuff aside and out of her reach and view.

“Is that all you’ve got?”

“I like to travel light.” He didn’t mention that he didn’t see any reason to drag everything with him just in case this didn’t work out. It was easier to pack a smaller bag and leave than to walk away with half his crap still in her possession.

“Well, I cleared some space for you in the bedroom. Just help yourself. I’m almost ready to stop working on this today. I was actually going to use the replicator tonight.”

“That’s fine.” Killian took his stuff into the bedroom and looked around. She had definitely moved in. Her stuff was everywhere with a few pictures and trinkets on the bureau.

“You can move my stuff and put out your things, too.”

“Thanks.” Killian cringed at the conversation. He thought she would be more at ease, and he could take his cues on how to act from her, but she seemed equally as nervous.

Killian picked up a picture and stared at the woman and man in the photo. Showing it to Emma, he waited.

“My parents.” Emma joined him and looked at their faces smiling. “They were quite the pair. Always so alive. I was their only child, given to them late in life. They had assumed that they would never have any children, and then I was born. My father use to threaten to tie a strap to me so he could keep track of my movements.”

Killian could understand the sentiment. Putting the picture down he looked at other ones of her with her parents. Strange. All the pictures of Emma were of her as a child.

“There are no older pictures of you?”

“No. I was sent to Temple to train when I was twelve. I never saw them alive again.” Emma touched her parents faces and didn’t even bother to wipe away the tears that naturally came to her eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s strange. We think of life as something discreet and full of proof...just there. But once it is challenged, questioned, or even threatened suddenly it takes on so much more meaning. I left home mere months before the end. If my birth had been just delayed by a few months, or if my father waited until my mid-cycle to send me, I too would have perished.”

“Your teachers. They weren’t your people?”

Emma just shook her head. “No. They were, but they weren’t. They were something else, born into the sect... into a calling. Being a Gaian Priest was the highest honor, and their families watched with great pride at their ascension.”

“Weren’t there other children your age also training at Temple?”
Emma shook her head. “No, of course not. Temple is only for the Alarch de Prin’c.”

“The what?”

“Nothing,” Emma muttered. “It’s nothing.” She walked out of the room, unwilling to talk anymore.

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Unforeseen Complications

Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday!

I hope everyone is recovered from the holiday season and enjoying the new year.

Thanks for the comments on this. I'm sure there are more out there with thoughts on how this story is going. Let me know what you think. Also thanks for the kudos, they are really appreciated.

As always, super mega thanks to ultraluckycat and her mad beta-ing skills.

Enjoy the next chapter...

Chapter 8 - Unforeseen Complications

David lay down in his bed and just stared at the ceiling. Killian had been gone for less than an hour, and already he was bored and lonely. He hadn’t realized how much space Killian filled in his life. Looking at the empty bunk on the other side of the room, he considered having it removed and installing a larger bed to replace the two singles. But what if Killian came back? Thinking of Killian and Emma fighting, David smiled to himself. Killian would be back.

The chime announcing someone at his door startled him. Killian would’ve just entered, and almost everyone else called him on the com if they needed something.

Mary Margaret.

“Captain. I’m sorry to disturb you.”

“You aren’t.” David stood aside and gestured her into the room. “Lady Mary Margaret, it appears you have left the protection of your rooms again.” Calling her Lady seemed appropriate after learning her father was once high on her worlds list of nobility.

“Shocking. I know.” David just smiled at her tone. “Regina’s asleep.”

“So when the Eminent sleeps, am I going to need to monitor for the two of you running wild on the ship?”

“Ruby’s asleep as well.”

“I see.” David said, but he really didn’t. “Can I be of assistance?”

“Yes.” Mary Margaret fidgeted some, but finally turned and looked at David. “What is wrong with Regina? I know you know.”

David fingered his scar. That was a nice trick. She didn’t really know if he knew, but she stated it as a fact and then stood waiting for him to give up the information.
“Do I?”

“Captain...”

“David.” At her confused look, he sighed. “My name. You may call me David.”

“Capt... David, will you not tell me?”

“Why do you assume I know?” David stared her down, crossing his arms over his chest. He liked the way his intense unwavering regard made her nervous.

“You’re the Captain. You must know everything happening on your ship.”

“The ship belongs to Regina,” David said casually.

“That’s not true. You’re her partner. You, Killian, and that Graham person.”

David just shrugged. It was true. He, Killian, and Graham had bought into equal partnership with Regina over a year ago. Will was going to do so as well, but he had a hard time keeping his credits long enough to buy into his partnership. There were just too many gambling tables along the way for him to drop his shares. This last large haul from the Olympus looked like Will’s chance to become an equal partner. Even though he hadn’t bought into the partnership yet, they all still treated him like he had. Will paid in other ways. He was their resident miracle worker. He had redesigned, rewired, and kept the ship running. A ship was nothing without the engineer that maintained it.

David conceded the point. He did know. And she knew he knew.

“I can’t help you, Lady Mary Margaret.”

“Why not?” Mary Margaret could feel her irritation rising. They had gotten back to their rooms to find a sick Regina heading for her bed. She hadn’t moved since.

“It’s not my place to tell. I’m sorry. But I can say don’t worry. She’ll be fine soon.”

She put her hands on her hips and stared at him with narrowed eyes. It was hard to face down loyalty that was protecting her step-sister, but she still needed to know. However, looking at his guarded face, the wicked scar that marred the perfection of his looks and that in some way made him even more perfect, she knew that it was futile. This wasn’t a man that would budge.

Unshakeable loyalty. Damn Areenians. They felt nothing for anyone but their own special loyalties, which didn’t always equate to family, but rather the family they chose. They turned away from anyone else, however, those they had built blood bonds with, they protected with their dying breath. There was nothing she could learn from him. The doctor would be equally fierce in protecting Regina’s privacy. That damn doctor’s oath of patient-doctor confidential and privileged information.

“Thank you anyway.” She noticed his amused look when she didn’t say it sarcastically. “You’re surprised. You thought I would try harder or be bitingly nasty when I didn’t get my way?”

“I’m a little confused.” David only had Kathryn’s behavior to judge by, and Kathryn had her own ways of extracting information. Unfortunately, not all of them were pleasant, but they did remain memorable.

Mary Margaret moved to stand close to him. Real close. Looking at his face, her eyes flickering to his scar. Reaching up a hand, she startled him by running her fingers down the scar in an almost
“I could never fault a person being loyal to my sister.” David held still under her hand. “Does this pain you?”

“At times.” David cleared his throat. “Lady Mary Margaret...”

“Even after all these years?”

“Yes.” David didn’t know what to do. No one in all those years had ever actually touched his scar. Reaching up, he grabbed her hand and pulled it away. “Let me escort you back to your...”

“That’s alright, Captain. I know my way.” She turned and left his rooms.

Staring at her, he caught himself fingering his scar again. *What the hell was that about?*

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Killian finished putting away his belongings and then showered before he went to find her. Standing in the doorway, he watched her, and despite his nature, he found himself smiling. Leaning against the door, he enjoyed the show. Emma versus the replicator, and for all accounts, the replicator was winning.

“It’s already programmed.”

Emma looked up at his voice. “It won’t give me hot tea. I say ‘tea, hot’ and it’s always the same temperature.”

“You have to tell it what temperature...like 100 degrees, or 120 degrees. It needs more detail.”

“So for food, do I specifically have to tell it how to cook it?”

“You’re just making it more difficult than it needs to be.”

“I’m not.” Emma just sighed. “My replicator is so much easier. I say ‘tea, hot’ and I get hot tea. Hot chocolate and I get hot chocolate with cinnamon. Pheasant roasted with potatoes, red...and that’s what I get.”

“Okay, I get it. This does the same.”

“No, it doesn’t!”

Killian moved her aside. “Pheasant, roasted with potatoes, red.” He waited and the replicator asked which portion of the pheasant or the entire pheasant. “Breast and legs only.” Then it asked if potatoes with skins or without. “Without.” Then it asked if he wanted the potatoes roasted with the pheasant or cooked another method and served with the roasted pheasant. “Just give me the bloody pheasant and some potatoes!”

“Now who’s being difficult?” Emma smirked. Killian just snarled and she watched him fuss and fight with the replicator until they finally had their dinner.

“Where did you get your ship?”

Emma just shrugged. “It’s always been mine. Why?”

“It’s a beauty. It handles like a dream, and if I’m not mistaken, it’s the fastest thing I’ve ever
“More than likely.” Emma finished her meal then eyed some of his remaining potatoes. “Um, are you going to finish those?”

Killian just pulled his plate closer and continued questioning her.

“So did your people build your ship?”

Emma just ignored him and went to the replicator and fought with it over a few moments, then came back with something whipped and chocolate. Killian watched her eat, suddenly silent.

“No, my people did not build my ship.”

Killian went and programmed himself some dessert as well, cursing under his breath. She was being enigmatic on purpose. Bloody Gaians were impossible to get to discuss their own business despite their willingness to help others.

“If not them, then who?”

Emma suddenly looked suspicious. “Why? Why is it so important?”

“I like the ship. I’m curious. Nothing else.”

“I built the ship.”

Killian snorted. Sure she did. She was a terror, with her hands on everything at once and her endless questions. He couldn’t imagine her fixing or designing anything that complex, and yet so elegantly simple.

“You don’t believe me?”

“I know your people were legendarily noted to be more advanced than people realized, but you’re hardly are old enough to have finished school.”

“I spent over ten years learning, and I’m twenty-eight. I’m hardly a child.”

“Still...”

Emma fumed as she went to a drawer and took out a small toolkit. Going to the replicator, she opened the access control door and began to make changes and repairs on the unit. Going to another drawer she pulled out another small kit full of microchips and small electronic units.

“What are you doing?”

“Upgrading your archaic system,” Emma simply stated.

“That replicator is top of the line,” Killian frowned at her. Replicators were luxurious and costly in both power and in purchase credit. The Enchanted had a limited amount. “I don’t think you should be messing with it.”

Emma ignored him and continued working.

“Emma, I said...”

“Finished.” Emma replaced the panel and gathered up her tools. “Let’s give it a try.”
“We’ve already used it numerous times tonight. The power drain…”

“Is now negligible. I looped the internal power conduits into a self-feeding loop. Whereas once it took so much power to replicate, now it takes seventy-three percent less.”

“That’s impossible.”

“And yet…” Emma gestured at the machine. “It’s simple. To replicate and synthesize the food, the unit lost much power into transformed energy, but a large portion was lost in heat. By building a self-feeding loop, that transferred energy is fed back into the system. Since heat is the last energy state entering chaos, it has to be interrupted before the transfer can be completed, so I tripped the system before that schematic and…”

“Okay...okay. Not so much detail. Prove it works better.”

“Then come here.” Emma waited until he was standing next to her. “Order something...something unique and hard. Clear your mind, imagine the food...the taste, the smell... and then order.”

Killian was skeptical, but he ordered anyway. Thinking of a food he knew wasn’t programmed into the food replicators, he ordered his boyhood favorite. Tarrok root pie with extra whipped cream. It was an orange tuber that grew on his planet exclusively. It was sweet and flavorful. It was also impossible to find since a blight took out all the large crops almost twenty years ago.

Killian took the pie from the replicator, and hesitating, he took a bite. Then he took another, and another. It was good! Just like Mom made...actually, more like David’s mother made. Killian’s mother’s pies usually tasted like dirt.

“How?”

“I added a scanning chip to the relay and power matrix.”

“It reads your mind?”

Emma made a gesture of acknowledgement. “Sort of. You know the new targeting controls in all fighters?” Killian nodded. “They anticipate the pilot’s command through a neural interface, which at first had to be physically made, but later was done through scanning. This chip is the same kind of neural interface scanner.”

“Elegant technology to waste on a replicator.”

“Do you like your damn pie, or not?”

“Aye, it’s good.” Killian smiled at her huffy attitude. “I think you should try a bite.”

Emma just shook her head no, and backed up. “I’m not real fond of pie, especially pies made from roots. They taste like weeds and dirt.”

“This doesn’t.” Killian shoved a bite at her, but Emma kept her mouth closed and still refused. “Stop being a baby, and take a bite.”

“I don’t usually eat anything sweet unless it’s chocolate or covered in chocolate…”

“Just try it!”

He wasn’t going to stop, so she gave in to the one bite. Killian watched her closely as she opened her mouth to take the bite. Her tongue came out a little to taste the food before it entered her
Killian’s eye narrowed as he watched her. He moaned when she closed her eyes to savor the taste.

“Okay, so it wasn’t that bad...”

Emma couldn’t say another word. Killian’s mouth was interfering with her normal speech as he kissed her. Her hand moved up his front to push on his shoulder, but instead ended up around his neck. Opening her mouth more, she stepped into his arms and leaned into the kiss, liking the sounds he made in his throat. Pulling back, they both stared at each other while trying to catch their breaths.

“You keep kissing me.” Emma stated the fact in a small whispery voice.

“Aye.” Killian bent his head again to do it again.

Emma stopped him with a hand to his mouth. “Why?”

“I like kissing, love. Actually, I like it a lot, and over the past few years I haven’t had the opportunity to do much of it.”

“I don’t understand.”

Killian just shrugged. “I’m Areenian, an unbonded Areenian. Women on my world liked to kiss me, make out, and stuff, but nothing else. I left my world in my seventeenth year to join the war, all my encounters since have been with women who basically do things for credits.”

“Whores?”

Killian just nodded. “Basically. Anyway, they’re not the type of women you kiss. So it’s been a long dry spell.”

“And I look like the type of woman you could kiss.”

“And then some.”

Emma removed herself from him, and leaned her head to one side in speculation. “I think I’m sort of flattered and insulted at the same time, but really it doesn’t matter. I mean...the kissing, it’s...good.” Emma ignored the twinkle in his eyes and the suggestive wiggle of his brow. “But I think it’ll complicate things, and make them harder.”

“I don’t see how, love.”

“You don’t?” Emma’s face clouded. “Kissing. Us kissing...it isn’t going to change anything between us, right?”

“Right. The only difference will be that we kiss. I don’t see a problem.”

Emma just shrugged and then sighed. “Okay, if you’re sure. I sort of enjoy kissing you, and as long as you don’t get any ideas, then...”

“What kind of ideas? Exactly?”

“Just that we...” Emma gestured between them, “will never have a real future. We can’t.”

“That’s okay with me. Areenians don’t mate outside their race.”
“I’ve heard that. Good. I don’t mate at all. Never will.” Emma smiled at him without humor. “Anyway, I’m going to go bathe before bedtime.”

Killian grabbed her arm. “Why never? You’re young and beautiful, and the last of your kind. I’d think that eventually you would want to ally yourself to someone permanently and have children to continue your race.”

Emma took his hand off her arm. “Never, because I won’t survive this adventure. My only hope is to complete the task before I die.”

Killian’s eyes became hard and intense. “You’re dying?”

“Technically we’re all dying. But, no. I’m not diseased or at the end of my life cycle. Actually, I have an incredible life cycle if left unhindered to live it. But what I’m planning on doing...my mission...is such that there is almost no chance for survival.”

“This is going to kill you?”

Emma just nodded. “We’ll be lucky if it doesn’t kill us all.” Emma started to walk away. But stopped. “I haven’t told you much and there is so much more to tell.

Killian reached out with his hand and gently clasped hers. “Try something new, love. It’s called trust.”

Emma stared at him, searching him for something that contradicted her instincts about him. It seemed they were similar souls, both outcasts, anomalies: she the last of her kind, him an unbonded man within a world of bonded people. Could she trust him? Her instincts told her yes, but she still faltered, still struggled to let another in.

She inhaled deeply, knowing this man would be the one to finish what she started if she couldn’t. “When I... if I don’t make it, I’ll need someone to finish what I could not.”

“Me?”

“We’ll see.”

Killian stood there silently as she went to get ready for bed. Looking at the modified replicator, thinking of her ship and her people, he couldn’t take the thought of her not surviving. She was a pain, loud, opinionated, and at times seemed to have eight arms, all of them reaching and pushing wrong buttons at the same time. But she was unique, loyal, and fiercely fought for what she believed was right; and this universe was fast losing that very quality.

Lying in bed, Killian couldn’t stop thinking of her words. She was right. Kissing complicated a sexual relationship. It denoted some higher emotion, but in truth, he didn’t want to give it up. And thinking of her imminent death, he realized that he was unwilling to give her up either. There was a part of him that assumed that if, and when, she died from situations other than natural causes, he would be the one murdering her out of sheer exasperation.

“Oh, good. You didn’t take my favorite side of the bed.” Emma emerged from the other room, and Killian didn’t mention he always slept as far from the com link as possible since his body resisted being disturbed. He happily gave her that side of the bed.

Killian didn’t know what to say when she suddenly dropped her robe, and joined him in the bed. She was naked, but then again, so was he. Moving his arm out, he let her slide in close to his body.
“God, you’re so warm. I knew you would be. This is going to be the first full night’s sleep I’ve gotten since I came on board.” Emma looked up at him and smiled. “Thank you.”

“Thank me later.”

Emma just chuckled and burrowed closer to his body. Killian was still trying to decipher the ‘sleep’ comment, when he suddenly became aware that she was still. Looking down, he couldn’t believe that she was already asleep.

Three hours later, he had classified all the different tortures he could think of, and none of them equated, or even came close to, ‘sleeping with Emma’ torture. First, she was naked, soft and silky, leaving him more than just a little disturbed. Second, she had a habit of moving constantly, not a little but a lot in her sleep, which added to the already mentioned disturbed feeling. Finally, she talked softly to herself which normally wouldn’t bother him too much, except her mouth was on his chest. She was resting on his bare chest, and the hushing rush of her warm breath over his chest hair was once again adding to the disturbed feelings mentioned yet again.

It was her hand moving down and over his body that broke his resolve not to wake her. Holding still, he tracked her movements as her hand passed his stomach and continued even lower. He consciously sucked in his breath to keep from disturbing her, while he mentally encouraged her to go on, and once she had him in a good grip, he encouraged her even further by moving his hips. She was definitely much better at this than he was, even completely asleep.

His breath was coming in fast shallow pants, and he moved his hand down her back, pulling her lithe frame to his, letting her rub up against his full body. Losing control of the moment, he forgot where he was, and lifted her mouth and kissed her.

It was the stiffening of her body, the stillness that clued him in that she was awake. Gasping, she quickly moved off his body and half sat up in the bed.

“Bloody hell! Don’t stop! I was near completion.”

“What?” Her husky sleep-thickened voice did terrible things to his control, or what little he had left.

Pulling her back down on him, he kissed her again, sucking her tongue into his mouth and feasting on it. Hunger. It felt like hunger, deep and painful, residing in the pit of his stomach. If he had ever eaten in his life, he didn’t know, because his body was telling him no.

“Darling, don’t stop working me over. I’m damn near ready to pop.”

“Darling? Don’t call me that! Pop?” Emma sat up again and moved away from him. “You mean...OH!”

“What?” Killian sat up confused too. She was turning red as best as he could tell in the dark, and her tone was horrified. “I admit, I would rather have had you awake, or not falling asleep on me, but this worked too.”

“I... grabbed you?” Emma actually put both her hands on her cheeks feeling the heat rising, and rubbed violently until suddenly she remembered where one of her hands had been. “Oh, oh... I’m sorry!”

“Aye, me too.” Basically sorry that she stopped, sorry that he had woken her up. Note to self...*do not wake her up, or at least not until the moment of release.*
“I mean...oh shit, what you must be thinking! I never meant to use you or abuse you...I really only meant to have you sleep with me as a warming stone...exchange of body heat... and...and now this!”

Killian’s brain short circuited. For once in his life, he kept his tongue quiet and listened to her mortified rant and self-castigation. Okay, he had it wrong. Just sleep together...no sex. She wanted his body heat, not his body, or at least not in that way. She was upset thinking she abused him. The dark kept Emma from seeing the twinkle in Killian’s eyes. No way he was heading back to his old room, and then having to explain the misunderstanding to David. Nope. No way. Not going to happen.

“Look, Emma...” He paused as she continued talking a mile a minute. “Emma! Calm down! It was no big deal, okay?”

“Really? I mean I didn’t...hurt you?”

“Well, I’m a little ‘uncomfortable’ right now,” Killian saw her body stiffen to his words, “but it happens. Things will settle down quickly enough. So don’t worry about it too much.”

“I...” Taking a deep breath, she tried to settle herself. “I’m just so sorry. Maybe it was the kissing...or maybe it was...”

“I’m sure it was just a fluke. No big deal. The kissing? No. I don’t think it was that.”

Killian didn’t mind tormenting her a little, but he didn’t want to lose any more ground than he already had. He had moved in thinking they were going to be bedmates and roll around in the sheets like out of control fuck bunnies. Now he finds out that it was the furthest from that. That her cold-blooded body needed a nice warming stone to sleep up against, and for some reason, he fit her ‘requirements’.

“Are you sure?” Emma chewed on her lip and looked at him suspiciously. He was being too understanding, too nice. “Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.”

Killian quickly grabbed her, and pulled her back down in the bed covering them with the blankets and bedding.

“Don’t be ridiculous. It’s a perfect solution. We’re both benefiting. This was just an unforeseen event. Probably will never happen again, or if it does, I’d rather it be a joint decision and both of us awake.”

“Maybe we’re too...”

“Compatible? I know. Moment of honesty? If you offered to finish what we started I’d wouldn’t say no. Actually, I’d more than likely just say yes. But, we have a mission and other things we need to accomplish...right?”

Killian almost laughed aloud at her nodding head. Bloody hell, he was good. David and Will had told him he had no tact, but he was proving them wrong.

“We hardly know each other enough to jump into bed. So let’s just put this behind us, let our friendship grow naturally, and see where it leads us. Okay?” Killian said in his most even, understanding tone.

Emma nodded, and snuggled back down on him. He was warm. Actually, he was warmer than she remembered, and knowing why, she blushed again. Burying her face against him, she tried to go
back to sleep. She couldn’t.

“I’m really sorry...”

“Emma! Sleep.”

“You’re not sleeping.”

“I’m sort of too ‘up’ to sleep right now, and all your wiggling isn’t helping.”

“Up?” Emma’s eyes moved down the covers. “Oh. I’m...”

Killian put a hand over her mouth. “Emma, if you say you’re sorry one more time, I won’t be responsible for my actions. Okay?”

Emma nodded again. She almost remained quiet for a full minute. “What are you going to do about it?”

Killian sighed. She was sexier than hell, but bloody hell, she asked more questions than a small child.

“I was thinking of going to take a cold shower.” Killian paused. He wanted to invite her to join him. Quickly leaving the bed, he went into the next room and took care of business trying to decide how to approach his current dilemma.

If she realized that he had accepted her offer with the idea of their relationship being sexual and not just a physical exchange of body heat minus body fluid, more than likely, she would toss him from her rooms. Next thing he knew, she would be measuring up other candidates' requirements. Killian frowned at the thought of Will, Graham, or even David eagerly accepting her terms. Not going to happen.

If he just bided his time, kept their relationship close and friendly with lots of kissing, sooner or later she would start to think of him in a more physical way. If her assertion was correct and their journey was a long one, he could be looking at a long-term relationship, the first of his life. Sooner or later it would save on cold showers and credits for bay whores.

He needed to be charming, exude dashing sincerity, and above all, manipulate the hell out of her. Killian swore as the cold water froze his skin. Subtlety was not one of his greatest traits. He didn’t like to brag, but his appearance and charm generally had the woman scrambling to do his bidding. Okay, so he did like to brag. He decided if he were to win Emma’s affections, he needed help.

~*~

“Okay, explain it one more time.”

Will just shook his head and reached for his tools. Killian was driving him insane.

“Killian, I don’t have time for your sex life right now.” Will growled in irritation when another one of his staff brought the latest report. They weren’t making any headway. With half their staff imprisoned for another few months, the standard diagnostics were being overlooked, and invariably systems were breaking down due to lack of regular maintenance.

“Will...”

Will rolled over on his back. “Look, in less than twenty-four hours, we’re scheduled to stop at
Palin II. Can’t you pick up some entertainment and give Emma and the rest of us a break?”

“I’m not that bad.”

“No. No, you’re worse.”

“I’ve been very understanding, and considerate, and...”

“You’re horny as hell and taking it out on her and the rest of us. You yelled at her yesterday for working on the forward sensory array.”

“She didn’t call and clear the work order before taking sensors offline.”

Will just shrugged. “Who cares? She’s a better engineer than half my staff. And truthfully, she's better than the other half and maybe even me. Her people knew and understood more about engines, physics, and space than any other. All that information is trapped in that tiny little body.”

“She’s a menace.”

“So what? So she gets into tricky situations. So what if she doesn’t follow standard protocol? She’s revamped all our replicators, and found a gremlin in the lifts that we searched almost a year for. She helped me install the power nodes to the crystal chamber, and increased our slip drive capacity over forty percent.”

Killian sat down next to the open panel Will was working in, handing him tools.

“Aye, I know. She’s a wiz, in a freak of nature sort of way. She's dedicated, inquisitive, and just a little strange and whacked. So what am I doing wrong?”


“I told you. She doesn’t want to get that physically close that fast. I’m trying to...” Killian paused. He had no language to state what he was doing. In the last ten days since moving in with Emma, he was making little to no headway, and things were looking grim.

They were fighting, and it was mostly his fault. Sleeping with her night after night was harder than he realized it would be. She moved in her sleep. She moved a lot. She slept in the nude, which normally he didn’t, but recently started. Skin to skin contact allowed for a more efficient transfer of heat. But truthfully, he loved the feel of her skin on his. And her hands...they were everywhere. It was like her mind took a nap, but the rest of her body kept on working. He went to bed hard and aroused, and woke up harder and even more aroused.

“Look, just go down to Palin II, pick up some action, get your pipes cleaned, and come back with a better disposition than when you left.”

Killian thought about it. Will was right. He was holding out waiting for Emma, but that could be a long time in coming, if at all. His added frustration level was taking its toll on their new relationship, and every day he was worried she was going to toss him out of the room.

“Maybe I might.”

“Please do. Personally, I think you had a screw loose when you agreed to this arrangement. Coming from a man who barely went a day without some sort of sexual gratification to being damn near celibate is just deranged.”
“So you wouldn’t have taken her up on the invitation to move in and sleep with her?”

Will just laughed finishing up the repair and replacing the panel. “In a heartbeat. I’d have moved in immediately, been waiting in her bed with nothing but a smile, and some type of restraints.”

“Restraints?”

“Learned it on my wedding night. Best to be prepared.”

Killian laughed. “You’re sick.”

“No I’m not. I just know the difference.”

Killian stood up and helped Will gather the tools. “So what makes you think you’d get farther with Emma than me? Best case scenario, you’d be whimpering like a bitch’s pup begging with those soulful eyes of yours.”

“That’s why I’d already be doing the nasty, making like bunnies with her. No one can resist the trademark ‘Will eyes’.” Will ignored Killian’s sneering laugh. “Honestly, mate. Over seven systems of women will testify on my behalf that I am charm incarnate, and too sexy to resist.”

“Emma is a hell of a lot more classy than your garden variety of bar wench or bay whore. She’d clean your clock with little to no effort.”

“It’s not my clock I’d be wanting her to clean.”

Killian could feel the rush of heat up his neck as he began to let Will irritate him. Emma wouldn’t fall for all that phony charm. She was much smarter than that.

“What makes you think she would fall for your lines?”

“Granted, she probably wouldn’t. But I’ve got one advantage over you.”

Killian just made a face. “What?”

“She likes me. You...you just piss her off and yell at her.”

Will walked away chuckling, leaving a thoughtful Killian behind.

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“Why can’t I go?”

“Emma,” Killian moved around the room trying to get ready for bed. “it’s just a restocking stop. Not even a real rest or break. We don’t want too many people wandering around getting into trouble.”

Emma sat down in a huff on the bed. “That’s it. I knew it!”

“What?” Killian closed his eyes and counted to ten.

“You’re afraid that I’m going to get into trouble or cause problems.”

“That’s not it.”

Killian turned off the light and got into bed as Emma scrambled in next to him. He moved the
covers around and frowned at her cold skin. Moving his hand up and down her back, he tried to warm her quickly.

“Then what is it?” Emma frowned. He was avoiding answering her, or giving her a direct answer.

“I have some personal business I’m going to attend to. And I won’t be able to take you with me.”

“You don’t have to. I’ve taken care of myself before without much trouble or problems long before I met you.”

Killian knew that, but he also knew that she was courting danger. “Emma, all it would take is you being scanned and it’s over.”

“I told you, Killian, I’ve wandered around six years without being actively scanned. I think I can continue to do so.”

“You can’t come.”

Emma went silent. “Want to tell me the real reason?”

“Emma...”

“Just tell me.”

Killian sighed. He was never going to get any sleep at this rate. Tenacious. She was like a tenacious hunter refusing to relinquish her prey.

“I’m picking up...that is...um, look...I just need to see someone about a problem I have, and I’ll be too busy to keep an eye on you.”

Emma’s hand was moving over his chest, and suddenly it was still. “This is about sex.”

“Emma.”

“It is! You’re going to hire a whore?” Emma moved away from him and sat up in the bed. Killian just laid back and enjoyed the view. She really was exquisite. “I can’t believe this. Why? Because I don’t want you?”

“This has nothing to do with you!” Emma snorted at his words. Yeah, right. “Okay, maybe a little. Look, I’m normally very...um...” Killian was at a loss for words.

Emma’s eyebrow went up. “Frisky?”

“Aye, frisky. And sleeping with you climbing all over me all night, every night is causing problems to arise.” Emma rolled her eyes at that. “Anyway, this is how I normally take care of business, and trying to ignore it is making me frustrated and cranky...”

“Damn skippy it is.”

Killian ignored her tone. “So I am taking the opportunity to relieve some of the tension and maybe give you a break from my foul humor.”

“Not that that wouldn’t be appreciated, but can’t you just take care of this yourself instead of finding some diseased piece of meat disguised as human on a constant prescription of antibiotics, to cure the eternal drips?”
Killian groaned at the description. It was too accurate and far too descriptive for his taste. “Look, I need some relief, and this is my only real option at this time. You don’t realize how hard this gets at times, and...”

Emma just snorted in derision. “Yes I do. I feel how hard it gets every morning when I wake up with it poking me in my stomach and sometimes my back. It’s not that easy to overlook.”

“Emma, I’m not talking to you about this, okay? This is my private business. I’m your heating stone, not your mate. And not wanting to be too crass, I need sex, plain and simple.” Killian rubbed his face with his hands and waited for her reaction. Worst case scenario, she’d kick him out. “I honestly want to keep you warm, but I also want more from you...maybe more than you want to give me. I can live with that. I’ve learned to live with things not working out before, so this is just like looking in the mirror of my life. But, if this is it...it’s reading the same from front to back. We’re ending where we started.”

She was quiet. He never knew she could be so quiet.

“You’re right, and I’m sorry. I never meant this arrangement to cause you pain or discomfort. I thought that...Nevermind, I don’t know what I thought.”

Killian didn’t like this. He didn’t know what he was feeling, but somehow he felt like he had just lost ground with her, or perhaps any chance he’d ever have with her. It was unsettling. She was more than just a potential bedmate; over the past few weeks she had shaped up into a real friend. She was someone he wanted more than just for sex. He wanted her company. He wanted to be around her.

“Emma...”

“Goodnight.”

Killian was shocked that not only was she quiet after that, but she didn’t move. At times, it was as if she tried to reduce how much body contact they had. Sighing in exhaustion, he finally went to sleep.

The next morning when he woke up, she was gone.

~*~
Happy Sunday, guys.

Here’s another update of this epic story. I really hope you are all enjoying it. It does seem to be steadily gaining kudos and comments so thanks guys.

Huge thanks, as usual, to ultraluckycat and her mag beta skills.

Enjoy the next chapter.

Chapter 9 - Clotho -She who spins the thread

Killian rushed to the Bridge. David was drinking his morning coffee and checking overnight sensor reports and intra-ship logs.

“Problem, brother?”

“Where is she?”

David just kept on reading. “Emma?”

Killian smacked his hand down hard on his brother’s chair.

“Don’t pull this bullshit on me, David! You know I mean Emma. I checked my sensors. No sign. I checked her ship. It’s gone. And the personal transmitter I planted on her isn’t giving me a reading.”

David just calmly sipped his beverage and looked at his brother with interest. “That’s an invasion of her personal space, Killian.”

Killian made a 'Like I Care' face. “Where is she?”

“Gone.” David got up and nodded to his officer to take the Conn. Killian scowled at his brother’s back, and then followed.

“Gone?”

David just nodded. “She woke me real early this morning and told me she needed to leave immediately, and that she would be in contact with us. She's going to rendezvous with us later.”

“You should’ve woke me up. You should've stopped her.”

David entered the galley and headed straight for the coffee. Leaning back against a table he looked at Killian critically. Usually nothing ever seemed to bother Killian, but this morning he looked very upset.
“Want to tell me about it?”

Killian put both his hands on the wall next to David and leaned into them rubbing his face in his arm. His voice was so low, David had to listen carefully.

“We sort of had a fight.”

“A fight.” David drank his coffee thoughtfully. “You fight all the time.”

“We disagree. This one was a little different. We went to sleep with things unresolved, and I woke to find her gone.” Killian just closed his eyes. “Did she say when she would be back, or where she was going?”

“No.” David rubbed the back of his neck. “Look, if you want to move back in with me...that’ll be fine.”

Killian just shook his head no. If he walked away while she was gone, then their entire relationship would be over from the moment she stepped back on the ship and found he had vacated their quarters.

“I’ll wait.”

David looked at Killian and frowned in confusion. This was certainly different. “Okay, but you can always come back if you change your mind.”

“Captain?” David moved away to the nearest com to respond to the call.

“Yes, Gus?”

“Palin II has acknowledged our hail, and we’ve been granted orbital status. Docking of transport ships may begin immediately at the designated docking bays. Palin II would like to remind us that all incoming docked ships will be inspected both when they arrive and again at departure.”

David looked at his brother. “Alert the first transport and have them ascend to planetside docking. Tell the commanders that I don’t want any trouble this time.”

“Aye, Captain.”

David closed the link. “Weren’t you scheduled to go on the first transport?”

“Yeah. I better take off.” He headed for the door.

“Killian.” Killian stopped in the door. “Don’t get into any trouble.”

“Right.”

David watched him go and then looked out the port window at the planet below. If he was smart, he’d go down to the planet and keep an eye on his brother, but he was too busy for that. David turned to leave when he ran into what he thought of as another form of wasted time.

“Captain.”

“Ruby,” David acknowledged with a nod of his head.

She smiled cheekily. “Do I not rank a Lady Ruby title?”
David sighed, but put on his most charming smile. “Of course, My Lady.”

“So polite.” Ruby sat down in a chair and motioned for David to join her. He looked around before sitting down. “She’s in our rooms.”

David just ignored the comment. “How can I help you?”

“Will tells me that you are restocking with essential supplies.”

“Palin II. The first transports have already left.”

“And Will?”

“He would be on the first transport along with my brother and the doctor.”

Ruby swore under her breath and smiled at David’s reaction to it. “Sorry. I was hoping to convince you to let me go to the planet with Will.”

“That is quite impossible. I’m sorry, Lady Ruby, but there is no way I could guarantee your safety.”

“Perhaps I could travel with Emma?”

David sighed. “I’m afraid that Emma is no longer on board. She left this morning in her ship. She’ll be rejoining us in a few days.”

Ruby smiled bitterly. Her amount of envy for Emma had just increased. She and Emma had found a sort of friendship since they met, Mary Margaret liked Emma as well, while Regina seemed to adore her, and perhaps that was part of the reserve she kept and the envy she felt towards the woman. Emma was free.

“I guess there is no possible way I could convince you?”

“Not likely. Maybe you could tell me what it is you need from the planet, and I’ll contact a stocking crew to acquire it for you.”

Ruby sighed. She needed fresh air, open spaces and freedom. Everything that David and his band of happy space campers took for granted, but couldn’t offer her.

“I just wanted some herbals and other supplies.”

David just shook his head no. “I understand, but in truth I can’t protect you down there. The authorities are searching and scanning all ships. If they scan you, it’s over.”

“But...”

“The best I can do is set you up with the interplanetary formulary and plant taxon...there will be pictures within the library. Once you load and identify all the plants you need, I’ll transmit the information to Graham, and he’ll get you all that is available.”

“Captain...” she whined.

“Let me escort you back to your quarters. I’ll send a technician from hydroponics to your quarters.”

Ruby understood defeat. “Thank you.”
Mary Margaret stood up when Ruby and David entered the rooms. Ruby just continued to walk past her and stormed into her room, shutting the door.

“Said no, huh?”

David nodded, and then shrugged. “I’m sorry. I wish I could find a way not to make this less of a prison for her.”

“Ruby’s mind is her biggest prison.” Mary Margaret said quietly. “It always has been. She wants to run free, that’s all. She was never a lover of confined spaces, loves the open air too much.”

“I see.”

Mary Margaret just smiled sadly. “I don’t think you do. Ruby is certainly a free spirit and hates the restraints put on us, mentally and physically.”

David nodded. “I can’t let either of you go down to Palin II, but I will arrange for a technician to help you determine what herbs are needed, and one of the stocking teams will make sure to acquire the materials.”

“Thank you, Captain. You’re being more than a little accommodating.”

David just nodded and started to leave. “Regina...is she feeling better today?”

Mary Margaret stood to walk him to the door. “Yes, I think she’ll be back on form pretty soon. She’s not used to it is all. I can’t remember a time when she was sick. She’s always been the strongest of us. She worries too much, about Cora, about Emma, about the Dark One finding any of us.”

“We all want to keep you safe, but that is no guarantee the Dark One will not board the ship and find you.”

“I feel that, too. She should never have taken Zelena’s power. Zelena should never have forced her to take it. It’s too much. Too much for one person to live with.”

“Regina is strong. She’s fought and overcome so much,” David offered.

Mary Margaret nodded as they reached the door. “She is feeling a disturbance in the matrix and she’s afraid the Dark One is feeling it. That the Dark One will concentrate on a search for what is causing this disturbance. She’s afraid he, or Cora, will find Emma and take her genetics, her power, for themselves and then they will be more powerful.”

“Is Emma more powerful than Regina?” David couldn’t help himself from asking.

Mary Margaret shrugged. “She doesn’t know. She just knows Emma’s power is pure. Purer than anything we’ve seen before. She is the light against the Dark One’s darkness.”

David smiled at that. Whatever that meant.

“She sees a change in the ‘aura’ of the Great Understanding. When Zelena transferred her power, she stopped a tear in space. The Dark One and Cora were waiting for this tear and it didn’t happen. So they know that either Zelena still lives, or she found a way to transfer the power. Eventually the Dark One will be forced to seek out Regina, to see if she is holding Zelena’s power as well as her own. Regina must hide Emma’s existence from him and Cora as much as her own.”
David paused before asking what he’d been wanting to since Regina had been taken ill. “Who are you? You and Ruby? I know you are not really Regina’s sisters, but you are certainly something to her that she feels she needs to protect you so much, from her mother and from the Dark One.”

“I’m Mary Margaret,” she said with a nonchalant shrug of her shoulder. She eyed him cautiously. “But I’m also known as Elurra Blan.”

David sucked in his breath at that revelation. This just got better and better. Not only did his ship carry probably the last Eminent One and the last Gaian, but now he discovered it carried Elurra Blan as well.

Elurra Blan was a legend on her own; a one-time minor royal of a failing planet, she had turned bandit during the war. She had destroyed and wrecked many a plan concocted by Cora and her cronies, with a bounty being placed on her head by the end of the war. Her connection with Regina? It was well-known Cora had married Elurra Blan’s father, hoping to rule the planet and relish in its wealth. Once she had learned there was hardly any wealth left, she had killed the father, depleted the coffers and fled the planet, taking Regina and Zelena with her. At her first stop she had learned of the Dark One’s destruction of Gaia and, almost smelling the first stench of war, she had gone in search of the Dark One. There were some who speculated the two were acquainted when they were younger, and there were more who speculated Zelena was indeed the Dark One’s child.

David understood Regina’s need to keep Elurra/Mary Margaret safe. Her mother had ruined her life.

“And Ruby?”

Mary Margaret laughed a little. “Ruby saved my life and I wouldn’t leave her, I wouldn’t come under Regina’s protection unless she agreed to extend that protection to Ruby as well.”

David stroked his face, fingering his scar. “The Dark One has taken too much already. It is time to stop the bloodshed. My own people are imprisoned, forced into service to the Dark One. Your people were exterminated and cultivated for their genetics, Emma’s homeworld was destroyed, and Graham’s people remain pressed into service, using their empathic abilities to scan other races for the Dark One.”

“I don’t think he can be stopped, David.” Mary Margaret said quietly. The war had started when she was 13, and in those years, the Dark One was the only concept of pure evil she ever understood. He was the monster that would not die. “He almost destroyed all of the Eminents, and they were the most powerful beings in our known universe.”

“No, they were not. Emma’s people were. How, no one was sure. All that was known was they protected and helped those around them. The rumor is that the Dark One took something from their planet and then used it against their own sun, thereby destroying them. It is this ‘thing’ he took that is his weapon of mass destruction; the very thing that holds us hostage, as all the worlds of our universe bleed at the Dark One’s command.” It was what Emma was trying to retrieve.

“What will become of us if we fail?” Mary Margaret asked quietly.

David’s blue eyes meet her green-colored ones, and for a moment they shared a common fear.

“We won’t fail. We cannot.” David started to leave, but Mary Margaret grabbed him back quickly. “Captain...David, I really need to thank you for what you are doing for Regina. And us.”

David turned to face her. “Regina is my friend. I owe her my life, and the life of my friends and my
“Killian’s not really your brother, right? It’s more like us, Regina and I.”

“No, Killian is not my birth brother, but we share a brother’s bond. An Areenian’s brother bond.”

Mary Margaret understood that. Understood the uniqueness of the Areenians and their bonds. How one could feel the other’s emotions, feel their pain and their happiness.

“What’s that like?” she asked, taking a step closer to him.

“At first it was completely surreal and I struggled to understand what was happening to me. But now, I would feel half dead without it. He’s my brother and that is all.”

She reached out one hand and gently stroked his chin along the scar, then ran one finger gently over his lips. David groaned to himself. He had known that the women were going to be trouble, but never dreamed that they would be trouble for himself. He was helpless to stop himself, and his arms reached out and pulled Mary Margaret in.

The first kiss was gentle, chaste. They pulled apart, David hesitant to go further. But the smile on her face was all the encouragement he needed. He leaned in again and this time lips parted and the duel began. David’s tongue investigated every inch of her mouth, the sweetness, the richness...and he, who hadn’t touched anyone in months, found himself ready to do just that. He could stay in this warm, wet cavern forever. His brother wasn’t the only one that enjoyed kissing.

Mary Margaret was feeling the same... God, how David could kiss!

Ruby was going to pissed off and Regina disapproving, but surprisingly, that didn’t faze Mary Margaret in the least. It did faze David, though.

He put his hands on her upper arms, and pushed her away from him. Looking at him through narrowed eyes, she was unable to read his thoughts or understand why he stopped.

“Pardon me, Lady Mary Margaret. I must return to my station. The technician will be here shortly.”

Mary Margaret watched in confusion as he quickly left without another word.

~*~

Killian watched the Bay Control Guardians search and scan their cargo holds and conduct a full internal scan of the structure. They were forced to submit blueprints for their runabouts while empathic scanners searched for hidden cargo holds and contraband. Killian leaned up against some crates, watching the process. The initial scan was finished and his people were released to go and begin collecting the supplies they needed.

Will stood beside Killian, watching as well. The guards were thorough, but Will had bet good money that they wouldn’t discover the hidden subfloor deck beneath the main deck. It was small, and ran the length of the runabout. There was nothing in it, but it was a smuggler’s hatch.

“Five hundred credits.”

“Forget it, Will. In the last six times we’ve been here they’ve never found it.”

Will just laughed. That was true, but members of the crew still bet him.
“Why do you think the empaths don’t pick up its location from us?”

Killian just shrugged. “They’re empaths, so they locate things by feeling our emotions and anxiety. None of us feel anxious enough to alert them, I guess.”

“That might change if we had something hidden in it.”

“True.” Killian watched the Captain of the Guardians signing papers and sending them over to him. It was done.

“So you want to tell me what the hell you did to our beautiful Emma?”

Killian just grunted and ignored Will as he signed the release papers. All their supplies would be searched before they left, and the ship would be scanned again.

“Must’ve been bad if she literally took off in the middle of the night.”

“Shut up, Will.”

Will sucked in his top lip in thought and rocked on his feet regarding Killian in amusement. “Told her about getting laid, huh?”

Killian just growled and looked at his friend.

“Careful. I could always take you.”

Will just laughed at the threat. “Sure ya could.” Will slapped Killian on the back as they left the landing bay. “I know you didn’t tell her. Even you wouldn’t be that stupid.”

Killian avoided Will’s eyes, and sped up his walk. Will studied him closely and then whistled under his breath. “No shit! You did!” He laughed in shock and amazement. “Dammit, Killian!”

“Will, don’t make me kill you.”

Will then nodded in sympathy. “What the hell were you thinking?”

Killian sighed. “I had no intention of telling her a damn thing, but she wheedled it out of me. You know Emma.”

“Aye, that I do. She’s a fine one. Smart beyond belief, and the trouble she finds? Who’d have thought?”

Killian closed his eyes briefly. Exactly. Emma was a trouble magnet. And she was gone to somewhere unknown...no doubt in trouble.

“That’s not the half of it.”

“So what did she say to your picking up 'company'?”

“She hated it.”

Will laughed at that. “Yeah, that’s understandable.” Killian looked at Will, confused. Obviously, he was missing something. Will laughed again. “Come on! Killian, think of it! You’re planning to pick up a whore, and then calmly come home to her bed? No woman would take that easily.”

“It was your suggestion!” Killian said indignantly.
“Do it. Don’t tell her about it!”

Will just snickered as his eyes lit upon his favorite gaming house. “How’d you like it if she picked up a strapping male companion for a few hours of relief, and then came to sleep with you as pretty as you please?”

Killian didn’t say a word. But the point was well-received. He’d hate it. No, he’d more than hate it. He’d be so pissed off! The thought of someone else’s hands on her...touching her...and the residual feeling of her being covered in disease would remain.

“Think you could’ve mentioned this yesterday? Before I told her?”

Will just patted him on the back. “I’ll buy you some literature or something. But until then, let’s get a drink and you can check out the possible pickups.”

Killian just snorted. “David said to stay out of trouble.”

~*~

Emma approached the star system in a burst of energy, quickly pulling back to impulse power. She had traversed the universe in a very quick trip. Pushing her scanners to maximum range, she searched the star system for lurkers. It was an ancient system, long since uninhabited. The original people had migrated to other worlds when all the raw resources on these planets were exhausted. That had been over three centuries ago, and since then the natural bio-filters of the uninhabitable worlds had reversed the damage.

Emma plotted her course to the third planet. Arion.

Navigating through the open atmosphere, Emma located the ruins of the once great temples of Arion. It had been her home for ten years, and it had been over six years since she left it. Docking her ship in the protective bay where she had built it, she left the hidden cave and slowly walked up the long winding stone stairs carved in the hillside, to the temple at the top. Stopping to look at the great civilization now in ruins, she felt the hush of winds and the silence of solitude.

Crossing the bridge to enter the Temple of the Talla’se, she walked through the time corridor. The place was suddenly alive with activity as monks and acolytes rushed from place to place. All ignored her, except to bow in regard.

Emma went to her old quarters, and found her familiar bed, still fresh and waiting as if she had never left. She slept for half a day, enjoying the sweet warm breeze entering the window of her chambers. Here she was protected. Here she was safe.

Emma woke to find the Seer sitting in her room. Few of the monks could or did talk, but the Seer did. He was the Master of the Dlohesha. And her mentor.

“Princess, your presence opens the heart.”

“N’al.” She bowed her head slightly to her mentor.

“You seek knowledge?”

Emma sat up, and pushed the hair off her face. “I seek the answer to a riddle. It requires the Map
“Knowledge is through the door.” Emma smiled at that.

“Thank you.” Emma waited until he left her room before she got up.

The Hall of Knowledge was where she had studied for ten years, using crystals containing information and knowledge she needed to know. The Map Room was a holographic room mapping the known universe and others as well. Emma took her customary seat on her knees before an altar lined with crystals and a control panel. Taking the first recovered manuscript from her bag, she entered the five known coordinates. Running a program of extrapolation, she entered a request for all palindrome coordinates using her now-destroyed home planet as the point of origin and the sixth missing coordinate.

“Your fate is in your hands, my Princess.”

Emma nodded. As it was. “He told me that our relationship runs the same from front to back,” she paused, thinking, “and the manuscript alludes to mirrors. In a palindrome, if a mirror was placed at the center, the end would read the same as the front.”

“Harmony is its own Deuteronomy. There is a cleanness in the balance.”

“Cleanness? White?” Emma looked at N’al. “As in purity?”

“You search for answers that have no ready solution except those already known.”

“N’al. I brought you chocolate, and if you could see clearly enough to stop speaking in parables and answer my query, I’ll give you a treat.”

The older man just stood with his feet slightly apart and his hands inside his sleeves, but he made no effort to answer her question. The concept of pleasure...even from something like chocolate...had been beyond him since his ascension.

“I know.” Emma made a gesture of dismissal and irritation. “I know. I am the Alarch de Prin’c.”

He just gestured his agreement. “Honestly, I can’t see how I’m to do this all alone. What if I fail? What if I translate or do it wrong?”

“Lighting flashes, electricity brightens the mind, and in one blink of your eyes, you have mis-seen.”

Emma laughed at that. “That is so helpful. Thanks. I feel less alone now.” Emma continued to enter all information she found in the translation.

“When the mind is enlightened, the consciousness is freed and the body matters not.”

“Hmm, well I am sharing a bed with a man. How’s that for enlightenment?” Emma asked off handedly.

“A tall man cannot hide in the short grass.”

“Yeah, I know. Boy, do I know. His tallness is pointing me to death all night long. God, I hate space travel. Why do you think people are insane enough to want to leave a nice warm planet for the coldness of space? It’s deranged.” Emma entered and removed a crystal and replaced a new one. Her voice lowered. “He’s going to go join with another because, though we share body heat, we don’t...”
“One cannot reach enlightenment by running from truth, and all journeys begin with a step.”

“I’m not running, N’al, I’m seeking,” Emma looked at her mentor. “I see no reason to invest in something that can never be.”

“Many roads lead to the Great Path, but only the willing will find their way.”

“What does that mean? That my path is with him? If this is my end, the journey’s end is my end. What good does it then do me to entangle him in something that cannot be changed? This universe has been nothing but one big, ongoing pain, and he’s had his share. I can’t be another source of it.”

“The future is never certain.”

“I thought there was a Destiny. My Destiny, and maybe one of his own.”

“Destiny is the ends to the mean. A purpose. But the journey is determined by choice. The Destiny is to try, but the success and the journey’s end remain unknown.”

Emma frowned and looked at the large empty room, and then at her mentor. “I live in the past, and talk to ghosts. I can’t even touch you, or be touched. My parents are gone. My people as well. It is our duty to fix the wrong that we caused the universe, although unwittingly. It is my life’s mission...all of my life.” Emma looked at the man who was nothing beyond the specter of his body. The Master’s presence was powerful, and all the knowledge of those halls had remained protected by its existence in the past. “I am dishonest with him. I don’t want to lie to him, but the answers I’m able to give, he may not want to know. He’s different, but I can feel his goodness, along with the goodness of those he calls friends.”

“The river tells no lies, and though standing on the shore, a dishonest man still hears them.”

“Okay, so he’s a terrible cook, and I told him his stew was good...”

N’al actually laughed at that.

“You would laugh at that! After all those years and all the jokes I’ve told you, and this is what you find funny? The Dlohesha order steals everything from you, especially your humor.”

Emma looked at the monitor. “That’s it. All that I know is programmed. Either we locate the first world of the first gem, or all is lost.”

“The first spins the thread. It is the fabric of the journey.”

“Stop flirting with me, N’al! I told you, I’m in a strange relationship that looks stranger and more tangled every day. You had your chance, but I’m afraid that you and me...we never stood a chance with you being all ‘spiritual’ and ascended and all.”

“Because it is so clear, it takes a long time to realize it. If you immediately knew that the candlelight was fire, the meal was cooked long ago.”

Emma started for the Map Room to see where the location of the first world was, but stopped at his words.

Quietly, she had to ask. “I’m that obvious?”

“Only to me, child.”

Emma nodded. Small comfort. Damn that Areenian pirate! He was rewriting her life. They entered
the Map Room, and Emma walked among the holographic stars, stopping to stare at her homeworld as it had once been.

“I’m afraid,” she said finally. “Afraid he’ll make me forget me mission. Afraid I’ll want to give it up, for him. This road I’m set on, there are no curves, no bypasses, no deviating; and he distracts me. I don’t have time for that. I don’t have room in my life for him, yet…”

“Yet?”

“Yet he’s in my mind, my thoughts. I can’t stop but think about what could be, then I get angry at myself. Because that can never be.”

She turned her head from him and gazed out the wide window to the lush green vegetation of the valley. “I’m afraid to love him, that he’ll hurt me, hurt my heart, and I don’t know how much more it can take.”

“When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.”

“Just once, I wish you would give some advice that didn’t confirm what I’m thinking.” She sighed deeply while holding her hand out as if the caress her planet, her people, who were lost forever. “I still hear their voices.”

“I know, my Princess.”

“I feel…” Emma brushed a tear away. “I feel unworthy.”

“A man who cannot find his own worth, cannot enter the Great Path.”

“It’s just too much…” Emma looked at her mentor again. “All the knowledge, all the preparations and the learning...all that I am...and I couldn’t save them. They could not save themselves. And in their death, the universe bleeds. There isn’t even a physical point to hold the specters of their essence.”

Emma walked to the man and passed her hand through his body as she tried to touch him, feeling the prickling of his energy force. “When did I get so small?”

“The universe is so vast, and we are so small. There is really only one thing we can control.”

“What is that?”

“Whether we are good or evil.”

Emma looked down at her small hands and opened them up palms forward. “What if I fail?”

“The end is not what matters, Princess. It is the journey. When the time comes, the path will be revealed.”

“Are we talking sex?”

“Walking the Great Path comes with great responsibility. You cannot waver or weaken your resolve.”

“Dammit, N'al, if that means no sex, I’m going to be very disappointed.” Emma laughed at the man. “I know what it means. I will not waver. On my honor.”

The Seer bowed his head in acknowledgement as Emma located what she was looking for.
“Aylosa. The yellow gem is on Aylosa.”

The Master bowed his head. “Then it begins.”

~*~

“Captain?”

David looked up at his helmsman’s hail. “Archie?”

The man gestured towards the door entering the Bridge. Mary Margaret stood there.

“Archie, take the Conn.” David quickly left the Bridge escorting Mary Margaret away by the arm.

“Lady Mary Margaret. Is there something wrong?”

“I’m sorry. Oh, gods, I’m so sorry!”

David paused. “Just tell me what’s wrong.”

Mary Margaret grabbed David’s arm hard. “It’s Ruby. She’s gone.”

David looked at the woman, and then suddenly swore. Taking her arm, he led her back onto the Bridge.

“Captain’s on the Bridge.”

David took the security station that Killian usually manned, next to the working Lieutenant.

“Leroy, scan the ship for Lady Ruby. All posts are to report and activate the internal scans for her.”

David turned to look at Mary Margaret. “How long has she been gone?”

“I think she left just after you did earlier. I went to sit with Regina, and when I went to check, she was gone, as were her outer cloaks.”

David went still at that. “Her outer cloaks?”

“Yes. The ones we use when we travel. I would’ve discovered her missing sooner, but the technician you sent finally arrived and I couldn’t find her.”

“Archie, how many more transports are scheduled to go down?” David asked his helmsman.

“Three more in aft bay six, number four just left, and three are on planet.”

David grimaced. That was three already out of his reach. “Call back the one in flight, and contact ground crews and advise we’ve got a rogue stowaway. Let Killian know immediately.”

“Aye, Cap.”

“Leroy, tell bay crews to search the three in holding bay, and the one when it redocks, especially the smuggler’s keep.” David took his command chair and Mary Margaret, uncertain what to do, stood at his side.

“What do we do now, David?”
David checked his command console as reports came in and finally looked at Mary Margaret. “We wait.”

And they waited.

“Captain, all stations report no sign of Lady Ruby. Internal sensors have scanned the ship for her signature but it appears she found a way off the ship.”

David turned in his chair, his jawline clenching and unclenching. “Make the call. Inform her Eminence.”

Mary Margaret looked at him sharply. “David, no.”

David ignored her. “Any word from the ground crews?”

“First crew has completed its restocking mission and is on its way back. But it was ordered by the Commander to leave without him.”

“Does Killian know the situation?”

“Transmitting specifics now, Sir.”

Mary Margaret frowned at David. “You don’t have to tell Regina.”

David finally turned in his command chair to address her. “Yes, I do.”

“But...”

“But nothing. Ruby is putting my men in danger, along with herself and this ship, including Regina. I’m sorry for her unhappiness, but that can’t be my concern right now.”

~*~

Killian looked in his glass and frowned. It had been full just a moment ago. Listening to loud laughs and increasing noise levels, he found Will in the middle of it. Figures. Will was usually the center of most chaos and ruckus happening at any given time.

Will caught Killian’s eyes and wiggled a brow indicating one of the young females sitting on his lap. Killian just grimaced at him and pushed his empty glass across the bar towards the bartender to fill again. He should have known Will would find twin whores with beards to pick up, and then try to use them to tempt him out of his brooding mood. Wasn’t going to happen. Killian downed the next drink just as fast as the previous one, and pushed it back for yet another refill.

Emma. Pain in his ass, Emma. Tossing down another, he rolled the empty glass across his forehead and wondered where the hell she went, and with whom.

It took a few moments and several rings before he realized that his com-badge was hailing him.

“Yeah, go. I told you to leave without me.”

“Commander. What’s your situation?”

Killian sighed and sat up straighter. It wasn’t the transport waiting for him and Will after all. It was Enchanted.

“Currently tasting new beverages.”
The Captain asked that I inform you of a situation..."

"Killian." Killian swore under his breath when David’s voice came on.

"David."

Killian waited for David to ask if he was drinking, but he was surprised when David did not.

"Lady Ruby has flown the coop. She went rogue and hopped a transport."

Killian swore again. Crap. “She’s not aboard the Enchanted?”

“No, all stations have reported and internal sensors say no.”

“Run a scan on frequency three-zero-sixty. I encoded her with a micro-transceiver to keep track.”

Killian could hear the pause in David’s voice. “Killian...”

“Yeah, yeah, I know...invasion of privacy...Blah, blah, blah...Thank me later.” Killian looked for Will, but the man and the two bearded twins were off somewhere. Killian scowled. Great. Just fuckin’ great. If Will accidentally almost got married again, it wouldn't be Killian’s fault.

“Give me a few to find her. I’ll call you back when I do.”

“Understood.”

Killian paid his bar tab and started towards the back room to get Will. He wasn’t going to be grateful for the interruption, but then again the two women were Kelbian, so not only did they grow facial hair, but hair in other places, and...they were hermaphrodites. Killian paused and wondered if Will knew that. Well, if he didn't before, he sure did now. Shrugging, he continued on to find Will. No time for all this crap, they had a job to complete.

Killian stood outside the room for a moment hearing the noises coming from within the cubicle. Pausing at the door, he was just about to knock, when suddenly he put his hand down and left Will alone with his conquests. There was no way in hell he was entering that room. He had enough nightmares left over from the war, and was reluctant to add any more.

Returning to the landing bay, he found that the transport he had arrived in had left, but two others remained and were being searched. Commandeering an officer from one of them, he received a report. Their supply mission was completed, but the Captain had ordered them to wait for Killian. The other ship was to leave immediately when cleared from inspection.

Killian nodded, and quickly went into the transport to retrieve an electronic information pad and sensor that would allow him to track the frequency of the emitter he had clandestinely embedded under Ruby’s skin. He had implanted them on Emma and Mary Margaret as well. They were small micro-mitters. He had taken the opportunity to "accidently" bump into all three women at different occasions, leaving a stinging sensation on their skin that he blamed on an open pin. The transmitter's range was limited, but it was sufficient for the ship.

He spotted Robin leaning against a bulkhead, waiting for the crew to finish and waved him over.

“You up for a little seek and grab?” he asked as he switched on the pad.

“Seek and grab?” Robin repeated, his brow furrowing.

“Never mind, just come with me.” And Killian led the way, working methodically from the
landing bays and outward, scanning the surrounding area. Eventually he would cross into range, but if Ruby was beyond the city’s gates... Robin looked around nervously, his hand rubbing the back of his head as he followed.

It took them two hours of searching and wandering the city before they found her signal. Standing behind the wall of a neighboring building, he watched the large imposing structure of the Precinct of the Guardians. She had been captured by the Master of the Guardians, and it would be only a matter of time before they scanned her. That information would be sent to the Dark One immediately, and this world would be rewarded by untold riches. Cursing non-stop, Killian made the call and waited, keeping watch.

~*~

“Killian.”

Killian looked to his right as his brother approached. David had left the Enchanted to come to planetside in response to Killian's call regarding the capture of the errant Lady Ruby.

“David.”

“She still in there?” Killian nodded and passed his sensor to David to read.

“They detained her for lack of papers. So far, I don’t believe she’s been scanned, but it’s only a matter of time,” Robin told his captain. He’d covertly learned this information while chatting to one of the guards about their squad.

David just shook his head. Palin II was a strict world. Lack of papers was punishable by enslavement, and that required a full health scan to assure freedom of disease for the prospective buyer. “I should leave her annoying ass to fry.”

Killian looked at David in wonder. That sentiment was his own, and was one that would normally have come from his mouth, not David’s. David was too authoritative, too in control to let things irritate him, much less to demonstrate his irritation in public. Killian frowned at the change in his brother and wondered what the hell was going on.

“Let’s go.”

Killian and Robin followed David, but hesitantly. “What’s the plan? The three of us can’t break her out of the fortress.”

“We’re not. We’re going to file a missing report.”

Killian scratched the back of his neck. Walking into a fully fortified prison wasn’t on the list of stupid things he was planning on doing that day.

“Great.”

David just sneered.

It took almost an hour before they were called to the Offices of the High Precinct, Master of the Guardians. David refused to look around the office, but made eye contact with the man behind the desk and did not waver. Killian on the other hand picked up various objects in the room, replacing them with a cold disdain, besmirching the quality or worth of those objects. His general attitude was one of being highly bored and utterly unimpressed, while Robin stood to the side, and slightly behind David, almost at attention.
“I understand that you’re missing a member of your crew.” The man sat back and steepled his finger together in front of him.

“That is incorrect.”

Killian continued to paw things around him as the Master stood up, unhappy with David’s reply.

“It would seem I was misinformed. My assistant tells me that you’ve filed a missing report, and claim that you tracked the missing person to my offices.”

“That is correct.” David kept his answers short and clipped.

“Then, pray tell, what is the part that I have wrong?” The man’s irritation with David’s attitude was beginning to break through.

“The missing is not a crew member, but an indentured slave.”

The man sat back down, his eyes flashing from Killian to Robin before he looked back at David with interest. “Slave? Strange that she did not say so.”

David just snorted in derision. “I found her barely alive, the lone survivor of a ship attacked by raiders. She begged my protection and transport to a world far away. I granted her wish for indentured payment. She was to work the galley of my ship, clean and carry, and I’d protect her until we got to her world.”

The man shrugged. “Sounds a fair trade.”

“It was not. I was cheated. She can’t cook, clean, or do anything useful. Physical labor is not to her liking, and she is lazy. This is the third time she has run away trying to nullify our agreement.”

“If she is so terrible, then why track her? Just let her go.”

David voice raised in anger. “I will not! She owes me a debt...one she will repay. It was an honorable agreement.”

Killian moved closer to David as his voice raised in anger. “Captain...” he warned.

David just shook it off. “She has disrupted my crew, turned a simple restocking expedition into a day-long fiasco, and my galley needs to be fixed from the last fire.”

The Master of Guardians seemed fascinated by David’s tale of woe and anger. It was the entrance of Ruby under guard that diverted his attention.

“The problem is that this slave has no papers or markings to show her entrance into port. That is a crime in these provinces.” The man sized David up as if to determine how much of a fee or penalty he could charge. “There is the matter of proving she is indeed your slave.”

Killian noticed the startling of Ruby’s body at the word ‘slave’, and he hoped she wasn’t so stupid that she didn’t hold her tongue. Ruby bowed her head and waited.

“Killian.”

Killian nodded and handed the sensor monitor to the Master of the Guard. “This is a tracking sensor to monitor her movements. Embedded under her skin a small iso-linear micro-transceiver modulated at a frequency of three-zero-sixty.”
The man took the pad and read the sensor. Ruby looked up and watched him.

“So this is how you tracked her?”

“Yes.” Killian took the scanner back.

David remained silent and ignored Ruby, and Killian backed up behind David and stood quietly and in respect, identical to Robin. The man looked at the group, his eyes wary and narrow in speculation.

“You may have your property back for five thousand credits.”

Killian kept his tongue, and careful not to show emotion, kept his eyes on his brother’s back. The man suspected that Ruby was more than an indentured slave. He was testing David.

David calmly looked at the man, and without blinking went to stand over Ruby. In a flash of an eye, he backhanded her across the face hard, causing her to fall to the ground in a heap.

“Keep her. She’s more trouble than I need, now or in the future.”

David, Killian, and Robin turned and started to leave, without looking back.

“Wait.”

David slowly turned and fingered his scar. His use of Palin II as a trading planet, along with supply acquisitions was well known. This man knew that if he removed David’s slave without compensation, the Enchanted would no longer use their facilities. “Fifty credits...fine... and she is to be branded.”

David shook his head no. “Twenty-five credits, and I’ll not put my brand on this worthless cow. I wouldn’t want the universe to know I once owned her.”

The man stared a dispassionate David down, and finally he caved. “Thirty-five, and no brand.”

David nodded. “Done. Robin take her back to the transport.” David and Killian left without even looking at Ruby still huddled on the floor, holding her face where David had hit her. Robin moved to her and dragged her up by her arm, hoping he wasn’t hurting her. It looked as though her cheek was throbbing where David had struck her.

They left the building without a word.

Several blocks from the precinct, David turned to Killian. “The transmitter was a good idea.”

Killian just grunted.

“You know where Will is?” David asked.

“Unfortunately.” David looked at Killian in inquiry. “Kelbian twins.”

David just grimaced. “As the Captain, my decision is...you go in.”

“Prick.”

By the time they retrieved Will and returned to David’s transport, Robin had arrived with Ruby. David had released the other transport when he came down, so they were the last on planetside. David ignored Ruby and motioned for Killian to take care of all the physical paperwork and
They were in a hurry, but had to appear casual. It wouldn’t take long for the Guardians to start to wonder how Ruby managed to not only get aboard a transport, but also make it to Palin II undetected by the transport crew, while evading scanning by the ground crews of their world. The smuggler holds would be discovered, and that came with an even stiffer penalty than being on this world without papers. It was a double offense because the Rules of Full Disclosure had not been obeyed.

Once they broke lower atmosphere and were almost home, David and the others breathed a sigh of relief. David looked at Killian and nodded at him to go see to their guest.

David closed his eyes and said to Will, who was reclining in his seat in exhaustion, “Kelbian twins?”

Will just smiled and turned to Robin, eager to regale him with his experience.

Killian snickered on his way to the back compartment. Finding Ruby where Robin had left her with the cargo, still shackled and not looking very happy, Killian released her and helped her up.

“You okay?”

Killian wasn’t surprised when she turned angry eyes on him. “He hit me!”

Killian checked her wrist for wounds. They were red, but hadn’t broken the skin. Pushing her not so gently into a seat, Killian turned taciturn eyes on her.

“Aye, and he also saved your life.” Ruby ignored him and just huffed. “He came down and retrieved you. If for even one moment he had appeared to care about you and your welfare, they would have suspected you were more than a slave.”

Ruby continued to ignore him, seething. Killian moved her face around and looked at where David had hit her. It was bruised and still red. It would fade, but Killian hoped she had learned something from this near-disaster. The humiliation and pain could be a valuable lesson for her.

“He had no right!”

“He had every right. You risked more than just yourself today. You risked us all. If they had scanned you, which they were mere seconds away from doing, you think they would ever have released you? The Dark One would pay untold riches to a world that found you because of your connection to Regina and Mary Margaret.” Ruby still ignored him, avoiding his eyes. Killian grabbed her jaw and forced her to look at him. “But they wouldn’t have just found you would they, Ruby? They would have found Mary Margaret, Regina, and maybe even Emma, if she were still aboard. And Enchanted...and all her crew? They would have annihilated us all for harboring you.”

“He could have just paid the fine they asked for. He didn’t have to get all nasty and cold, hit me and say those things about me,” she lamented.

Killian couldn’t believe she was so stupid, so unaware. “Aye, he did. They asked for more than three times the worth of any slave. If David agreed to the price, they would’ve known. It was a test. To pay the asking price meant you were more than just a slave, and they would’ve wanted to know why. By refusing and threatening to walk away, David left them in a position to lose our business for all time for a worthless slave, barely worth the price of paper. Hardly a good enough trade off.”
“But...”

“No buts! There is nothing but the fact that you owe my brother an apology and a heartfelt thanks for saving your arse!” Killian had had more than enough of her. He turned to return to the front cabin. “You were lucky. If David hadn’t come for you...” Ruby looked at Killian. “I’d have left you there to your fate.”

Ruby remained silent as Killian left her alone to think.

Killian avoided witnessing the reunion of the Eminent’s family. He went to his station on the bridge and worked long hours, running diagnostics on his sensor array and operating systems. Finally, it was David who tossed him off the Bridge, after he had been awake for two days.

Returning to his and Emma’s rooms, he finally had to face what he had been trying desperately to avoid. She was gone.

Moving around the rooms, he found himself picking up her things and putting them away. The whistling at the door announcing a visitor startled him and barked the order for the door to open.

Regina moved regally into the space, her gaze flickering over the manuscripts still scattering over almost every surface. She could feel the annoyance emanating from Killian so she avoided making a comment on how untidy Emma seemed to be.

“I just wanted to say thank you, for what you did in returning Ruby,” she said in explanation for her visit.

“No thanks needed,” he rushed out, eager to be rid of her and return to his wallowing. “She endangered this ship,” he added.

“I know. She won’t do it again.”

“Make sure of it.”

Regina nodded and turned to leave.

“Regina,” Killian stopped her. “Do you know what Alarch de Prin’c means?”

“It’s Gaian,” she answered with a slight smile, fully understanding his irritation was due to the missing Gaian. “Why?”

“Emma said...”

“Wait,” Regina held up her hand. “Is Emma the Alarch de Prin’c?”

“Apparently. What does it mean?”

“Alarch means Swan. The royal house of Gaianosis is Swan. That means not only is she the last Gaian but she’s their princess. Alarch de Prin’c means Swan Princess or Royal Swan.”

“Princess!” She watched as several expressions flittered across his face, and she could feel his sadness, his disappointment, and she could almost hear his internal thoughts. He felt he wasn’t good enough for a princess. Now wasn’t the time to try and convince him otherwise, he was too caught up in his misery that she had left.

“I’ll leave you to sleep, Killian,” Regina said, almost snapping him back to the here and now.
“Goodnight, Regina,” he said distractedly.

He didn’t hear the soft swishing as the door closed behind her, he just moved to the large porthole and gazed out into space.

Finally, he went to bed. The room was cold without her, the bed too large without her stealing all the space and covers, and surprisingly, his body felt alone without her constant touch…

He didn’t sleep. He just lay there with his head resting on his folded arms, staring at the ceiling.

~*~
Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday fellow Oncers.

Thanks for your comments and the kudos, you can't know how much I appreciate knowing you are enjoying this.

Here's the next chapter of this epic fic.

Thanks to ultraluckycat as always, thanks for all your support and encouragement on this adventure.

Chapter 10 - Love is a Funny Thing

Emma left Arion and plotted a course to Aylosa. It was nestled in the Outworld region, brushing the edges of the Dark One’s Legion Federation. Aylosa was a world trying desperately to comply and become part of the Dark One’s protected worlds. After the war, members of the Royals fled to outlying areas to avoid prison, death, or being pressed into service for the Dark One. Aylosa was one of the worlds they fled to. Over the past six years, that world was in turmoil, becoming a haven for cutthroats and raiders. The governments of the world needed order, and for that they petitioned the Legion governments for admittance into the Federation.

The first sensor net was easy to avoid but as she got closer, there were more and more. The final ones before high orbit of Aylosa were manual stations. Her ship could avoid the automated ones; it would be hard to explain to a real person, though, why they could see her ship. Especially when it hadn't shown up on their sensor screens until it had reached the manual nets.

Emma quickly backed away. She was going to need information and then help.

~*~

“Okay, give me the symptoms again.” Graham ran his medical scanner over Killian one more time. Nothing. He was perfectly healthy, but Graham could tell Killian was anything but that. The man looked tired, on edge, thinner, and his hands hadn’t stopped fidgeting since he entered Sickbay.

“I don’t know! I just think I have a cold or something. Maybe one of those bugs that make you puke your guts out.”

“You’ve been throwing up?”

“Technically, no.” Killian thought about it for a moment. “Would it help if I did?”

Graham just shook his head and put away the scanner.

“You need sleep, Killian. When’s the last time you really slept?”
Killian just shrugged. It wasn’t high on his priorities.

“Okay, when’s the last time you ate?”

Again. Not really big on his ‘to do’ list.

“Killian.”

Losing patience, Killian jumped off the medical bed. “Just fix me! I don’t have time for this. I can’t sleep. I have no appetite. I feel sick inside, and my body feels hollow. I get headaches, and I don’t feel like doing anything except work.”

“And this started when?” Killian just shrugged, but Graham had a suspicion. “Say, about a fortnight?”

“About that.”

Graham nodded with understanding. “When Emma left.”

Killian stalked around Sickbay, agitated. “This has nothing to do with her!” Graham just watched as Killian worked himself into a frenzy. He could feel his friend; feel his emotions and his confusion.

“You’re in love with her,” Graham said amusement.

Killian stopped pacing and hopped back on the bed. “Great. You figured it out. So fix me.”

“Killian...”

“Just give me a damn shot for it or some medicine so I can go back to work.”

“It’s not that easy.” Graham sighed at the confused look on Killian’s face. “There’s no treatment for being in love, Killian.”

“So it’s an incurable disease? I’m going to die?”

Graham laughed and sat next to his friend. “We’re all going to die eventually. But no, this isn’t a disease. Not really. It does resemble an illness at times because it can make you miserable. But at other times, it actually feels great.”

“No shot then?” Graham just shook his head no. “Okay, then get to the point where it feels great.”

“I can’t. That’s a place you just get to on your own.”

Killian rubbed his forehead. “This love thing...does it go away?”

“Sometimes we learn to live with it, and it pains us less and less, but in true love matches? It never goes away. If it did, then it’s not love.”

“I heard of this ‘love’ thing. It makes no sense to me. I always thought it was like a stomachache.”

“Does your stomach hurt?” Killian nodded. “Then there you go.”

“She did this to me. This is her fault.”

“Emma?”
“Who else?”

“I should’ve made sure she was disease-free before I agreed to sleep with her. She probably knew this was going to happen, and after infecting me, she left.”

“Killian, it’s not something you catch. It’s how you feel.”

“About Emma?”

Graham just nodded. It was too hard to explain a concept to a person who had no frame of reference to compare it to. Areenians didn’t understand the concept of love. It was the one conflicting violent emotion they seemed not to have, or maybe they just refused to admit they had. Areenians understood anger, hate, revenge, and even friendship and loyalty. But love was something they couldn’t recognize. They had never given it a term, almost as if having a meaning for how they felt about the strong ties they built with their friends and family would weaken them. So 'love' on their world became something they ignored. This evolved over many generations, around the time they started the bonded mate ritual. They couldn’t have bonded pairs broken because one of the members of the bond was ‘in love’ with another.

“I’ll tell you how I feel about Emma. She’s a royal pain! She is strong and opinionated, stubborn and unrelenting. Her hands are everywhere. She can’t understand the concept of ‘don’t touch’ or even ‘no’. She gets up in the fucking middle of the night and just leaves! Not even a word, or a goodbye. She just left. I don’t know where the hell she is, if she’s okay, or even if she’s coming back...”

Graham remained quiet as Killian jumped off the bed and began pacing again flopping his arms around.

“She is incredibly untidy. Her crap is all over our place. I’ve been picking up after her since she left. Her clothes were all strewn about and they all smell of her. I can even smell her in our bed.”

“Change the sheets,” Graham offered.

Killian scowled at Graham. Change the sheets? Then it would be like she was really gone. “That’s not the point.”

Graham laughed at that. There was a point?

“Shut up, Graham! Dammit, just give me something to help me sleep, or get her off my mind, or...anything! There has to be something you can do.”

“Sorry, Killian.”

In exasperation, Killian rubbed his forehead and then looked at his friend. “Your people...they feel this love thing all the time?”

“We wait our whole lives wanting it, wishing for it, and welcoming it.”

Killian just shook his head and turned to leave. “You’re a sick people.”

Graham just laughed as Killian left. After he was alone again, his laughter subsided, and the smile left his face. His poor friend. He had no clue what he was in for.

~*~
“So you want to play Three-Tier poker tonight?” Will asked Killian as they moved through the corridor to the Bridge.

“No.”

“You wanna play a different game?”

“No.”

“What do you want to do?”

“Nothing.”

Will just made a noise of disgust. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Graham says I’m stricken with the love thing.”

Will stopped in his tracks. “Oh damn, Killian. I’m sorry. How long?”

“Forever, if Graham is to be believed.”

“Can’t he cure you, or make it go away?”

Killian just shook his head no. It was nice to finally have someone who could commiserate with him.

“Graham says it’s something most species want.”

Will just slapped Killian on the back. “Sick bastards.” Killian had to agree. “Did you tell David?”

“No way! He’ll just make fun of me. Bad enough I was unbonded my entire life, but now this...”

Will just silently supported his childhood friend. He couldn't imagine anything worse than a sickness that made you not want to eat and be uninterested in gambling. It was the deadliest of diseases.

~*~

“Captain, I’ve got a distortion field opening up fore starboard,” David nodded at his helmsman.

“Killian?”

“I’ve got it. We’re clear of it, but I’ve never recorded anything like this.” Killian looked at the science station where a quiet Regina sat. “Regina?”

“It’s almost like a slipstream corridor. Different, but I think the same principle. More like a wrinkle,” Regina’s brow creased as she checked her data output. “We’ve got a ship coming out.”

“Killian.”

“On it, David.” Killian quickly raised shields increasing power to all shields along the hull plating of essential areas. His weapons were powered and standing ready.

“Bring us about, helmsman, and then full stop.” David watched as the small ship came out of the drift.

“Captain, we’re being hailed.”
“Open channel.”

“Enchanted, this is the Zephyr Bug. Request permission to dock.” Emma’s voice filled the Bridge.

“Power down, Killian. Com, open a channel.” David waited as the communications officer established a connection to Emma’s ship.

“Permission granted, Zephyr, and welcome home.” David turned to his operations officer. “Inform fourth level aft bay that the Zephyr is docking.”

Regina looked up from her station. “David, Emma just transmitted some coordinates to my station.”

The two men looked at each other. David nodded.

“Transmit them to the helm. Archie, lay in a course once you receive the information. Once you plot, open us a slip stream.”

“Aye, Captain.”

Emma had obviously found them her first location.

“David.”

David turned in his chair and looked towards Operations and Killian’s station. “Go.”

Killian didn’t even hesitate. He was off the Bridge.

By the time he got to the docking bay, she was already docked and gone. Quickly moving from the bay to the nearest lift, he went to their quarters. Her bags were by the door, almost like she couldn’t carry it another step, but the rooms were dark.

He found her.

Emma was curled up in the middle of their bed, sound asleep. She hadn’t even bothered to change. It was like she immediately went to sleep the moment she hit the bed. He stood looking at her, his eyes wandering over her entire body checking for marks and signs that she hadn’t taken care of herself.

Finally, he went to the bed and slowly removed her clothes. She was already shivering, so he quickly undressed her, and slid her under the covers. Leaving the room, he went to retrieve the bags she had dropped and called David.

“David?”

“Take the time off, Killian. Get some sleep. I’ll have a call put through to you when we reach the coordinates Emma gave us.” David disconnected.

Killian stretched in tiredness. Taking her bags, he dropped them on a chair in their bedroom. Slowly taking off his clothes, he never once stopped watching her. When he climbed into the bed, she turned to him naturally seeking his greater warmth. Killian closed his eyes and sighed when she nestled up against him making a soft sound in her sleep. For the first time in over two weeks, he could sleep, too.

~*~
The sound from the com system was annoying and unwelcome. Emma turned in her sleep and burrowed even more into Killian's body, trying to block out the annoying sound. Killian, a normally slow starter, couldn’t believe he was living with someone even slower than he was. He reached across her to answer the hail.

“Yeah?”

“Commander, we are approaching the set coordinates.”


“No.” Her voice was low and slurred against him.

“We’ve entered the system.”

Emma slowly opened one eye and trained it on him. “When?”

“Just now. You want to get up and tell us what’s going on?”

“Yes. No.” Emma sat up a little and looked at him. “First, I want to say hello to you.”

She pulled his head down to her, but Killian took control. He set his mouth on hers and opened wide, thrusting his tongue in her mouth, aggressive and burning hot. She didn’t protest, just moved around in his arms and further up his body, making a noise in her throat. What she did was kiss him, long and deep, kiss him like someone who she knew well.

Killian rested his forehead against hers, breathing deep. “I’m bloody pissed at you, love.”

Emma moved against him, wrapping an arm around his neck. “Why?”

“You left without telling me, or even saying goodbye.”

“I did.”

“You didn’t. I woke up and you were gone.”

“Technically, you woke up before that. I tried to wake you, but you kept making these shushing noises. So, I just covered you up and left you with a kiss on your forehead.”

Killian was quiet for a moment. “Really? You should’ve left me a note. I thought you just left.”

Emma frowned at him before laying a hand on his cheek, the feel of his facial hair familiar under her palm. “I wouldn’t do that. Of course, if you didn’t cling to sleep so deeply, I’d have been able to wake you.”

“I was tired.”

Emma sat up in bed and looked at him. “Why? Why did you think I’d just leave?”

Killian was silent for a moment, then just shrugged. “You weren’t really too happy with me before you went to sleep, and...”

Emma remembered the conversation and turned her head away from him slightly before asking, “So did you take care of ‘business’?”
“I went down to the planet, but if you're asking if I picked up a whore, the answer is no.”

Emma looked down at the bed in relief. “I’m...” Stopping before she said more than she knew or could say, she looked at him again. She smiled slightly, and then leaned down and kissed him again.

Killian liked it when she kissed him, instead of him doing it all. When they first started sharing a room he was always the one kissing her, but over the past few weeks that had changed. So he just leaned back and let her lead. She leaned over and kissed his mouth generously. Opening up to the kiss, he felt her tongue lick inside, just their mouths were touching, nothing else. He lifted upward and forward, angling his head so they could go deeper. They lay there on the bed, not touching, but making out - just with lips and tongues and teeth. Emma hummed a little as she pulled away, and Killian could see the flash of gold in her soft green eyes and her bright smile in the dim light.

“So we should go?” she whispered but she buried her nose into his neck instead of moving.

Killian groaned. Yeah they should go. “Shower first.” Killian was off the bed heading for the bath, dragging her behind him, before he did something he should regret but wouldn’t.

“Did I ever tell you that you have a nice ass?” Emma smirked as she followed him.

Killian looked at her with shining eyes while adjusting the temperature of the water. Pushing her inside under the spray, he laughed at her small yelp as the water hit her skin.

“Don’t mess with me. We’ve got places to be.” Killian crowded in behind her, and reached around for some soap. Leaning down, he whispered in her ear, “You have a very nice ass as well.”

Emma laughed and looked over shoulder down her back. “Really?” Killian cruelly pushed her directly under the water and laughed at her. “Aye.”

~*~

Emma was frowning into her coffee cup. Blasted thing was empty again, and she didn’t remember drinking it. Looking over at Killian to her left, she became suspicious when he was still sipping on a cup. No way she beat him through. He had to have switched their cups.

“Emma, you want to tell us what planet in the system we're going to, and why?”

Emma nodded at David. “Aylosa is the fourth star in a binary star system.”

“This is an Outworld system.” Regina said quietly.

“True. The planets in these joint systems have been trying to get admittance into the Dark One’s Legion Federation. The rules and regulations are very strict. Last few years they had systematically submitted all inhabitants’ genomes for consideration. It caused an explosion of violence and civil unrest.”

Regina frowned. “The Lomada system lords have been in dispute for almost five years. This part of Outworld was declared a war zone two years ago. Most inhabitants fled to other stars to avoid the dispute.”

Robin knew the dispute well. He and his men had landed in Outworld when the war was first over but it proved too volatile, so they took to better worlds and systems with better opportunities. Lomada was the name given to a Rebel Federation of five large ruling systems that struck a peace after the war, but jealousy and greed tore their alliance apart.
“Do you blame them?” Robin asked the group. “Most of the inhabitants that settled this region were Royals fleeing genetic purity under the Dark One’s reign. Now their new governments are forging an alliance and giving up their genomes, all against their will.”

“It is very unstable, but Aylosa is where I must go,” Emma said with some regret. “The first gem is housed there. And with the first gem is the translator key I need to translate the next book, the red manuscript.”

Killian looked at Emma sharply. “How do you know?”

“Pardon me?”

Killian spoke slowly and very exact. “How do you know the region is unstable?”

“I staked it out for over a week.” Killian sat up straighter cursing under his breath. He knew it! Or at least he suspected it. She was out messing in dangerous places, and then acting like it was nothing.

“Killian, settle down.” Regina turned to Emma. “What did you learn?”

“I couldn’t attempt to land on Aylosa. The scanning arrays aren’t very sophisticated, but the atmospheric ones are manual. My ship would have been seen, not detected. I couldn’t take the chance. Otherwise, I’d have landed and found the gem without your help.”

Killian sneered at that. She was still pissing him off. Independence was fine, as long as he knew what she was doing - and he was with her.

“How unstable are we talking, Emma?” David asked.

Emma just shrugged. Looking at Regina, they shared a silent communication.

“Full scale war. The civil unrest is strong enough to make the Legion guards assigned to this region a little trigger happy. Their techniques are brutal and very exacting.” Emma held her coffee cup out as Will walked around refilling them. “Three days ago, the main citadel of the Capital city of Riaas on Aylosa was split into two factions. The controlling Legions were fighting against the Royal terrorists entrenched in the city.”

Graham sat sideways looking out the port at the stars and discreetly watched the group. He had remained silent until that moment. “Where do you need to go, exactly?” he asked, already suspecting her answer.

“Riaas.” All the men in the room moaned. Riaas - the city under siege and split.

David looked at the woman whom they had pledged their help. “What are we looking at?”

“They have sensor grids layered in a tier formation ranging between the different stars. The Legion government will allow us to land, but only after scanning the ship.”

“You can’t go.”

Emma scowled at Killian. “I have to go, or there’s no reason to go at all.”

“This is insane. They will scan you, and that will be it.”

“I have a plan.”
Killian just groaned and rubbed his face. Of course she did.

~*~

They had just been cleared to land in a Legion part of the city. Killian was in the pilot seat of his runabout, *Jolly Roger*, and Emma was in the co-pilot’s. The others were in the back compartment except Regina, who couldn’t take a chance going down to the surface.

“They’re scanning us now,” Killian said tightly, not able to keep the anxiety from his voice.

“I know,” Emma answered shortly, not wanting to look at him and see how angry he was.

“Emma...”

“Don’t worry. I told you I could mask my life signs.”

Killian just shook his head. “But when we land, how do...”

Emma looked at him. “You're Areenian, correct?” Killian just nodded. “I’m your mate.”

“Technically you’re not...”

“I’m your mate,” she insisted. “They know that Areenians don’t mate outside their species, so they will assume that I am...”

“Areenian.” Killian could understand her reasoning, but it still didn’t mean they wouldn’t scan her. “We should’ve landed on the Royals' side. We’re Royals, and...”

“They don’t trust that easily, and the place we need to go is on the Legion side.”

“I hate this! This is bloody foolish!”

“So you’ve said. Dammit, all these negative vibes. I swear...if we get caught, it will be your fault.”

“My fault? Your plan has too many holes, and it’s going to be my fault?”

“You could be a little less negative about it. I can read you as positively negative from here. They’re going to take one look at you, and just know.”

David and the others in the back of the runabout rolled their eyes. The arguing continued non-stop until finally they landed.

Killian and Emma were still arguing when they stepped from the runabout. The scanning crew entered the ship to scan for hidden cargo and stowaways. The chief of the scanning crew was waiting for Killian’s papers. He didn’t look at the man, just tossed them over his shoulder.

“Next time, I get to make the plan.”

Emma rolled her eyes with impatience. “What the hell is wrong with my plans? They are simplistic and easy to execute.”

“They’re too simplistic and obviously going straight through the most dangerous areas. A little caution, love, and...”

“Caution? For how long? We could die of old age waiting for one of your plans to come about.”

The man tried to interrupt them. Emma just stared him down. “Excuse me! Do you not see me
talking to this infuriating rat bastard!”

“Rat bastard?” Killian’s eyes narrowed. “I like you better when you’re asleep. And my plans are not safe!”

Emma just snorted.

“They stink of caution. When the hell did you get to be so old? You’re like a little...” The group ignored Emma high pitched squeal when Killian grabbed her.

The man turned to David, who handed over his papers. “Areenian?”

David nodded. “He’s my brother, and that’s his mate.”

“Oh!” The man stepped away from the arguing couple. Areenian mates were noted for their volatile natures, and only an idiot came between them. The man turned back when the arguing stopped to find them no longer fighting, but kissing passionately.

“Um, the nature of your business in Riaas?”

David took back his papers and Killian’s. “They’re renewing their marriage vows.”

“Are you sure?” the guard asked. “I think they need a divorce broker.”

“Divorce is unheard of in our world,” David returned with a bored voice. “I wish it weren’t so. It would be easier for us all if they could part ways.”

“I suggested marriage counseling,” Will butted in, “but that only made them argue more.”

“She wanted it; he thought it was a fool’s errand to take that route,” Graham chimed.

“It’s easier just to let them go for it,” Robin finished.

“More entertaining, as well,” Will leered, gazing his eyes back to Killian to Emma, his eyes trained on her butt. Completely for the guard’s benefit, of course.

The group left the poor confused man, all the while snickering and making rude comments. David paused to pull Killian away from Emma and escort her from the docks.

“That went exceptionally well.” David said.

“Told you.” Emma beamed a smile at the group.

Emma left the group for a moment, and stopped a woman in the street. They watched as she conversed, and the directions were given and pointed out. They proceeded to the center of the town, towards the main citadel. The closer they got to their destination, the more ruins there were.

“She said we must be careful. That this area of town is often raided, and the terrorists set out landmines and attack at random times.”

“Great.” Killian pulled his weapon and checked his active rounds.

Graham watched the streets, not liking how quiet the area was. “Captain...”

“I feel it.” David looked around. “Graham, you and Will come up to the rear. Killian, you take Emma into the sanctuary, and Robin and I will cover the front.”
They cautiously separated at the front of the Temple of the Honorable. Part of the outer structure showed damage from the war. Entering with Killian, Emma pulled her weapon as well. Stopping in the door, she quickly laid her weapon to the ground and pulled off her boots. Standing in bare feet, she waved her hand over the sacramental waters in the sanctuary, and Killian heard chimes sounding in the background.

A hushed voice came from their left. “You seek knowledge?”

Emma remained staring straight ahead. “I seek enlightenment in the House of the Honorable.”

“My journey is long?”

“My journey has just begun. I seek the weaver of the voyage.”

Killian watched as a group of cloaked men came out of the shadows. He watched as Emma dropped to her knees, and bowed her head. Neat trick. He wondered if he could get her to remember to do that for him.

“The path is set. If you can walk it, then your way is clear.”

Killian watched as Emma quickly stood and walked down the long aisle to the front of the cathedral. He tried to move after her, but he could not. His feet felt cemented to the ground.

“The path is for the One. You are not sanctioned.”

Killian looked at the man, and then after Emma. Looking down at where he stood, he noticed the ornate crest in the floor, the stones demarcating the separation of the Temple. Placing his gun to the ground, he quickly removed his boots as Emma had done.

“Why do you seek to enter?”

“I follow her.”

The man looked at him. “You follow the One?” He looked at his brethren. “Perhaps the path is clouded, or the walk too long? You seek what is there, but you follow no one.”

“Aye, whatever. I just need to go with her.”

“Why?”

“Well, if you knew her better, you’d wouldn’t ask. Nor would you allow her to enter your Temple without restraints and supervision.”

“Then she is yours to guard?”

Killian didn’t get it, but he understood her being his responsibility. “Aye, just born lucky that way.”

They bowed away, and Killian looked at them for a moment before stepping over the crest stones into the main Temple. Moving quickly, he found Emma in a room of lit candles. Outside Killian could hear voices rising, the sounds of blasters being discharged.

“Emma.”

“I hear. Shush.” He looked around, and reached for his weapon, but his holster was empty. He had left his weapon on the floor as he entered. Idiot.
Emma walked forward between lines of candelabras to stand in a middle of a circle of lit ones. Slowly circling, she withdrew a medallion she wore around her neck, and she slowly opened her palms out and upward.

Killian didn’t hear the wall move, but suddenly in the dim light stood a woman wrapped in full cloaks of yellow. She stood quietly and almost timidly. Her voice was young, and lacking inflection.

“Princess.”

Emma stopped and walked towards the woman. Taking her arm, she gestured to Killian to follow.

Killian rushed after Emma, looking back at the room of candles. What the hell? Where the fuck was the gem?

“Who’s the girl?”

“Killian, no time. We must leave.”

The sounds of a battle increased outside. Emma and Killian quickly stopped to put on their footwear, and pick up their guns. Killian reached for the young woman’s arm, but Emma stopped him.

“Don’t touch her! She cannot be touched.”

“Okay, then you touch her. Come on, hurry!”

They exited the Temple in time to see a structure close to them explode. Killian couldn’t grab the young woman, so he grabbed Emma instead. He pulled her along with him, and she pulled the young woman. They sheltered by a low wall, as David and Robin joined them.

“Did you get the gem?” David asked breathing harshly. He looked over the wall and saw Will and Graham clearing the way toward the only road out of the citadel. They were bottlenecked in and being threatened by impending fire.

“Yes,” said Emma, as Killian said no. They looked at each other.

“This is the gem.” Emma pointed to the woman.

Killian and David shared a look. “Your gems are women?”

“Yes.”

David swore. “You might have mentioned that, Princess,” he sneered. “I take it she has no papers?”

“Doubtful.” Emma ignored his princess remark for the moment.

Killian swore as well, and David just scowled. Killian looked at Emma as if she was insane. “How the hell do you expect us to get her on board without papers, or without her being scanned, Princess?”

Emma’s face became dark at Killian’s question. “Don’t call me Princess! She’ll wear my dampening field emitter. We’ll create a diversion, and while no one is watching, she will go aboard.”

“Aye! We’re screwed!”
“Stop with all the negativity. I’m telling you it’ll work!”

Killian saw the break in the fighting, and Will was gesturing for them to quickly follow. He roughly pulled Emma to her feet, and dragged her with him.

“And what if they scan you without your dampening field, Princess?”

“You’ll just have to make sure they don’t!”

David went ahead of them to see if the ship was through being scanned. Graham, Robin, and Will couldn’t stop watching the cloaked figure. She was covered from head to toe in a soft yellow wrap, and she kept her head down.

“What about your translation key?” Killian asked quietly.

“She’s the key.”

Killian snorted. Great. “I thought she was the gem.”

Emma reached out and took the woman’s arm. Pushing the cloth away, she showed Killian a tattoo on the woman’s forearm of symbols.

“The translation key.” Emma covered the arm. “Satisfied?”

Killian just grunted as David came back to join them. “The ship’s ready. We just need to have any packages we have searched.”

Emma nodded. “David, you take…” Emma looked at the devote. “Your Holy Honorable, is there a name you go by?”

The woman looked up with soulful blue eyes. “Belle. They call me Belle, Princess.”

~*~
Happy Sunday guys!

Thanks so much for the comments this story has received so far, and the growing kudos. It means so much to me, because this story is very important to me.

Ultraluckycat is a beta sent from heaven, thanks for everything you've done, and continue to do, to support and encourage me in my writing.

Enjoy the next chapter...

Chapter 11 - Truths Come Out

"Belle! Go with the Captain. He’ll protect you," Emma instructed.

"Yes, Princess."

Emma grimaced. "Emma. Please call me Emma. Now go." Emma quickly grabbed David’s arm. "Do not touch her. She’s an Honorable." David nodded and gestured towards the woman to follow him and Robin.

Killian watched them go. "Now what, Princess?"

Emma glared at him. "Now we create a diversion." She looked at Graham and Will, "You go through. Commander Negativity and I will follow."

Will was worried. "What’s the diversion?"

Emma just snorted. "Killian and me."

Graham just laughed as he and Will went towards their transport. Answering questions, they assured the security guards they hadn’t purchased or acquired anything while on this world, that they had simply come for a wedding.

Killian watched them, and then turned to Emma, "So what’s this diversion?"

"Kiss me. And don’t stop."

"Just kiss you? That’s supposed to be distracting?"

Her eyes traveled the length of him taking in all his details, from his boots, to his chest and the dark hair that always seemed to tease her, to his facial scruff, then his wild blue eyes. Killian squirmed under her regard and the darkening of her pale green eyes. She was living energy - alive. He decided it was no hardship to comply. Reaching out, he pulled her towards him. Lowering his
head, his lips brushed hers.

Once.

Twice.

“Can you handle it?” he asked in a husky voice, popping the T in that infuriating way of his that made the word seem sinful and her inside quiver.

She didn’t want to play. This was hardly going to create a commotion. “Maybe it’s you who couldn’t handle it,” she smirked back. She grabbed the back of his head and pulled him down, plundering his mouth, biting his lips and then sucking the hurt away. Trailing her lips across the raspy hair on his cheek, she nipped his earlobe, the one with the silver dangling earring.

"A kiss doesn’t have to mean anything,” she said simply.

"Not unless you mean it."

Emma looked at him sharply, her eyes narrowing and darkening even more. "Then put something into it, Commander. Let’s create a sensation."

Killian looked up and noticed a few of the Guard’s ground crew noticing them. Right...a show.

Growling low, he pushed her back against a small wall of crates and stood between her legs. Grinding against her, he let her feel how hard he was. He could smell her arousal; it wove its way around him, pulling him further into her web.

She lifted one leg up and hooked it around his thigh. Pulling his head down, she ravaged his lips while taking her pleasure from him. He gave her control, relinquishing it gladly. She bucked against him, more into it than she was ever going to admit. Offering her neck to him she moaned as he sucked, nipped, and tasted. His hands moved up to frame her breasts, kneading, massaging, and letting his thumb rub over her nipples through her tight leather vest.

Pushing against him she rode him harder and faster, straining for the orgasm she could feel beginning. Allowing herself to be very vocal to attract more attention, she bit the side of his neck.

"You could help me here by adding to the sound effects..." Her breath was raspy and coming in gasps.

Following her cues, he lifted her and pulled her other leg over his hip, wrapping both around his waist. Increasing his speed, he bucked into her, driving his hardness against her. Pulling at her nipples and biting her neck, he slammed into her harder, faster, until he felt her legs tighten around his waist and her voice cry out in pleasure, adding his own vocal encouragement. Without looking, he knew they were the only show anyone in the landing bay was watching.

Minutes passed, both regaining some control. Her hand drifted to the front of his leather pants, caressing the bulge still there. He grabbed her hand, smiling ruefully at her obvious tease. This might be all for show, a distraction, but he still had to sleep with her. Chastely.

Pulling his head down, she whispered in his ear, “Let's try this without clothes some time.”

Killian looked at her in shock, as he noticed his brother standing in the doorway of their transport signaling him to hurry. He kissed her again, and then whispered in her ear, "Keep kissing me, we’re heading for the transport."
Emma just nodded, keeping both her legs wrapped around his center and her arms around his neck, as he carried her towards the transport, kissing her passionately the entire time. They didn’t stop for anyone, and no one tried to detain them. Finally, once they entered the transport, the bay broke down into a large display of applause, catcalls, and suggestions that were best ignored. Locking the transport door, Killian gazed at the bemused Emma.

She had never looked more gorgeous. Her hair was everywhere, her mouth swollen and red, and she was still trying to catch her breath. Okay, he had to admit it, her plan was a stroke of genius. Maybe all her plans didn’t exactly suck.

"How are you getting past the outer marker scanners with your gem wearing your dampening emitter?" he asked her, his hand drifting to tame a strand of wild hair.

"I just need to touch her. The emitter will extend to include us both." Her eyes watched him cautiously. She’d let him in, lowered one of her walls temporarily, and she struggled with the consequences of that.

Killian nodded and led her to the smuggler’s hold where David must have stashed their newest passenger. He could feel her pull back, regaining some of that composure she’d let slip.

David and Will were getting ready for takeoff.

"They sure know how to hold the attention of an audience," Will said with not just a little amusement.

David just grunted his agreement, for some reason a little uncomfortable at what he’d just witnessed. "They do."

"No one even noticed you walking the woman onto the ship. All eyes were watching the dry-humping, out of control lust bunnies going at it against crates in the bay."

"I noticed."

"One guy started chanting, ‘Take off her shirt, take it off…’, and damn if I didn’t join in."

"Perverts usually do." David said as casually as he could.

"You know, she could’ve volunteered me to act as a diversion," Will moaned.

David piloted the transport clear of the open bay, and lifted off towards Enchanted. "Sure she could have. I think the sight of you and Killian dry-humping in the bay would have had the same distractive quality to it."

"I didn’t mean with Killian!"

David just laughed. "Sure you didn’t."

~*~

Emma helped Belle settle into a set of rooms. The woman hardly spoke unless spoken to, and she seemed timid.

"This is a communicator linked to my quarters. You may contact me if you need anything. The mobile dampening emitter I’ve given you needs to be worn at all times."
The woman touched her lapel and the small device that Emma had attached.

"I’m not sure what you need for your daily routine or what your eating requirements are, so I’ve had Will install a replicator in your rooms."

"Thank you, My Princess."

Emma sighed. "Really, please call me Emma. The whole princess thing? It seems silly when there are no people left to rule." Emma smiled at her slightly. "Plus, I was never really good at the princess thing."

The woman bowed in respect. Emma just flopped her arms and gave up.

"Do you need anything else?" she asked.

"No. I am fine."

Emma was reluctant to leave the woman alone. "I know the rooms are large and empty, but tomorrow we’ll begin translating the red manuscript, using the translator key on your arm, and soon you’ll have a roommate."

"Thank you, My Princess."

Emma had already given up on the princess thing. "Then I’ll say goodnight." She stopped and looked back at the woman. "I know that your entire life has been one of service, and remaining devout. But there isn’t a reason you couldn’t come out of the rooms and interact with the members of the crew and maybe eat with us, because someday this will be over. You might wake up one day no longer required to be devout, and the option to pursue a different life might awaken."

When Emma got no response, she left.

~*~

David was standing by the coffee when Emma walked into the galley, so he calmly poured her a cup as well.

Emma smiled and took a drink. "Careful, Killian made this batch," he told her conspiratorially. She quickly spat it back in the cup, and looked up to see Killian’s dark regard.

"Um, it tastes...lovely."

Will suddenly perked up. "Speaking of lovely, where is our new female on board?"

"In her room doing her daily devotionals."

Will’s smile faltered. "Devotionals?"

Emma just nodded and doctored her coffee with anything to take out the acid taste. What the hell did that man do to perfectly good coffee beans?

"Yes. She is a member of the Holy Order of the Honorable. Since birth, she has been cloistered in solitude to prepare for her journey, and she alone can touch and hold the yellow gem. It is through purity alone."

"Purity?" Will cursed. "Are you saying she’s a nun, or something?"
"I’m saying keep your hands off."

Will and Graham shared looks and both just groaned. They already had a bet over who could talk her into a date first.

"So there is a real gem?" Graham asked.

Emma finished fixing her coffee and went to sit next to Killian. "Yes," she answered him.

"Worth much?" Will probed.

"Priceless. It is a special crystal not found in this universe. It resonates at a pitch unrecorded. A normal man or woman would not be able to hold it in their hand. Legend has it that the devotee assigned the crystal once broke her vow of chastity, and when she touched the crystal her body winked into nothing. Imploded."

Will sat up at that. "Cool. Can I get a look at this crystal?"

Emma just laughed. "I don’t trust you not to try to touch it. You wouldn’t be able to resist. Even I can’t touch them. My job is simply to protect the Honorable, guard them, and complete the journey."

“Simply,” Robin half laughed, understanding there was so much more to what she was saying.

David asked quietly, "So all these gems are women?"

Emma nodded, stealing a piece of food from Killian’s plate. "The next is Patience...the red gem. I should know the location once I translate its manuscript."

"And from that gem, you get the location of the last one?" David asked and when Emma nodded again, "And then what?"

"Then I and my gems go to the Dark One."

Regina had entered the room while they spoke, standing silently at the door. "Why, Emma?" she asked moving into the room.

Emma looked down in her cup, not wanting to explain, but their lives would be forfeited if she failed. "The weapon that the Dark One has, the one he uses to hold the universe hostage...that's not what it was designed for. He took it from my world along with the manuscripts, in the hopes of one day understanding its use. He couldn’t. So, he sent the manuscripts with the rest of the ill-gotten treasure on the Olympus."

"And this 'thing'? It is not a weapon?" Regina asked. She mentally visualized it. It was a device made of a metal unknown to her.

"Not exactly. It can channel immense energy and create a field. The mistake that is made is believing that time is a linear thing; that it only exists in one plane. Time is actually fluid and ever-changing. As fast as it runs one way, it can easily reverse." Emma looked around at her audience to see that David and Regina were following the subject, but the others were not.

"Space, or the concept of space, is seen as origins and destinations. And in that thought, there is only so much space or distance that can be covered in a span of time."

Will was suddenly more attentive. Emma had traveled distances in a few days beyond what they
could travel in a week, or even a month. He’d love to understand and convert to that technology.

"So this thing that the Dark One stole..."

"It creates an energy barrier or ribbon, a wrinkle between universes, so you can travel there in a blink of an eye. If you find two points in space, and they are separated by immense distance, the Dagr’du could open an energy corridor that takes you from one point to the other instantly."

Regina sat down. "So it was never a weapon?"

"At one time, yes, it was a weapon but then it was changed, altered to control, to maintain. The same, but different."

"Does it fold space?" Will asked, a little frustrated that Emma seemed to be evading the question.

"No. It is as if space does not exist on dimensional planes, but is rather inter-wrapped and laid upon itself. That at any given time, multiple planes touch and intersect, but due to phase variance, they do not ‘perceive’ each other. The Dagr’du can open an energy field that allows for the crossing from one plane to another."

"The distortion field that we saw when your ship rejoined us. It was like a slip stream, but different. Is it the same thing?" Regina asked, also wanting to understand the technology more.

"On a much smaller scale than what the Dagr’du does, but yes, the same principle."

David sat on the table beside Killian. "So the Dark One stole a simple device from your world, one used to travel, to control, but because he had no concept how to use it, he activated and used it in another manner that was destructive."

Emma nodded. "Yes. My people would’ve stopped him. They would’ve gone after the Dagr’du, but his first act of destruction was to destroy my people and my world. I was at Temple learning about my duties as the Guardian of the Dagr’du. Once they were silenced, it became my obligation - my legacy - to restore balance to this universe. My regret was I was so young in my training that I couldn’t begin sooner. It was never my people’s intention to allow something as strong as the Dagr’du loose. That is why the ‘gems’ were hidden and separated from the Dagr’du. They’re a Holy Order, the Honorable - very much like the teaching order of the Dlohesha. They trained and prepared for centuries for the moment they would be called in service to return our people home, to the ancient worlds."

"Your people were not from here originally?" Regina figured that explained a lot about how one planet in an entire system could be so evolved above the rest.

"No. We were not." Emma paused, not sure how much to reveal. "But in time we blended our genetics with those indigenous to our star system. Over so many hundreds of thousands of generations, we now belong more to this system than to our old one.

"What happened to the ships your people used to travel here? Rumor was that your people did not travel in ships, but traveled in winks," Robin asked, leaning on the table in interest. He never for one moment in his life thought he would find himself in the company of the people he did now. First Zelena, an Eminent One, then Regina, an even more powerful Eminent One, and now Emma, the last remaining member of a species borne from myth and legend.

"That’s true,” Emma smiled at Robin. “They were able to use the Dagr’du to create instant travel between one world to another in a wrinkle of time and space. However, travel became less and less necessary as those worlds evolved and became more technologically advanced. We considered it..."
rude to merely appear on another world. So, the technology was adapted to be used in ships much like mine. It gave us the ability to travel in less time, and with less exposure to the cold of space."

Regina was silent in thought, when suddenly it occurred to her what Emma had avoided telling them, or had purposely skipped over the answer.

"Emma, what became of your ancestors' ships?"

They stared at each other for a moment and finally, Emma shrugged. "They didn’t come in ships."

The rest of the room became silent, listening.

"My homeworld, Gaianosis, was the ship. They transported an entire world through the barrier, and it became trapped in the star system in which you have always known it to exist. That is how powerful the Dagr’du is. It can move worlds."

～*～

"You haven’t said much."

Killian looked over at the bed where she was lying waiting for him to join her.

"I know." Killian turned and looked down at his hands resting on the counter with her family photos. "Your mission...what is it?"

Emma considered his question as she stared at his back. Should she tell him the whole of it, or keep its core to herself. "To remove the Dagr’du from the Dark One, to strip him of his power."

"How will you do that?"

"I will use the ‘gems’ and activate it to its real potential power, and then I will feed it into a phase shift loop. It will wink out of existence."

Killian turned and looked at her. "Why do you expect to die?"

Emma just sighed and shook her head. "Don’t ask me to tell you of my demise."

Killian came to sit on the bed. "Tell me anyway."

"Killian..." Emma looked away from him and at her family. "It is what I must do."

"I can’t...I don’t want to..." Killian paused. No words. There were no words. "Just tell me."

"My people. The Ancient Ones. The ones that first came to this universe...they were fleeing a universe that had destroyed its own fabric of space because it had evolved too fast for its own technology. My people never meant to stay here. But once they became trapped by the sun of our star system and the entire ecology of that system changed to admit them, if they had left it, it would have wreaked havoc on all the other planets in this universe. So, my people never intended to leave, but on the other hand, they couldn’t live here. It took hundreds of generations before they noticed the start of their physical breakdown. The original Ancients could phase shift, so traveling in winks was okay, but they were slowly losing cohesion. Some went through a process of ascension, where they left their corporal bodies and became pure essence. Others joined with the indigenous people of this system to create those that you know."

"That's what you are?"
"Yes. But I am the last in a long line of first families. My bloodline is direct and pure, or as pure as it could possibly be. I’m the Alarch de Prin’c and it takes ancient blood to be able to withstand the power of the Dagr’du. They used to phase shift with it, and that was how they survived."

“Alarch de Prin’c; Swan Princess,” Killian smiled slyly at her.

“You looked it up?” Emma asked, a little surprised.

“I asked Regina,” he returned honestly. “I was curious, but I guess your yellow gem confirmed it with all the My Princess this, and My Princess that.”

Emma shrugged. “It’s just a title.”

“You’re the daughter of royalty.”

“Of dead royalty,” Emma emphasized sadly.

"And you are destined to die because...?"

"I can’t phase shift. If I shift, there is no strong matrix to hold me, or to bring me back. I will either ascend, or I will wink out of existence along with the Dagr’du."

"I don’t understand."

"For me, phase shifting comes with a price. My physical form. Without my physical form or an anchor, I cease to exist." Emma looked at him solemnly. "There is only one way for me to achieve this. I must take on the power of the Dagr’du, to let its essence weave into me, to become Un’tywyll. This is something I won’t survive."

Killian was silent for a moment. If she did not take this Dagr’du from the Dark One, become this Un’tywyll, whatever that was, then the universe would continue to suffer. But if she did, it would mean her end...the ultimate sacrifice.

"Emma..."

"Let’s not talk about this anymore, okay?" Emma pulled him into the bed, covering them up. "What has to be cannot be changed."

Killian held her close and in his arms, enjoying having her back. Love. The concept still had no meaning to him, but he felt a burning need to protect her, to keep her, and to have her stay next to him forever.

~*~

"Captain?"

David looked up from his work, and frowned at the two women on his Bridge, Mary Margaret and Ruby. Masking his irritation, he politely stood.

"My Ladies."

Mary Margaret discreetly pushed Ruby forward, an encouraging smile on her face. Ruby looked back at her in irritation, but continued anyway.

"I just wanted to thank you for coming for me on Palin II."
David just nodded, but remained unyielding. "You shouldn’t be out of your quarters."

"Emma made us mobile cloaking fields, and modulated them to read as other species. I’m a Tellarian,” she smiled amusingly. “I like that they have three stomachs and can eat all their food for a week at one sitting."

"Emma?” David should have known. Their resident little fix-it genie was fast at work meddling, and now he’d have Mary Margaret and Ruby to run after as well. "Clever little thing she is." Both Mary Margaret and Ruby nodded their agreement.

"I, um..." Ruby looked at her sister for encouragement. "I wanted to offer to help around the ship, to do something to pay you and your crew back for saving me, and for all the trouble I caused."

David looked at her thoughtfully. "What can you do?" His tone indicated that he doubted she was worth much or capable of doing anything.

Mary Margaret shot a look of anger at him. It wasn’t easy for Ruby to come to him and offer her services, and he wasn’t helping.

David just shook his head a little. A pretty face. Always his downfall. "Maybe I could use your help." David refused to see Mary Margaret’s look of thanks and encouragement. He didn’t need a mother hen.

"Where? I’m not really trained for anything, and..."

"You seem to understand herbals and plants. I think hydroponics and Sickbay could use you in some capacity."

Ruby’s face suddenly cleared and brightened. "Really? Oh that would be excellent!"

"Why don’t you go to Sickbay and talk to Graham. Tell him I said he should find something for you to do, and then have him take you to hydroponics."

"I’ll do that!" Ruby turned to rush from the Bridge, but suddenly rushed back to David’s side and quickly kissed his cheek before rushing off the Bridge.

Mary Margaret watched amused at the look of discomfort moving over his face. David was trying to regain his composure while his crew watched him with interest.

"Thank you. Between you and Emma, Ruby might actually survive this."

David nodded, and watched Mary Margaret turn to leave the Bridge. Against his will, he motioned for Archie to cover the Conn until he returned.

"Lady Mary Margaret?"

Mary Margaret stopped and turned back towards him. She waited.

"Was there something you wanted to do as well?"

Mary Margaret just smiled. "My life isn’t a prison to me, but if you need help, I can cook."

David smiled at that. "Finally! I let someone on board who can actually create something edible? Shocking. Go to the galley and talk to the Steward in charge. He’ll install you into the cooking schedule."
Mary Margaret smiled and nodded.

"Can Ruby cook?"

“Actually, yes she can, but it’s something she doesn’t enjoy doing.”

David nodded. "Maybe we’ll give her a pass on that for the time being then."

Mary Margaret just smiled as she looked around the corridor on the deck outside the Bridge, it was surprisingly free of people. Moving closer to David, Mary Margaret studied him critically. He was a strange man. Commanding and domineering without a word, his mere presence was enough to demand respect.

"I never thanked you for saving my friend, and not taking it out on her."

David groaned under his breath. She was moving too close. "Lady Mary Margaret..."

He never got to finish.

Making sure they were alone, she pulled him to her. Using her hands, she lowered his mouth to hers and kissed him. He was gentle at first, but quickly became more demanding as the passion began to take hold. She matched him, opening her mouth and meeting his tongue with her own.

As his arousal began to escalate, his hands began to move. Slowly, he let his fingertips glide over her, learning her contours. After a few minutes of this, she broke the kiss and stepped back.

Taking his hand from her body, she turned to see Killian watching them. "I should go."

David watched bemused as Mary Margaret quickly left, nodding at Killian along the way. Killian watched her for a moment and then looked at his brother. His eyes narrowed and he searched his brother’s face.

"Want to tell me about it?"

David’s jawline clenched. "Nothing to tell."

"Mate, that didn’t look like nothing."

"Killian," David warned.

“She seems to be into you, and you weren’t protesting."

"I’m married."

"No, you’re not. Not anymore." Killian stopped next to his brother. "I don’t understand much, but I know that things are changing. We’re changing, and you aren’t unaffected by that woman. Kathryn was a lifetime ago, Dave. She’s dead, you’re not."

"Killian," David rubbed his face. "You don’t understand. She’s not simply another woman, she’s so much more, and I can’t offer her anything but an affair. She deserves more than that. And if we take down the Dark One, for the first time in her life, she’ll be free to live. I’m a scared space dog who has lived ten lifetimes in one."

"You’re holding onto Kathryn," Killian argued. “Your devotion to the bonded mate system of Areenia is noble and admirable, but that isn’t everything. We are free to choose for ourselves. Areenia is not our home anymore.”
David laughed bitterly. "I’ve tried to let her go. God knows I’ve tried. I hated my wife most of the time. She was one hell of a bitch, but she knew me. She understood me, and parts of me mourn her, mourn the common understanding we shared. I will never bond to another." David paused, a pained expression on his face. “Mary Margaret… I can’t get her out of my mind.”

"You must be in love. It’s a horrible affliction.”

David just laughed. "In love? Damn, you’ve been hanging around Graham way too long. If this is love, then kill me. I’ll have none of it."

"Amen, brother. Amen." Killian followed his brother onto the Bridge. He had just lied to his brother. The longer he felt the emotion of ‘love’, the more he was coming to realize that he’d do anything to keep it, despite all the pain and anguish it caused him. For the first time in his life, he felt truly alive.

~*~

"Regina, there is a message for you."

"Thank you, Robin."

Regina took the com and read the message that came over the screen. Frowning, she reread the message before sending a reply. She waited for an acknowledgement.

Robin looked up from his work. "Is everything okay?"

“Yes,” she answered curtly, still unsure of this man her sister had thrust upon her. He seemed to be everywhere she was. Every time she turned around, there he was in his strange clothing of slightly baggy pants and his forest green tunic.

“And how are you feeling now? I know you’ve been ill lately,” Robin pushed, smiling internally because she was finally engaging him in conversation.

Regina smiled. "I am better, thank you."

"You look good, Regina,” Graham butted in as he settled at the console beside her. “Your headaches have stopped, the nausea gone. I would say your body had finally accepted Zelena’s power.”

“It’s about time,” Regina grumbled back. “Who’d thought I would have reacted that way.”

“The body is a complicated thing, Regina, and yours is more complex than most. I would have been surprised if you hadn’t had some form of reaction from absorbing your sister’s power.”

"The path is set and the walkers have begun. It is impossible to change the path of thought once the idea has sparked," was all Regina could respond with.

Robin smirked at how quick she could slip into ‘eminentness’ as he called it, while Graham nodded in fake understanding. "That makes no sense to me. Okay, once again in human language and not Eminent talk."

"Sorry. I mean that once a rock begins moving down a mountain, its path is chosen."

Graham smiled. "I think I understand. Your path was set a long time again. As was all of ours. All on the path to be here, in this moment. To undertake what we must.”
"Yes."

"Okay, then you know what? We need to get you language lessons," Graham joked.

Regina just laughed. No one knew why or when the Eminent Ones began talking in rhymes and parables. But it was like a sense of understanding that made sense to a simple man, but confused the hell out of everyone else.

"I wonder about my fate and what I am sometimes, Graham."

"Now? For a long time?"

"Recently. Since meeting Emma."

Graham laughed at Regina. "Emma makes people think and wonder a lot. She is...dynamic."

"Yes. But it is not just her personality or her intelligence. It is her people."

"I don’t understand."

Regina puzzled over what she knew, and all the things she did not. Her gaze slipped to Robin, who was listening intently, and she pushed out with her senses, making sure she could trust this man. She received nothing back from him but curiosity and openness. "When my genetics were altered, and I was created to be an Eminent, it was from a template."

"Template. Regina, how can they have a template for something that never existed?"

"It did exist. They existed. Emma’s people. The ones called 'the Ancients'. They were advanced far beyond anything in this universe. The Council approached the Elders of her world, and asked for a genetic comparison. At the time, the Gaian had no reason to refuse."

"So you are like Emma, like her people?" Robin asked, wanting to fully understand.

Regina just shook her head. "Not really. They had multiple base pairs and extra chromosomes. All the ones we had, but multiple ones, woven and thickened. They coded and processed proteins and enzymes beyond what we could understand. The closest we could come to replicating their genome was finding individuals with genetic anomalies of multiple chromosomes. With us, they used a retrovirus to imprint the Gaian genome to ours. It was similar, but not the same."

"So the ones who created the Eminent, who created you, did what the Dark One wanted to do," Graham processed.

"Worse. The Dark One was on the original Council. He was unhappy that no matter how they proceeded, they could not produce an Ancient. It was believed that within their code was the understanding of many things, and when we, the Eminent Ones, talked in parables, they felt they were close. But we were still a failure."

"So the Dark One went back to Gaianosis."

"Yes, but by this time, the Gaian began to understand how we were altering the fabric of this space. How every created Eminent connected to the matrix. And after talking to Emma, I understand why they refused to help in the project."

"Because her Ancients came here due to the fact they had ripped apart their own universe’s fabric?" Robin theorized.
"Yes. They must have seen that we were striving to advance beyond our limits too fast, too recklessly, and that this universe would suffer for it. So, they refused."

"And the Dark One took?" Graham added, his hearts aching for what was lost.

"His intent was to hold their Holy Relic, or what he thought was a Relic, hostage. But instead, he found something much more powerful."

"So Emma was wrong. This didn’t start with her people losing control of this Dagr’du."

"It started because we, the members of the Council, started it. The Council created the Dark One, gave him the beginnings of his power." Regina laughed sarcastically. "We had no right to play in God’s sandbox, to change what nature had created. But we did."

Graham felt the futility of it, the anguish, and felt Regina’s distress of being something created to help destroy others.

"Regina? Maybe you should calm down a little," Robin said, his eyes off to the side and his body alert.

Regina looked at the wall and noticed the distortion field starting to form. She pulled it back.

"What the hell was that, Regina?" Graham demanded.

"I have no idea. I’ve been doing it a lot lately." Regina responded.

At that moment, Graham’s com sounded. Not taking his eyes off his patient, he answered it with a curt, "Graham."

"Graham, my security sensors have a recorded sub-space fluctuation," Killian’s voice echoed through the room.

"It was Regina. Sorry, Killian."

Graham, Robin, and Regina could hear the silence at the other end. Finally, David’s voice came over the com.

"Is this something we need to worry about?" he asked.

"No, Captain. I think we’ve got it under control," Robin reassured his captain.

David’s voice was firm and brooking no refusal. "I’ll see Regina in a few moments."

"Sickbay, Captain."

Graham disconnected and looked at his friend, standing and offering her his hand. "You’re in trouble now, My Lady."

~*~
Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday.

I'm not going to bore you with my ramblings, I have a broken finger and typing is certainly a challenge!

Thanks to those who have left comments - letterfromathief- that was some comment!
You are awesome! :)

Ultraluckycat _ you know what I'm gonna say... so I won't

Hope you all continue to enjoy this story.

Chapter 12 - More Powerful Than You Realize.

"Regina, explain" David demanded as soon as he entered Sickbay.

"It is hard to do so."

"Try." David sat next to Regina while Killian leaned up against a wall. "I had security sensors going off all over my Bridge, a sub-space distortion forming in my ship, and the integrity of my warp field was being compromised."

Regina was startled at the results. "I am sorry. It has only happened a few times. The only stable one I created was just after Zelena left to go in search of her cure."

"How?"

Regina was helpless to say. It was beyond her. "I don’t know. I just thought of where I needed to be, and it opened. I tried to do it again to get to Killian and Emma when they were dying on the bridge of the Olympus, but I couldn’t."

The men looked at each other. Regina was becoming more and more a stranger in her own body with the increase in her power from Zelena.

"This last incident?" David asked, uncertain if he wanted to know.

"Emotions. She was emotional." Graham took the initiative from Regina.

Killian just swore and David stood up and paced. "Let me get this straight. If you get upset, you can open a distortion field between my stable decks and the space outside, decompressing my ship?"

“No!” Regina cried indignantly. “I wasn’t upset. Graham and I were discussing some Eminent history and it got to me. I wasn’t upset, I was feeling.”
“Well, get your feelings under control will you?” David demanded.

"Aye, Captain," Regina replied in a hard voice.

"Dammit! Don’t ‘Aye, Captain’ me! Just do it!” David looked at his friend and partner. Regina actually smiled at the firm David. "Think about flowers or some pansy shit! Relaxation techniques, or something."

"Aye, Captain," Regina grinned. David just swore, and stomped to the door. "Killian!"

"David, wait." David stopped at the door and turned around at Regina's request. "I just got a communication from the Doyrilia system. Their system would like to hire us to retrieve salvage lost in a neighboring Nebula during an ionic storm."

"They can’t do it themselves?"

Regina shrugged. "Apparently not. Their ships aren’t equipped to handle the ionic disturbance that still exists, and raiders are bearing down fast."

"You drink tea, and practice flower arranging or something, and I’ll plot a course to the Doyrilia system." David pursed his lips, and rubbed his scar. "I’m assuming you already accepted the job."

Regina looked at Graham, and both men started laughing. "Yeah. Thought we could use something normal to do."

"Damn straight. By the way, Ruby is working in Sickbay with Graham, and Mary Margaret has offered to do shifts in the galley."

Regina just smiled. She had known this. Since Emma set her sisters up with mobile cloaking fields, her life was less strained.

~*~

When Killian’s shift ended, he went to find Emma. She was in their quarters with Belle, working on the translation of the red manuscript. As soon as he entered, Belle quickly excused herself and scurried out.

"What did I say?"

"Nothing. Belle has spent years in isolation. It’s hard for her not to feel out of her element around others, and especially around men." Emma quickly stacked the manuscript and pages into neat stacks. Killian hated the clutter.

He went into their bedroom and then to bathe. Emma could hear him moving around. Knowing the time, he was back early.

"Is it your turn to cook tonight?” Emma cursed herself under her breath for not paying attention. If she had to eat Will and Killian’s cooking, she might just have to kill herself.

"No. We picked up a new wreck. I’m on duty for salvage, so I’ve got time off until then to rest."

"Really? What system?"

Killian leaned back in the tub and shut his eyes. "Doyrilia."

"Been there. They aren’t an admirable people. They would sell their own organs for extra credits."
Killian just huffed. "Sounds like another mission where I’ll have to keep an eye on Will. Sounds like his type of people."

Emma slowly walked to the large tub and unfastened her clothing. The sound of rustling made him open his eyes as her garments dropped.

"Are you going to share?"

Sleeping with her every night, he was becoming accustomed to her nude form. But in the dark and at night, it lacked the impact of seeing her standing unabashed in front of him.

When he moved back in the tub, she shook her head no. "I want the back. I’ll wash you." He moved forward and felt her slide in behind him.

"This is getting difficult, Emma," he mumbled. She picked up a sponge and slowly made movements across his skin. He leaned his head forward and moaned. He was so gone. She knew exactly what she was doing. "I hate it when you tease me."

Emma moved closer to him, whispering in his ear. "It doesn’t feel like teasing to me."

"Then what does it feel like?" Killian asked softly. "Because to me, it’s bloody damn close to torture."

"I’m sorry. I don’t mean..." Emma rested her head on his wide shoulders. "I don’t mean you harm, but every day this compulsion to touch you gets stronger and stronger, and perhaps I am weak."

Killian just snorted at that. "And I am interested in becoming Will’s lust interest."

"Really?" Killian could feel her mouth stretch into a smile.

Killian turned and made a threatening look at her. "Emma," he warned. She just laughed and went back to washing his back.

Killian reached behind him and grabbed her hand and the sponge. They stared at each other unmoving. Killian refused to hesitate.

"Sooner or later, love, this...courtship will end. You know that, don’t you?" Emma tried to avoid his eyes, but he grasped her face and forced her to see him. Only him. "We can’t go on like this forever on the verge of something else. When I win your heart, Emma, and I will win it, it will not be because of any trickery; it will be because you want me. And it's getting closer every day."

She didn’t say anything, simply taking the sponge back to continue washing his body.

When Killian woke hours later, it was early morning, but the bed was empty on her side and the rooms silent. She had left again.

Cursing, he was up and out of the room, stalking to the landing bay holding her ship. Standing in the doorway, he was relieved to see it was still there. She hadn’t left the ship.

David didn’t even look up when Killian entered the Bridge.

"She’s in the gym."

Killian didn’t even acknowledge his brother. He left and headed for the gym they used for combat training and exercise. Standing in the door, he watched her for a while. She was blindfolded and moving in a fluid motion. The movements reminded him of his childhood lessons of self-defense.
They were fighting movements, but she performed them with an unconscious grace and movement.

On his world, the movements were swift and violent. She did them slower, with the precision and the grace of a dancer.

"What are you doing?"

Emma took off her blindfold at his voice. Looking at him, she motioned him forward.

"Exercise."

"I woke up and you were gone again."

"So you ran to check on me?" she demanded, surprised and a little hurt.

"Aye," he answered angrily. "I thought I'd better make sure you were still on board, and didn't just run away when things were tough."

"I didn't run away last time," she shot back quickly. Killian's look of disbelief made her admit that part of her did. A guilty look crossed her face; she hadn't intended to worry him. "I'm sorry."

Killian shook his head. "That's not good enough, Emma. You don't say good-bye, you don't let me know you're okay, and you're sorry? The only thing you're sorry about is that I keep crowding you, and making you want to run again."

"That's not true!" she insisted. "I came back as soon as I had the information I needed. I'm not running. I'm just exercising."

Killian refused to back down. The disbelief in his face was apparent as his arms crossed his chest and his stance became unyielding. Watching his jaw clench, she had a desire to kiss it; to kiss him. To run her teeth against his jaw and feel the prickle of his facial hair.

Killian glanced around the room, appreciating the emptiness except for them, but he didn't move. "Why, Emma? What's happening between us? We both want it, but we can't go any further. What the hell is going on?"

"I got scared," she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Of me?" Killian was shocked. If she could control him any better, he would be her personal whipping boy.

"Of us," she answered defiantly. "I woke up this morning and I wanted to touch you, to run my hands all over you, taste you and never stop. I panicked."

Killian's mouth twitched, but his voice was very even, "Let me get this straight. You left because doing something I'd kill for, something you desire as much as I do, scared you?"

A half-smile crossed her face at that, but she shook her head. "I left because I suddenly felt like I was..."

"Like you were what?" he asked when she didn't finish. "Being smothered?"

"Like I was... yours."

Killian looked at her in shock, there was some sadness in his voice as he asked, "Would that really be so terrible, love?"
"At this time, right here, right now? The thought absolutely terrifies me," she responded honestly.

"Then explain this to me," he said, puzzled. "Why do you stay with me and sleep with me if I scare you? Why don’t you cut me off? Are you feeling guilty?"

"No! I was feeling lonely," she answered softly. "I missed you so much when I was gone! A few weeks ago, the thought occurred to me that I could destroy us both by giving in to these feelings I have for you. That you'd probably not appreciate me throwing it away. But I'll have to do that, Killian. My destiny...what I must do...is very clear. And I can’t stand the thought of losing you, of leaving you. But I will leave you. I will lose you. These thoughts scared me a lot more than the thought of being with you. I realized you have enough power over me to make me want to choose you over my duty. To stay with you. I’m afraid if I give in to this, if I’m with you for a moment, that it will be a moment too much. I wanted to explain and try to get you to forgive me..." she stopped for a moment, then went on. "I'm crazy about you, and you make me regret not being born Areenian, not being born free. Make me regret my duty, even though I know my life will end soon."

"And that's it? I'm supposed to just let you decide for the both of us? I'm supposed to open my arms and welcome you to sleep with me, touch me, tease me with no chance of ever having you?" Killian asked, sarcastically.

"No. I know it's not going to be that easy. I'm going to be here for a couple of months. I was just hoping we could see each other a little. But, I guess I'm coming to understand that it's impossible, and I'm being unfair to you. See, if there was ever any chance..."

"Go to hell!" he said, very deliberately. Turning on his heel, he could hardly wait for the door to open and started out.

Halfway through the door, he stopped. For a full minute neither of them moved. Finally, he stepped back into the room and watched as the door shut again.

"FUCK!" he shouted, still facing the door. Turning around, he said in a bewildered voice, "What do I see in you?"

"I have no idea," she replied.

At that, he chuckled and leaned back against the door. "Bloody hell, Emma..." he said softly.

She walked toward him, hesitantly, afraid he would reject her. He didn't move as she came closer. She continued walking until she was pressing him into the door and then, raising up on tiptoe, she kissed him tenderly. He didn't push her away, but he didn't respond either.

After a moment, she moved away from his mouth, kissing and nibbling on his neck. Completely passive, he let her do as she liked.

Giving up, she pulled away, "You're not going to make this easy on me, are you?"

"No," he responded. "Why should I?"

"Are you going to stop me?"

He smiled at that. "No..."

"But, you're not going to help."
"What do you want from me?" he demanded.

"I want you," she answered. "I want you to make me forget there can never be a forever for us. I want you to be with me no matter how long, and not stop me from doing what I must when the time comes."

"Fine," he answered, flatly. "If that's what you want." He noticed she hadn't moved. Trying to keep a straight face, he looked at her. "What's wrong?" he asked innocently.

"You really are a bastard, Commander," she commented. He wasn't supposed to accept it so matter of factly. Her short life and imminent death should mean more than an end to sleeping together, being together.

"Not exactly what you had in mind, huh?" he asked, still trying to keep the humor out of his voice. "How about this?"

With a single movement, he reached out, took her arm and swung her around. Turning with her, he pressed her into the door. As he moved against her, he reached down and tugged her leg up, guiding it over his hip. The entire maneuver had taken less than two seconds.

Smiling at her gasp of surprise, he leaned into her. "Better?" he growled softly.

When she nodded, he captured her lips with his own. As their kiss deepened, he reached behind her and tugged at her exercise clothing. Once her shirt was open, he pushed it off her shoulders, then followed the material with his lips and tongue as it slid down. He didn’t stop until he had her breasts exposed.

Emma shuddered; from the cold or from his lips she wasn’t sure. She just knew how good it felt to feel the scruff of his facial hair against her naked breast. She couldn’t stop herself from thrusting her chest out more, offering herself to him.

Catching a nipple between his lips, he teased it gently, enjoying the plumpness of her flesh and her soft whimpers of desire. Feeling her pull her leg away from him, he raised his head, wondering what was wrong. She looked at him with darkened green eyes, serious and emotional. Realizing that she was still afraid of what they were becoming, he bent down and took her mouth in another deep kiss, not giving her room to worry or even breathe.

Leaning toward her, he nuzzled her gently, inhaling her scent. He reached for her, planning to pull her into his arms and open her to him, but she reached down and pushed his hands away.

"Don't," she whispered, "Please... I want you, but not this fast." She had to be kidding. If they went any slower, they would be standing still.

Standing up straighter, he started to lean back into her. She put her hands up, holding him away. When he held still, she moved one hand lower, caressing him through his pants. After a moment, she lowered her other hand and quickly unfastened his slacks and freed him, moving her hand inside to stroke him. He closed his eyes and groaned.

Watching her through half closed eyes, he smiled when she caught her bottom lip between her teeth. "Don’t stop. You’re doing fine."

It was hard to imagine her needing any encouragement. Her hands in her sleep had mapped and moved over his body for weeks and weeks. She was a demon in her sleep. Looking at her serious face, his smile faltered.
"Emma, is this what you want from me?"

"I’m not certain what I want, and what I can have." She moved away from him and refastened her clothing. "I never thought to be in this situation. I never thought to find anyone that could make me wish not to have my duty. You...you confuse me. Confuse things."

"You want to stop?"

She started at that. "No! No, I don’t. I want to go on with you, but maybe slowly. We talk, we kiss, and we sleep together, so maybe we could add touching, or more touching, and see where that leads..."

"I could draw you a diagram where I want it to lead, love," he said with a smirk that made her want to melt.

Emma laughed at that. "I think a diagram isn’t necessary. I’ve very clued in here."

Killian refastened his pants. She was good. She had him unfastened in seconds flat, and that was nothing, if not encouraging.

"Okay, we do this your way. Slowly. But, I need a promise from you."

"What?"

"No more running away."

Emma laughed at that. "Okay. I’ll leave at least a note."

Killian didn’t smile back, instead he grabbed her roughly and up tight against him. "No notes. You wake me. You talk to me. I might have to give you up sooner or later, but until then...you’re mine."

Emma said solemnly, "Partners?"

"Partners."

"Okay. So how do we start?"

Killian thought about it for a moment. "How about you tell me about this exercising you were doing?"

"Kataan? It is a dance form. It teaches strength, balance, harmony, and concentration."

"It looks like battle stances and movements from my world. But you move too slowly."

Emma frowned. "I don’t!"

"You do. An opponent could overwhelm you with a simple movement."

Emma just snorted. "You equate greater strength and size with success and power. Any person’s strength and size can be used against them."

Killian’s eyebrow raised. "Really? Then show me."

They spent the next hour having Emma toss Killian around the mats easily and without effort. He was breathing hard and she was hardly sweating. He remembered how when they first met, she unarmed him and tossed him easily.
"How are you doing that?"

"The bird that fights the wind, falls to the downdraft."

"Oh shit, not Eminent parables from you as well!"

Emma laughed. "Sorry, that was from my mentor N’al. To fight a strength greater than your own is to fall under its power, but to channel your opponent’s strength against them makes them forced to do the work, while you reap the benefit."

"Okay, no riddles. Just show me."

They worked for another hour as Emma and Killian practiced the moves together, moving fluidly and in tandem. Will found them and watched, amused. They looked so strange. Killian was so large with Emma so tiny, moving in identical movements.

"You’re moving too slowly." The two of them stopped and looked at Will. Almost in agreement, they both moved towards the door to leave.

"You think?" asked Killian.

Will just charged, not giving Killian a chance to retaliate. Killian easily flipped Will with barely a flick of his wrist. Looking at Emma, he was surprised to see her approving look. Who would have thought?

Killian snickered at his downed friend as he led Emma out of the gym.

~*~

Killian had just turned when the com unit sounded. Emma made mewing noises and pushed herself harder into his back. Neither of them was willing to wake up and answer the hail, until finally Emma gave in.

"Yes."

"Killian?"

Emma sighed. Figures. "Killian...Killian, it’s for you."

He just made a noise and refused to wake up. Dammit, he always did this!

"Just a second," Emma told the person on the com.

Moving up close and personal to his back, she kissed the back of his neck, and moved her hand around from his back to his chest, and downward. She knew the moment he became more awake. He held himself still, seeing how far she’d go.

"Stop faking. The com is for you."

Killian groaned, and turned to reach over her. "We’ll finish this later."

Emma just giggled at his rough voice. "Yeah?"

"Killian, I need you in the command room."

Killian groaned. David. Of course, it would be David. His brother had little regard for his sleep.
"I’m on my way."

Emma started to get up as well. Killian pushed her back into the bed. "Uh uh. You go back to sleep."

"I’ll freeze without you. I’ll just come along."

"Emma, go back to sleep. I’ll tell you what it’s about later."

"Partners, remember?"

"Not that kind of partners, Emma."

"I’m going."

"You’re not."

"Am."

They argued all the way to the command room.

David showed extreme patience until finally he interrupted them. "If you wouldn’t mind, this needs to be decided soon, and your personal squabbles need to be shelved."

Killian looked at Emma nastily. "See? See what you did?"

"Me? You said partners! And partners means..."

"Enough!" David’s hand hitting the table hard had them jumping. "There is no time."

"Sorry, David. Continue." Killian gave Emma a warning glare.

"We need to detour to the Slocenus system. We received a distress hail from the Haven, but I want to send the first salvage team ahead to the Doyrilia system."

"Why separate us?" Killian asked with a curse under his breath, as Emma kicked his ankle under the table when he purposely turned in front of her blocking her view and thus, her ability to participate.

"A ship caught in an ionized Nebula as a salvage operation needs immediate attention. But I also can’t ignore a call from one of the largest battleships the Royals possess."

"Excuse me? Distortion fields?" Emma asked with considerable attention to detail in each word.

Killian said to her in a quiet voice, "Don’t know everything, huh?"

Emma whispered back in not so soft a voice. "I was so going to fuck you, but now? I think I’ll do Graham instead. He’s nicer."

"I am," piped up Graham.

“No, I’m better,” Will added, smiling charmingly to Emma, and wriggling his eyebrows.

Killian just glared at his friends while David just gave them all a warning glare.

"Killian, you take Will and the Apollo. We will meet with you on the ruling planet of Zion, or seek you out in the Nebula."
"Full recovery team?"

David nodded at his brother. "I’d send more, but I don’t want that many men out there unprotected."

Killian nodded. Pirates, raiders, and generally nasty individuals would be after them, and without the *Enchanted* as an overseer protecting the *Apollo*, it could be a bumpy ride. They would have to try to recover the ship itself, or at least the cargo. They wouldn’t know what the Doyrilia people wanted until they arrived.

"I should go with them."

Both Will and Killian said ‘no’ emphatically and at the same time, Killian looked at David, who shook his head.

"Sorry, Emma," David said. ‘Killian is the commander of this mission, so you stay here."

"Fine," Emma huffed, refusing to look at Killian. She tuned out the rest of the talks about the recovery and the rendezvous. Making eye contact with Regina, she discreetly gestured her to follow her out. "Since I’m not involved, I think I’ll go find somewhere to sleep. Excuse me."

"Emma!"

She kept walking, ignoring Killian calling after her. Leaving the command room and walking through the Bridge, she waited for Regina to join her.

"Are you alright, Emma?"

She smiled ruefully. "I’m fine. Look, Regina. Tell me about the distortion fields."

"Why?"

She hooked her arm through Regina’s and led her to the lift. "Just humor me."

~*~

Killian finished making plans with his brother and followed Will out of the conference room. Looking around on the Bridge, he had hoped to find Emma there, messing with sensors, pushing buttons, and generally creating havoc. She was not.

"Will, I’ll meet you and the team on the *Apollo*."

"She’ll be ready to deploy in less than an hour.\" Will patted Killian on the shoulder. "Go find her."

"Right.\" Killian walked off fast to find Emma, hoping she went back to their quarters. Will watched him leave and just shook his head. This love crap was a curse.

Killian didn’t find her in their rooms. They looked exactly the way they had left them. Quickly changing and finding his gear, Killian ran a scan of the ship looking for her. Nothing.

Oh, no way! He left their room in a run, and quickly went to her ship. Breathing in relief, it was still there. Killian couldn’t help but feel suspicious. Going to the *Apollo*, he boarded.

Will seemed surprised to see him there. "That was quick, mate. You smooth things over?"

"I couldn’t find her."
Will laughed. Emma was a slippery customer.

"August," Killian called out, “check the smuggler holds and other areas before we take off. I don’t want to find a stowaway."

Will laughed to himself, as August asked, curiously, "Lady Ruby?"

"No. Emma." August looked a little crestfallen, but went off to quickly comply.

"What the hell was that about?" Killian could feel his irritation level rising.

"Most of the men think of her as a sort of mascot. She is into things, but she has a way of finding workable solutions, and they like that,” Jefferson said as he settled into his co-pilot’s seat.

"Great." Killian grimaced. *Who the hell were they working for anyway?*

"Don’t sweat it, my friend. I’m sure she’s just avoiding you, and not sleeping with anyone else." Killian just growled at the suggestion.

~*~

"Regina, you look so much better.”

"Thank you, Emma. I do feel better. Now, tell me why you wanted to know about the distortion fields."

Emma finished replicating them some coffee, and went to sit next to her. Both Ruby and Mary Margaret were obviously asleep this late in the night.

"You’ve never opened a corridor before Zelena transferred her power to you?"

"Never," Regina agreed as she took a sip of the coffee and grimaced at the bitter taste. She preferred tea.

"Creating a corridor is something my people did. It is a form of phase shifting."

Regina stopped drinking. "What are you saying?"

"I don’t think it was you, not consciously." Emma moved forward in the chair.

"Then what is it?"

"Think Regina. Eminents speak like our Dlohesha priests, and they are ascended. Their essences are all that is left of them. They left their corporeal bodies, and transcended to another plane of existence. Before that, they phase shifted until they lost cohesion, the ability to retain a physical form."

Regina looked curiously at Emma, trying to understand what the blonde was saying.

"Distortion corridors are the first step of phase shifting,” Emma added.

"More like your people?"

"Eventually, yes, but something more advanced than anything naturally occurring in this universe."

"You are advanced," Regina said in some confusion.
Emma just shook her head no. "I’m more like you, all of you, than I am like the Ancients. They have been gone for so long, and so much of what they were and the things they understood were lost. It wasn’t until the Dlohesha order began that we were able to collect all the remaining knowledge we had and safeguard it for our futures. We took a step back, and we were finally beginning to evolve upward towards where we once started when the Dark One came."

Regina couldn’t comprehend what could have been lost. Emma was a mythical woman, one that at times seemed to hold so much knowledge and understanding, and at other times was such a child, unknowing and curious.

“Do you think this could be because of you, because of your presence here?” Regina asked, looking at her sideways.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

“The first time I did it was just after Zelena left on Nassoz V. I didn’t meet you until after that.”

“Maybe our mystic waves, or whatever, are connecting, calling out to like matter, to the same power,” Emma speculated, unsure why Regina was developing traits only known to her people. Then again, she was an Eminent One, one with immense power. Regina was as much of an enigma as she was.

"Why are you telling me this now?"

"Because … I can teach you how to use it."

Regina was suddenly interested, and not so tired. "You can open distortion fields?"

"Since I was about three.” Emma shrugged. “I’m the Alarch de Prin’c. I can do that and so much more, but there is also so much that I cannot do."

Regina stood up and paced the room, picking up objects as if to test their weight to throw. She sat them down, and slowly breathed to calm herself before she lost control of her emotions again and opened a distortion field.

“I used to dream of stopping the Dark One and freeing our universe,” Regina confided. “I believed at one point I was the only one capable of doing this. That is different now, with you here.”

"Nothing is certain, Regina. Nothing is written. Who knows where our paths will take us. We can only tread the one we have been burdened with.” Emma stood up to leave and she squeezed her shoulder. “I have faith all that will come to be is what should be.”

“Why?”

“Because if I don’t, what else do I have but a death sentence.”

~*~

Emma wasn’t surprised to see David outside in the corridor when she emerged from Regina’s rooms.

"David," she greeted.

"I wondered where you went." David followed her into hers and Killian’s quarters. "Killian looked for you."
"More like he wanted to make sure I didn’t stowaway on his precious mission."

David made a face. This was true. "Give him a break. He’s just trying to keep you safe."

"And who keeps him safe? The Enchanted won’t be there to help him out if raiders attack."

"What are you suggesting?" David asked, his eyes narrowing at her, already suspecting what she was saying.

Emma just smiled at the man. "Since you asked..."

"Just tell me what your plan is."

Emma laughed. She was obviously becoming very predictable to this man.

~*~

They made the Slocenus system in good time. The Enchanted came to rest beside the Haven, the ship that had at one time housed Regina and still sailed as flagship to the Royals. The Haven had suffered a severe malfunction with its isotope core and more than half the ship was filled with leaking, deadly, noxious gases that could putrefy a body from the inside.

The gases could not be ejected into space as this could form nebulae that were dangerous to all surrounding planets. The Haven’s engineer and half of its ranked crew were suffering from isotope poisoning. Philip, the captain of Haven, was baffled at how the core had leaked. He reassured Regina a diagnostic on the Haven had been completed two days before the core erupted, showing no signs of weakening or eroding. It was a mystery as to why the incident had happened.

It took three days for David and Robin to stabilize the Haven’s core, and two more for Graham to be satisfied he had saved as many of the crew as he could.

They stayed for as long as they could, but it was finally time for them to head towards the Doyrilia star system.

"Captain!"

"Yes, Ensign," David acknowledged as he settled into his chair on the Bridge of Enchanted.

"We’ve received a distress signal about the Apollo. She was under attack. Captain... she went down."

~*~
Armada

Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday Everyone! Hope all you lovelies are having an awesome day.

Thanks for the comments and kudos for this fic.

Ultraluckycat, you know the score!

Still struggling to type, so here's the chapter

Chapter 13 - Armada

Will tried to get Killian to talk during the thirty-six-hour trip to the Doyrilia system but(15,608),(989,723) about twelve hours into the journey, it was apparent Killian wasn’t in the mood to discuss anything. Especially not Emma.

It was hard to decide what Killian was pissed off about most: the fact Emma didn’t even bother to try to crash the salvage operation, or that he had to leave without knowing where she was and what she was up to.

"This love thing…it really sucks, huh?" Will asked.

"What?" Killian looked at his friend and frowned at being pulled from his own thoughts.

"Being in love…it sucks."

Killian just grunted. Being in love was inconvenient at the worst of times, but remembering the last few times with Emma…how she woke him that morning with her hand, gentle but tight, stroking his growing erection, and even how she invaded his space…it was hard to hate something that gave him a sense of belonging.

"It’s tolerable at times," he finally mumbled.

"Maybe you’ll get over it soon."

Killian was amazed at the sudden stab that remark caused in his chest. Get over it? Get over Emma? All he knew was that someday, one day soon, she was going to use a bloody weapon called the Dagr’du and she would be gone. Somehow knowing this made it worse. He wasn’t looking at an endless road, but rather a road with a definite end.

"Aye, mate, … maybe I’ll get over it." Killian went quiet again. Will finally gave up and went into the back compartment to get some sleep.

Several hours later, Killian called. "Will, we’re almost to the Doyrilia star system. Can you get the sensors online?"

Will came forward and took the co-pilot’s seat Jefferson had recently vacated for some shut eye.
Smee, the navigator, was already plotting their entry into the system and out of the slip stream. Will pushed the sensors to the max, which was beyond their normal capacity. Emma had helped him tweak them a few weeks back.

As soon as they emerged, Will began scanning the field. This operation would require them to set down on Doyrilia’s ruling planet of Zion and discuss terms and sign contracts. But once they entered the system, Will immediately searched the Nebula for their salvage. It was always best to have an idea of the complexity involved so the proper fee could be charged.

"Killian, we’ve got a problem."

Killian turned in his seat. "Tell me."

"The Nebula is a Class Four with an ionic displacement field. There are active ionic showers, and I am locating a ship trapped in the center of the field."

"That must be the salvage. How big? Can we pull it free, or are we going to need to dock and evacuate the crew and cargo?"

Will looked at Killian, the worry plain on his face. "It’s a full brig ship riding adrift."

August, who was seated at a console behind Killian, double checked his sensors. "Killian, there are no life signs."

"The crew’s dead?" Killian swiveled his head towards Gus.

"I don’t think so. When Emma tweaked our sensors, she made it easy for us to scan internal areas of ships. Killian, it’s on automatic pilot. It’s a dummy ship; a decoy," August explained.

Killian looked at him sharply. "Fuck! Full sweeping scan, Gus! They were expecting the Enchanted, not just the Apollo. They’re out there, and they’re waiting for the rest of us to catch up."

Killian took his controls off automatic approach to the planet of Zion, and quickly raised all of his shields to maximum. Arming his weapons array, he called to the back for his men to arm the aft gunneries.

"Strap it in, boys, looks like an ambush." Killian rotated around to his navigator. "Smee, plot me a slip stream out of here. Fast!"

"Killian, too late. They must have had a read on our weapons and shields coming online. They’re powering up," Will called out.

"Who? Who’s powering up?" Killian demanded.

Killian followed Will’s view. A full fleet of Legion cruisers. "Fuck me!" Killian took pilot control and employed diversion tactics, staying clear of any larger ship’s tractor beams. "Will, tell me something good. We’re not lasting long in this." Killian looked back at his navigator trying to get them a plotted course. "Smee, today would be a good time to jump out of here."

"Working on it, Commander."

"Work faster!" Killian cursed as he avoided oncoming cannon fire. "That good news would be appreciated, Will."
"Emma tweaked our shields and weapons as well?" Will offered in a hopeful voice.

"Bloody hell, Will, I said something good."

Will looked out the viewer and checked his sensors. "Too late. First battalion of fighters coming in. We’re toast."

"Not yet, and not before we take some of them with us."

Killian piloted the ship through the worst of the attacking fighters, his gunners taking out as many ships as possible. Will targeted the larger ships' forward gunnery arrays to take them out as they passed. The shields were holding, but they took full hits to the port nacelles, and their environmental dampers were offline.

"Will, I lost an engine."

"Direct hit to the coolant tank. I can’t repair it."

"Will, I need that engine. I can’t jump into a slip stream without it." They took another hit and Will slammed forward. Then to the side, directly into Killian with their heads hitting hard.

"Get off me! Get me my engines back!"

"I can’t. The forward shovels are toast, ballast is gone, and the inertial dampening field is going." Will rotated in his seat checking his control panels trying to control a fire in the front impulse engine. "The shields are holding, but another direct hit to port, and they’re gone."

Killian looked at Will. "Transmit a distress warning to Enchanted. Word is, 'We’re gone; she is not to pursue'."

"Communications are down, and they are blocking all transmissions."

Killian’s jaw clenched. His eyes narrowed as he took out more of the smaller fighters. Lining up his run, he slipped between them, drawing the fire power of the larger Legion cruisers to take out their own ships. Using Emma’s method of letting the stronger opponent use their own strength against themselves, he almost decimated the attacking battalion.

But there were more.

Will was impressed, but the odds were too steep. "Killian, don’t be stupid. What are you planning?"

Killian just shrugged. "I’m thinking today's a good day to die as any, and I’m taking some of those sons-of-bitches with me."

Will read over Killian’s console and noticed him targeting one of the large Legion Cruisers. They were lining up for a dead man’s run with direct impact.

"Killian, we’ll never penetrate their forward shields. It’s suicide."

"We’ll penetrate if we flood the compartment with antimatter before impact." Killian looked at him. "We take out as many as possible so Enchanted doesn’t land in the middle of a firefight."

Will looked at him as if he was insane. That would cause a cascading reaction that would not only blow the Legion cruiser, but many of the ones around it.
"You’re a crazy bastard."

"Aye, I am." Killian smiled as he began the run by clearing the road along the way, taking out smaller ships, but sustaining massive damage. *David. Emma.*

"Killian, wait! I’ve got increased fire power coming over us fast!" August called out.

"Another fighter battalion, Gus?"

"Negative. They’re not targeting us. They’re taking out the surrounding fighters."

They watched as a full spread of torpedoes fired over them, straight for the Legion cruiser they were targeting.

"Those torpedoes will never penetrate the shields." Killian held his course.

"Killian! Power back! They penetrated!" The full spread torpedoes went through the larger Legion cruiser’s shields as if they didn’t even exist.

Killian quickly changed course, and tried to distance himself from the larger craft before it exploded, taking everything with it. His inertial dampers were gone, and the final ballast was blown to hell.

"Will, sound for impact. I’ve got a dead stick. We’re going in." Killian couldn’t see the ship that had come to their assistance. The engines were roaring as he tried to hold the ship steady, but it was in gimbal lock, as the shakes and shimmies increased. "What are my shields like?"

"Gone before we clear the upper atmosphere. We’ll go in burning." Both men looked at each other and braced themselves. Before they went down, they saw another explosion as another cruiser was taken out.

~*~

"Helmsman, set a course, full speed." David rushed to his chair in the Bridge. The entire flight deck was in chaos as all stations were manned. "Battle stations. How soon can we make the Doyrilia system?"

"With full engines through a slip stream, earliest is eighteen hours, Cap." Archie turned in his seat. "It’s dangerous. If we deviate in the stream for even a moment, we’ll be pulverized."

"Do it." David cursed a full stream of bitterness. "Batten down the stations! Full alert! They must have entered an ambush. All hands to battle stations, and running lights only."

Regina entered the Bridge and took the science station. Looking at David, they understood much. It had to be the Dark One, and if it was, he would need a full fleet to board *Enchanted.*

"Did Killian send any information, David?" Regina asked quietly.

David just shook his head no. "It wasn’t Killian. It was a witness to the *Apollo* going down."

"Any coordinates where they went down?" she pushed.

"Zion. Location unknown. I hope it was the capital city. Those bastards will pay for their part in this."

Regina didn’t say anything. David was feeling the separation from his brother, something he
wasn’t sure how to handle. Since the brother’s bond ceremony that Regina had performed years earlier, the bond between Killian and David grew stronger, to the point where the one could physically feel the other’s presence.

"I’m sure Killian is okay."

"He better be." David didn’t mention that he couldn’t feel his bond to Killian. With the distance separating them that wasn’t surprising, but it was still no comfort.

"David, you should go sleep while you can."

"I’ll sleep when I get my brother back, or when I remove any, and all, persons responsible for his death."

Regina didn’t say anything else. Areenians were warlike by nature, and blood feuds raced in their veins like passion. If it was war that the Dark One wanted, it’s what he was going to get in spades.

~*~

Killian regained consciousness to a rushing sound in his ears and a splitting headache. It took him a few moments to orientate himself and realize that the rushing was blood streaming down his face. He had a scalp wound and it was bleeding like a bitch.

Shaking his head to try to restore his normal vision, he looked over at Will who was still out. Will had a large gash across his forehead, and his left arm was at an alarming angle.

"Will? Come on, mate...stop sleeping, ya lazy wench."

"I hate you..." Will slurred.

Killian just smiled at his friend’s voice, but the slurring of his speech worried him.

Looking over his shoulder, he saw Smee. He had taken a piece of shrapnel in the chest. Reaching over in pain, Killian closed his eyes. Leaving the flight deck, he entered the forward compartment. Some of his team were already waking and helping others.

"Gus, what’s the situation?"

The tall man looked at Killian with bloodshot eyes, and just shook his head. "Ten dead and six wounded."

"Make that eleven. Smee didn’t make it. Take Jefferson to get the wounded out and collect all ordinance."

"Aye, Commander." Out of a crew of twenty-seven, he had eleven dead and seven wounded counting Will. That left only nine men able to fight, including himself, and Killian couldn’t move his right arm without almost passing out from the pain. He still had double vision and a rushing sensation in his ears that wouldn’t stop.

They set up a defensive perimeter, but they needed to move away from the wreckage. It would be the first place the Legion would come. Killian had one of the men strap his right arm in a sling, and then did some reconnaissance to surrounding grounds, trying to find a defensible area. They collected water, supplies, additional live rounds and laser rifles. The area was a dense forest with minimum visibility - hardly an ideal area to defend.
Killian returned to camp, and sat next to Will who was sweating. The bone in his arm wasn’t just broken, it was a compound fracture that poked through the skin. They had covered it as best they could, but Will needed medical attention soon, as did his other men.

"I found a defensible cave," Killian told him, “but it is five clicks to the north. There is no way to move all of you at once, and I’ll not leave any behind. Three of you won’t make the move."

"Leave us and go," Will said, hoping his voice sounded strong and brave, but it sounded more dejected than anything.

Killian took a drink of water, and tried to ignore his increasing headache. "Shut up Will, or I’ll beat you bloody myself."

"Killian, save those that can be saved." Will was having a hard time breathing. He didn’t want to mention the rib that seemed determined to puncture his lung, so he remained silent. "Enchanted won’t be able to punch it even in slip stream under eighteen to twenty hours max." “It will take Enchanted eighteen to twenty hours, max, to get here, even in a slip stream.”

"She’ll be here."

"I know." Will breathed in a hushing breath. "Look, if I don’t..."

Killian just swore and interrupted him. "Bloody hell, Will. I told you to cut out the dying shit!"

Will finally held his tongue. Killian didn’t look that great either. He was better than most, but even Will in his state could see that the man had a concussion, and his right shoulder was fucked.

"So this 'love' thing. Does it really feel that terrible?" Will asked hopefully.

Killian closed his eyes and put his head back. He was on sentry duty in an hour. Letting himself think of Emma, he softly answered Will, "It's...I don’t know. Confusing. But it makes me care about things, about her...and about making it home."

Will was silent for a moment, thoughtful. "That must be nice. I can’t remember the last time I cared about anything, or even home."

Killian just passed the water to his friend, but Will didn’t take it. He was unconscious again.

"Commander, we’ve got movement coming from the North," August told him a half hour later.

"Full spread. Weapons on kill. I’ll circle to the left, you cover the right. Leave three to protect the wounded."

Killian moved as fast and as quietly as he could through the brush, but his arm was hampering him. Pausing and listening, he heard the movement again. It was in front of him and to the right. Anticipating the position of the intruder by dead reckoning, he aimed and waited for the next movement.

When the movement came, it wasn’t where he expected it to be. It was directly behind him. Swinging quickly, his gun went to the forehead of his attacker, as was hers to his.

"God help me, Killian...if you shoot me, I won't ever sleep with you again! And you can forget about anything else!"
"Emma." Killian slumped back and dropped his arm.

"Miss me?"

Killian's only response was to curse.

~*~

Emma scanned the wounded and paid special attention to Will. She had brought as many supplies as she could carry from her own ship.

"I sent a communication to Enchanted," she told Killian as she ran a medical scanner over Will, gazing at him in concern. "Internal bleeding. Compound fracture, concussion, fractured rib, and a punctured lung."

Killian looked up from where he was digging in her pack. "It was you that took out the Legion cruiser?"

"Yeah...abandoned partner to the rescue," Emma said dryly.

"I thought I told you to stay put."

"You know, could you be just a little more ungrateful, or more of an asshole? I didn’t like you out here alone getting into trouble. You do that, you know."

"I get..." Killian just closed his mouth.

"I found the Apollo. She went down hard. I spent a little time wiping away your tracks and building a false trail. They'll circle back around soon when the false trail ends." Emma leaned in and kissed Will on his forehead. "I’m sorry I didn’t get here before you took so much damage. For a second there, I thought you were starting a suicide run."

"Shocking how it can look in a battle." Killian said dryly, scratch the side of his head in nervousness.

"Hmm..." Emma ran her scanner over him. "Your right shoulder is dislocated. Your thick head took a bad bump, and that scalp laceration needs to be closed."

"I’m fine."

Emma just looked at him with disbelief and concern. "Either way, I can’t fix you right now. We need to move to a better location."

"I know, but there is no moving some of them, not the distance we need to go."

"I’ve got a cave..."

"Five clicks to the north. Aye, spotted it myself."

"That’s where I set down. It’s got a clean water supply as well."

Killian looked at her, sitting down hard. He was tired. "You might notice it's too far for us to travel and transport everyone."

"No, it’s not. I’ll open a distortion field. It will be as simple as taking a few steps."
Killian looked at her, not sure he was understanding what she was saying. "The thing that Regina was doing?"

"Yeah. I can do it," she said with casual shrug of one shoulder.

Killian took in what she was saying. "Then why the bloody hell didn’t you open one when we were trapped on the *Olympus* freezing our arse’s off?"

Emma just scowled at him. "If you remember, I was first half frozen and my brain doesn’t work in the cold. I was also without air."

Killian conceded the point, but just barely. It wasn’t a good idea to give Emma too much room. She was able to squirm out of a lot.

"Okay, whatever. Just open this stupid thing and let’s get everyone undercover."

They quickly fixed everything for transport including the wounded. Emma would have to make two trips. She opened the first field and most of the wounded were taken through. Going back, they collected the last of the supplies and weapons, along with the remaining wounded.

Moving inside the cave, Emma tossed August some emitters.

"Set these up around the opening to the cave - both sides. They’re a security field. I use them when I camp on planets with large wildlife. It keeps you from being eaten while you’re sleeping."

August smiled at her. "Yes, Princess." Killian just growled at Emma’s latest conquest.

"Neat little thing those emitters, Emma. They should keep the Legions out."

Emma looked down at the now awake Will. "They will, but it’s false hope. They might not be able to enter and kill us, but they can just target this hillside and bring the mountain down on us in a rush of stone."

Will looked up at the ceiling of the cavern. She was right. The shield kept their area safe from invasion, but not from a cave-in.

"Great. So, what do you suggest, Princess?" Will asked, ignoring Killian who was looking paler as every moment passed.

"That we go out and hunt them down before they hunt us. You Areenians know how to hunt, don’t you?" Emma teased.

"Aye, that we do."

"Good. But first I need to do some repairs on the Commander. That shoulder needs to be reset."

Emma reached down and kissed Will gently on the lips. "Don’t go anywhere, sweetie, and ignore the Bellowing Bitching Bear."

Emma went over to a resting Killian who had silently watched her interact with Will. He was quiet. The pain was starting to take its toll, but his vision had finally cleared. Now he was only seeing doubles and not sets of doubles.

"Will?"

Emma kneeled beside him. "He needs more medical care than I can give him. I stabilized his arm,
and sealed the gash on his head, but the internal bleeding is going to take Graham’s special touch."

"Did you give him something for the pain?"

"Yeah. But my stuff and yours is dwindling fast." Emma took his head and looked at the scalp wound. "This isn’t too bad. Scalp wounds bleed like a bitch, but it’s not serious."

She quickly cleaned and sealed it to keep infection and dirt out. Graham would need to finish it later.

"Emma."

"Killian?"

Killian said softly, "I’m glad you’re here."

She looked down at him with a softness entering her eyes as she searched his face for humor or sarcasm. Leaning down, she kissed him lightly on the lips, avoiding his tongue. They needed to finish this first.

"You ready to set your shoulder?"

Killian groaned. "Do I have a choice?" She just shook her head slowly. "Then do it."

Pushing his shoulder firmly against a wall, she added her weight to the front of his shoulder and pushed hard. Killian shouted a nice plethora of obscenities that had Will chuckling. Emma felt the shoulder move back in place.

"It’s going to continue to hurt like a bitch, but you should be able to use it now. When you don’t need it, I want you to rest it in a sling." Emma instructed as she quickly immobilized his arm in a sling.

"Take it off me. I need the arm until we can be rescued," Killian complained.

Emma took his face in her hands and kissed him. "You scared me, Commander. For a moment, back there, I was afraid you were going to be gone for all time, heading for that damn cruiser."

Killian started to say something smart mouthed, but stopped. His eyes met hers, and suddenly all those off-handed remarks were gone - meaningless under the power of her regard.

Killian couldn’t break her stare. She pulled him close and as each part of her touched him, the heat spread and created a cascade effect he could feel everywhere. Killian felt the creeping stain of red moving up his neck as his body felt like it was steaming. Neither of them could control the desire. His ever-present erection was painful against the restrictive cloth. A kind of madness overtook them, and there was no concept of prudence.

She placed a hand on either side of his face and turned his head so her lips had access to his. Killian relaxed and let her have the lead, refusing to even pretend to resist as she deepened the kiss. Her tongue slid into his mouth, and he felt another wave of desire rush from their mouths, down his neck and settling into the most appropriate places on his body.

Killian broke the kiss and moved his head to her neck. They were both panting now and all he could think of was that there was nothing to stop them. He couldn’t imagine what their combined body temperature was at that moment, but it had to be somewhere between hell and a nuclear meltdown.
"You know, there are wounded people watching you two. Think you could wait until you’re alone? Not that I mind watching because watching is fine with me, but..."

"Shut up, Will," Killian said in a husky voice.

Emma laughed softly against Killian's neck as she heard Will’s singsong voice bitching in the background.

"Next time, I get the girl. Does Will ever get the girl, all soft and concerned, kissing him, sleeping with him? No! No, I say! All Will gets is some quick fuck in a back room and a nasty gash about the head."

They purposely ignored him as he continued to bitch.

~*~

Mary Margaret watched him quietly for a moment. He was alone in the forward observation deck watching the colorful array of the slip stream rushing by. Statues had more life to them. They spoke of living and hope, time trapped in a moment. But David was just silent and cold.

"How much longer until we're there?"

"Six more hours."

"You haven’t slept." Mary Margaret moved towards him and handed him a cup of coffee. "Drink this. You look cold."

David took the drink and sipped it without looking at her. Staring outside, he closed his eyes and tried to reach his brother, to establish any contact to tell him that they were coming, something they hadn’t really tested before.

"I’m fine," he said in quiet response.

She shouldn't have come. Mary Margaret sighed to herself. It was obvious that he was avoiding her, avoiding any contact with her that was too close, and therefore unsafe.

"What’s the sigh for?" he asked softly.

"You. Me. I don’t know..." Mary Margaret moved to stand next to him, careful not to touch him or demand anything. "At times I trust no one but you, and other times I wonder why? You’re nothing but a stranger to me."

David nodding in agreement.

"I don’t know about your past, hardly make a mark on your present, and the future is very doubtful," she continued.

"Lady Mary Margaret," David looked at her, and saw her frown at that. "Mary Margaret...I’m sorry. This is not the best of times, and I know that I’m sending you mixed messages. Believe me when I say that that was never my intention."

"It's fine." She knew a brush off when it came. It wasn’t hard to recognize that he didn’t want her.

"I’m not explaining myself."

"No, I think I'm the one not explaining myself."
She reached for his face, and David couldn’t stop his eyes from closing reflexively. He wanted her badly, but he couldn't act on it. He wouldn't. It scared him too much that he would lose himself in her - not just physically, but emotionally.

There was a foreign feeling of desire building in him. It tingled at the back of his neck and caused his stomach to flutter. David opened his eyes in confusion and Mary Margaret's soft green eyes had turned stormy. Oh Gods, he needed someone to stop him! David helplessly watched his arms move and before he realized what he was doing, he had her face cupped in his hands.

She felt soft and his fingertips moved over her face, feeling her, but they seemed disembodied. He held them away from her skin and looked at them. The sensation of roughness passed over each finger but he couldn’t see anything touching them. Then he looked at Mary Margaret and saw her arm moving. Her own fingers were stroking his face, and David realized he was feeling the sensation of his own skin on his fingertips.

This can't be.

"Close your eyes, David, and just let it happen."

"I can’t." David moved away from her, and left the room.

Mary Margaret watched him go, and rubbed her arms as if she were chilled.

~*~

Emma moved swiftly through the trees, then paused to listen. They’d been on her for the last six clicks or so. Pausing and changing direction, she waited for them to catch up. Moving with intent and purpose, she left the trail and moved on, keeping them just behind her. Ducking under an overhang, she straightened on the other side when an arm wrapped around her midriff and pulled her back. Killian. It wasn’t hard to know him anywhere. To know his body against hers.

"This is a stupid plan," he whispered. Emma just rolled her eyes. His favorite thing, dissing her plans. "How many?" he asked.

"Six, maybe seven, coming fast on my tail."

They moved undercover, and Killian made a gesture in the dark that his team read. In silence, they waited to spring the trap. The small group of Legion troops came under the overhang and spread out, looking for her lost trail. And within moments, they were taken out by Killian and the others.

"Gus, toss them with the others. Make sure they're dead."

"Aye, Commander," August answered with weary smile.

Emma stretched catlike, and smiled at Killian. "I'll be back soon."

Killian hooked her around the waist again and stopped her from leaving. "Where are you going?"

"To round us up some more Legions."

Killian looked at his men and gestured for them to search the area. Emma had run through the wooded area for almost a mile, and she wasn’t even breathing hard. Every time she went out and lured another small group of Legions into their ambush she was taking a chance. But she was the only one without an injury and she was fleet of foot. They had already taken out three patrols, and Killian was worried that she was becoming too self-assured.
"Killian, there were six active patrols. We took out three. Three more, and then we can rest."

"A battle cruiser holds a full complement of foot soldiers, Emma. We take out a few men here and there, they send more."

"If they have them. I left their last battle cruiser severely damaged. You took out two battalions of fighters before going down. Their operating systems must be totally trashed, and with full repair teams. What soldiers they have left were sent down to check for survivors. A few hostages would be welcomed when Enchanted arrives in the next six hours or so," Emma reasoned.

Killian held her arm firmly. "You’re not listening to me. Every time you do this, you increase your chances of making a mistake. They carry thousands of troops on the cruiser. We’re taking them out only six at a time."

"I know. I’ll go get us some more." Emma broke free and suddenly was gone. Killian swore under his breath and kicked at a large rock near him. Normally, his men would have hunted, but they couldn’t leave their wounded unguarded. Too many of them had taken injuries. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Emma, he did. He trusted her to get her ass in trouble.

Emma hooked a new search party. This one tracked her for over half an hour before she turned them towards Killian and the others. It felt wrong. This one anticipated her moves and followed too closely. She altered course again to add a sense of random fleeing to her pattern. Pausing in one place she felt a presence behind her. Moving fast through the brush, she didn’t even falter or pause. Stopping to look behind her would be a mistake. Tearing through the underbrush, she went under the overhang. Killian’s arm came out and pulled her up into his hidden place.

"What is it?"

Emma placed a finger on his mouth to silence him. The hunter was too close. Killian stilled and waited, cocking his head to the side as he listened. One lone hunter who had pulled away from his team. He was able to track and keep up with Emma without her pausing to let her pursuer catch up.

He was the real thing. A real hunter.

The man entered the area with caution, lifting his head as if he were smelling her scent. He turned towards their hidden place, but before he could find them Killian was on him. Emma for once stayed out of the way, but she drew her gun and was targeting Killian’s opponent trying to keep Killian out of her sights.

Finally subduing the man, Killian was breathing hard, and his arm hurt even more. Breathing in deep gasps, he felt like vomiting. Looking down at the tattoos on the man’s arm and taking in his physical appearance, Killian let up a little.

"Killian," a gruff voice greeted.

"Rafe," Killian acknowledged. The two men stared at each other for a long beat. "Your parents?"

"They are well."

"Good." Killian broke the man’s neck. Rising from the body, he wiped the sweat from his forehead. He gestured for August to remove the man as Emma came to stand next to him.

"That’s enough for tonight. The rest of his party will be here soon," Killian instructed, suddenly feeling exhausted.
"We can take care of it, Commander," August offered and Killian nodded tiredly.

"Last prey. Finish them, Gus, and then spread out in sentry. Rotating shifts, every two hours."
Killian’s headache was coming back and he rubbed his forehead.

August looked at Killian and frowned. "I’ll take first rotation with half the men. You should rest, Killian. I’ll wake you in three."

Killian nodded. "Three. No later."

"Aye, Commander." Killian grabbed Emma’s hand and dragged her with him. August nodded to her with a smile, "Princess." And then he melted into the darkness.

Emma kept looking back as Killian pulled her with him towards the cave.

"You knew him?" she asked about the man that Killian killed.

"Yes."

Emma frowned at his quick response, and the lack of more information. "He was good. Much better than the others."

Killian just nodded. "He would be. He was my cousin."

Emma went quiet and followed him the rest of the way to the cave. His cousin. His people were enslaved by the Dark One and forced to serve in the Dark One’s military. Emma wondered how many Areenians had died in battle the day before.

When they came to the cave, Killian motioned for the guard inside to lower the force field. Emma came up behind him and wrapped an arm around his waist resting her head against his back.

As soon as they entered the cave, Emma went to check on Will and the others. Two more had died, and Will was now the one in the most critical condition. Emma didn’t like his color, and he was covered in sweat. His breathing was raspy and coming in pants.

"Will?" she said softly.

He opened his eyes, and tried to smile at her. For the first time since she met him he didn’t have a twinkle of humor in his eyes. "How did the hunt go?"

"It went." Emma looked at his arm and winced. Giving him another injection for pain, she watched Killian talking to a guard. "He had to kill his cousin."

Will just closed his eyes, and softly asked, "Which one?"

"One called Rafe. He was good."

"He was. He was a littermate," Will said with a thickening in his voice.

"Littermate?"

"We're raised and trained with our cousins, siblings, and allied families in groups of common age. Rafe was born a year before Liam, and Liam was bonded to my sister, Penelope."

“Liam?” Emma asked with confusion in her eyes.
“Killian’s brother,” Will said simply.

“But I thought David…”

“It’s a long story.” Will cut her off. "Princess," he said, needing to lighten the mood, “did you decide that the Big Brooding One is too boorish and thus your place is with me?” asked, his voice low and dry.

"Absolutely. I was just using him to make you jealous."

"It worked," Will said with a quick laugh, and then he coughed. "I want to try this 'love' thing. I've always been a sucker for pain."

*Love thing*, Emma thought as she brushed the hair from Will’s forehead and watched as he drifted to sleep aided by the injection she’d given him. Looking up worriedly, she met Killian’s eyes from where he stood over them, watching his best friend.

"Two others died?" Killian said sorrowfully.

Emma nodded. That made a total of thirteen.

"Killian, let me take Will on my ship to the *Enchanted*."

"I can’t. *Enchanted* is in slip stream. There is no way for you to rendezvous with her until she leaves it, and then she’ll have that Legion cruiser to worry about. While engaged in battle, her shields will be at maximum, and you won’t be able to dock. You’d be a target."

"My Bug can transverse shields."

Killian reached down and helped her up from where she was kneeling next to Will. Taking her to a dark corner he had set up for sleep, he sat down and took off his boots. Emma joined him and removed her own, sliding beneath the warming cloth next to him.

"How? How can your ship do that?" he asked.

"Her reflective shielding is reflective because it harmonically modulates. It reads the shield harmonic and mimics it. That's part of its invisibility."

Killian was thoughtful, but he couldn’t see sending her up there in the middle of a battle. "And your torpedoes? They penetrated the Legion ship’s shields with no problem."

"They are the same technology. Everything in this universe emits a harmonic, a variance. All the basic technology stems from it, from scans to shields. The trick to overcome is letting your weapon or whatever be the mirror image, the exact replica, then it can’t distinguish between itself and you."

Killian yawned and held her close, closing his eyes. "Someday when we have time, you’ll have to show Will and me your systems."

Emma looked up at his tired face as he slipped into sleep. Him and Will. How easily he refused to let Will go - just as easily as he had broken his cousin’s neck. Areenians were a confusing people.

~*~
"Welcome to the Rebellion."

Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday Everyone! Hope all is good for you all.

Thanks for your constant support of this fic. I know its not to everyone's liking so those that take a chance on it, and then love it, makes it all the more special

Ultraluckycat, I'm sure this wouldn't have turned out as well as it has without your assistance and I constantly thank my lucky stars that the connection was made by our mutual friend.

I'm away on vacation next week but I will endeavor to make sure the next chapters are queued and, wifi connections willing, I should be able to post.

And so onto the next chapter ...

Chapter 14 - “Welcome to the Rebellion”

"Commander."

Killian slowly woke up to the shaking of his shoulder and August calling to him. "Commander, *Enchanted* has broken slipstream."

Killian sat up and looked beside him. Emma was gone. "How long...?"

"The princess said they just arrived," August answered.

Killian snarled. "How long was I asleep?"

"Six hours, Sir."

"I told you to wake me in three."

"I know, Sir. I tried. The princess said to let you sleep, and..."

Killian got up and glared at the man for his increasing loyalty to the *Princess* and his insubordination. Under his breath, he breathed his anger in a mantra of 'the Princess, the Princess, and the Princess'. He went to find the woman herself.

It wasn’t hard. She was standing just outside the cave giving orders. She looked every inch a warrior, not in the least a princess. Maybe a warrior princess. A swan was the last thing he would think was fierce, but knew the swan was the emblem of her family, her royalty, for a reason.

"Princess Swan," he barked out.

She looked at him as she sent another guard off. "You look better," she said, completely ignoring the irritation in his voice and his hard eyes.
"You look like you need a beating," Killian said easily with a smirk as he moved closer to her, his anger at her almost forgotten as soon as he laid eyes on her.

"Don’t be that way, and don’t blame August. He tried to wake you, he really did. But you just turned over and ignored him. I finally got up and told him to let you sleep. You obviously needed it."

"Emma..."

"The *Enchanted* has entered the system."

"Are you in contact with them?"

"No, but I left my long range sensors on in my ship, and they alerted me when *Enchanted* came out of the stream."

Killian saw his men rushing around. "What are you doing?"

"I’m getting ready to take off to rejoin the *Enchanted*."

"Bloody hell, Emma. The hell you are!"

Emma just took his face in her hands. "Let me take Will. He won’t survive much longer without medical treatment. You can hold the cave with your men until I can tell David where you are."

"Emma, we talked about this."

"Then you take my ship." Emma looked at him. "Take my ship, and take Will."

Killian shook his head no. "I’m not leaving you here. None of you."

Emma shook her head. "I can’t take any more. No more death, Killian. You made the decision to fight, and you killed your cousin. Now make the decision to live and save Will’s life."

"Emma..."

"Take my ship and go!"

Killian looked at her darkly and in anger, then he turned and went back to the cave. They loaded Will in Emma’s ship as carefully as possible. Once Killian was in the pilot seat, Emma climbed the ladder to the cockpit.

"She has about half her torpedo complement left. The shield generator took some damage, but it’s still working. Don’t overcompensate to the right. I took a hit to the left ballast struts, so she’s pulling. Just let her lean a little, her generative power is at maximum. Push hard and lay in steady trim, she’ll get you home in no time."

Killian looked at all the control panels as Emma pointed them out. He had figured most of them out the last time he piloted her ship. Looking at her, they shared a long silent stare.

"Emma..."

She didn’t give him a chance to finish what he wanted to say, dropping quickly from the ship and disappearing into the brush.

August climbed up to help him fasten the hatch.
"Gus..."

"I’ll watch over her,” August anticipated what his commander was going to say. “She’ll be okay. Just get Will home." Killian nodded, and looked at his Lieutenant. "I’ll be back."

The man dropped from the ship and backed off as Killian began lift off. The last thing he saw before leaving the surface was Emma high on a hill watching him, her hair whipping wildly around her in the turbulence made by the ship, and then she was gone.

~*~

David rushed onto the Bridge and took his command chair. Regina joined him at the science station. They were on final countdown to exit the slip stream.

"Mark, in four, three, two, one..."

David moved his chair as the helmsman counted off their jump. "Shields to maximum. What are we looking at, Regina?"

"One large Legion cruiser, and lots of...oh damn!"

"Full view screen." David slowly stood from his chair as the screen filled with debris. The Legion cruiser was still operational, but it had sustained heavy damage with fires still burning. Six of its support freighters were still with it, but they too had suffered damage. It was a total debris field. A fleet of Legion battleships had been laid to waste.

"Captain, I am counting three Legion cruisers gone, seven support ships and smaller debris from what looks like two battalions of fighter craft wasting in the field."

David just whistled under his breath. "I hate it when Killian gets pissed."

Archie looked up from his sensors. "Captain, the cruiser is coming around. They are hailing us."

"Open a channel."

"This is the Legion Cruiser, _Sihvaka_. By command of the Royal Emperor, I am ordering you to power down your weapons and prepare to be boarded."

David stood and moved forward. "This is a protected ship of the Eminent. By what command do you think to board my ship?"

"By the order of Genetic testing and purity. All your domain and hatches are to be scanned. You will prepare to be boarded, or we will be forced to use harsh means."

"No one boards my ship."

"This is an act of treason against the Legion Federation. You are encroaching on Legion space without authorization."

"We hold license to salvage, and this system contracted a salvage. We are in keeping with the rules and stipulations of contract that gives us the right to enter this space. By what right do you have to ambush and down one of my salvage ships?"

"You will stand down and prepare to be boarded."

"The hell I will!" David took a stronger stance. "Weapons, full spread torpedoes. Target the main
cruiser, and fire at will!"

"Aye, Captain." David watched as the view screen closed on the Fleet Commander’s face and reverted to the star field.

"Running speed, Archie. Bring her about and buddy us up against the Nemo class ketch. She’s shimming and her systems are down. We’ll use her as cover. All small craft fighters to the bays...prepare for take-off and engagement."

Regina smiled. "Fighters coming in, two battalions."

"About time. Time to fight. All pilots to small fighters. Order is to deploy at will. Order full gunnery to battlements, and arm the forward photon array. I’ll not be happy gentlemen, until I can have a cruiser for lunch."

"David, I have found the wreckage on the surface. I’ve got Legion troops flooding the area looking for survivors." Regina said quietly.

David shut his eyes for a moment searching for his brother. Smiling to himself, he sat back in his chair. "Killian is on his way up. I can feel him."

"I don’t have anything on the sensors," Regina denied, her brows furrowing in puzzlement.

“Leroy, full view and bring us about. If we can’t see him on sensors that can only mean one thing...Emma’s ship.” David watched the battle as his smaller fighter planes engaged the Legion fighters. "Let's take out the big cruiser. Archie, line us up for a scrapping run, pattern delta omega charley."

"Aye, Cap."

"Cap, we’re being hailed," Leroy said.

"The battle cruiser?"

"No sir, another craft coming fast off our portside."

Killian. "Open a channel."

"Enchanted, this is the Zephyr Bug requesting permission to dock." David smiled at his brother’s voice.

"Sorry, brother. Can’t lower the shields. Take a flanking position to our wake, and we’ll pick you up after we finish these few ships."

"The Zephyr can transverse the shields," Killian informed him.

David turned in his seat and looked at Regina, his eyebrow lifting. Gaian technology was still a mystery. Regina just shrugged.

"Then get your ass on board!"

"Alert medical, I’m coming in hot, and I need full assistance. Will is threatening to meet us in Valhalla. He’s been chatting up a Valkyrie since I left planetside trying to get her to take her clothes off."

"Understood." David hailed Sickbay. "Graham..."
"I heard. I’m on my way!"

~*~

Killian was out of the ship in no time flat, shouting for a raised platform. He sighed his relief when Graham and his medical team came onto the flight deck.

"Killian! You look like shit!"

"That’s only because you haven’t seen Will yet." Killian jumped down and allowed Graham and his people to get to Will. "He has a compound fracture, concussion, and internal bleeding," Killian told Graham, watching the crew carefully to make sure they didn’t make things worse.

Graham scanned Will and nodded. He could feel it, and he could feel Will’s life slipping away.

"We need to move him now." Graham grabbed an end of the stretcher. "Killian, help us."

They rushed Will to the medical bay, where Graham ran another scan on him. Sensing Killian’s move to leave, Graham told him to stay put.

"Don’t even think about it. I don’t have time to squabble with you, but you’re not leaving until I can look at you," Graham instructed as he prepped the area for the medical procedures Will needed.

"There’s a fight going on, Graham," Killian returned sternly.

"There’s a fight going on in here. Take a damn seat, and that is an order, Commander." Graham nodded at his assistant to scan and take care of Killian.

Looking at another assistant, Graham ordered. "Prep him for surgery. The arm will have to wait. Start full IV fluids, and increase his pain medication." Graham turned to look at Killian, gesturing his assistant away so he could finish.

"How’s he going to be?" Killian couldn’t hide the concern in his voice, and he didn’t need to.

"It doesn’t look good, but Will is tough. He’s only slept with half the despicable species in this universe. He’s not ready to go," Graham joked.

"I need to go, Graham." Killian watched in surprise as a silent Ruby entered the room carrying a tray and supplies for Graham.

"In a moment. Your shoulder was dislocated." Ruby passed Graham the instruments to repair the wound on Killian’s head.

"Emma fixed it." Graham just made a humming noise under his breath. "It hurt like a bitch."

Ruby looked at Killian and quietly asked, "Is Emma alright?" Killian turned to look at the young woman, and she stepped back in fear. His blue eyes were dark, violent, and angry.

Graham fixed the scalp wound and quickly scanned Killian for a concussion. "Was it Emma that cleaned and sealed this wound?"

"Yeah. She was pretty adamant, unrelenting and basically a royal pain in my arse."

"She a helpful little wench, that’s for sure. You’re a lucky man."
Killian didn’t comment. "Graham, I left her down there. I need to go."

"How many fingers are you seeing?"

"Four."

"Killian, there were only two."

Killian held up his hand, one finger in particular. "How many fingers do you see?"

Graham finished the procedure and stepped back. "Go."

By the time Killian entered the Bridge, the battle was underway. The front view screen held witness to a support ship taking a full hit and exploding under the impact.

David just nodded to his brother as he came to stand next to his chair."

"Systems report." David asked one of his men moving in his chair.

"Weapons control sustained a hit in the last run, Cap, and front lasers are offline."

"Get them back up. Switch to photon torpedoes, and tell gunnery to charge up all phaser banks. We’ll go to blasters if we have to."

"Cap, we have a breach in deck five, subsection six. The deck has been cleared, but power couldn’t be rerouted."

"Understood. Do what you can."

Regina nodded at Killian. "David, there is fighting on the surface. It looks like the Legion troops are pushing forward."

David looked at Killian and frowned. His brother’s jaw was clenched so hard it looked like it was going to break. David worked to send support to their people on the planet.

"Inform Gold leader to break off from attack and divert to planetside. I want our people to have some backup. We’ll need full ground cover. Alert med-evac teams to the landing bay, prepared for dust off. Have the Hermes in slip ready when we have a break in the fighting. Launch at first opportunity."

"Aye, Cap."

"David," Killian said with more than a request in his voice. David looked at his brother and nodded. Killian was off the Bridge without another moment passing.

A flashing red light on Regina’s console made her swear. “Damnit,” she hissed. “I have a possible breach on sector nine’s hull panel,” she told David, her eyes swinging to the corridor that led to that sector.

“Repair crews are drowning,” David acknowledged.

“I’ll see to it,” Regina offered, standing from her station and motioning for her second to take over.

“See to it quickly,” David ordered. “I need you on the Bridge.”

“Aye, Captain,” she smirked as she left the Bridge.
Robin found Regina struggling with a panel that had blown loose after the hull had taken a hit.

“Here, let me help,” he smiled as he moved closer.

“I don’t need your help,” she shot out, her eyes shooting daggers at him. “Go and find some other person to help.”

“Even an Eminent One needs assistance at some point,” he simply said as he stepped closer and struggled with her to get the panel back and safely secured.

“Can I ask, O Eminent One, what I have done to warrant your dislike?” he asked as they worked.

“I don’t dislike you,” she spat out, and at his hopeful smile, she added. “I don’t even think of you.”

“Oh,” he said, a little crestfallen.

Regina stepped away, frustrated with this man before her. “Why you?” she said with anger lacing her voice.

“Excuse me?”

“Why did my sister choose to spend her last days with you instead of me.”

Now Robin understood. “I’m sorry. I was never privy to Zelena’s inner thoughts. I just know she was desperate to find you.”

Regina paced away from him, her anger at her sister was overflowing, and she struggled to maintain some control, not wanting to cause any more distortion fields, no matter how small. Especially not during a space battle.

“And why did she insist you come with me. I don’t need your assistance; I have plenty here who would lay their lives down for me. I don’t need some macho bodyguard.”

“Is this really the right time to discuss this?” Robin asked, spreading his arms wide.

“Every time I turn around, you’re there,” she argued, moving back to him as they continued to wrestle with the panel.

“It’s a surprisingly small ship,” was his reply.

“Nonsense.” Did he not know how infuriating he was? With a clash, the panel was finally replaced, securing the hull against any further breaches.

“I will ask that you leave me alone,” Regina said with as much dignity as she could while wearing a streak of grease against her cheek.

“And I will honor the task set to me by your sister,” he returned. “Until she releases me from my oath, I will continue to stay exactly where I am.”

“You’re intolerable,” she lashed at him as she stormed off, back to the Bridge.

“And you’re formidable,” he whispered. “But I do love a challenge.”

~*~

~*~
David wasn’t surprised that Killian made quick time back to his ship, but David expected him to join the *Hermes* preparing to go to the surface, not Emma’s ship.

"Captain, the *Bug* has cleared the bay," Leroy informed him.

David’s eyebrow went up. He should have known. Killian would be too impatient to wait for a break in engagement for them to lower shields long enough for *Hermes* to dust off. Emma’s ship could leave whenever it wanted. "Understood. Inform Gold team to follow him down to the planet."

"He’s not heading for the planet, Captain. He is making a run at the Legion Cruiser," Leroy returned with some surprise.

David turned and looked at his console. "Full screen, and get me a connection to the *Bug*.

"Established, Sir."

"Killian, what the hell are you doing?"

Killian’s voice came back sounding distracted. "I’m going to take out the Legion cruiser’s shield generators both aft and port."

"The hell you are, Killian! Pull back!"

"Negative. The *Bug*’s weapons can penetrate the shields." David winced as he noticed Killian barely avoiding a collision. Emma’s ship was taking some direct hits.

“Killian, the princess will not be happy if you wreck her ship,” David said before turning to Regina. "Regina, how are the *Bug*’s shields holding?"

Regina shook her head, "I can’t tell. I’m still unable to scan the ship through its protective shielding, so that can only be good." She turned from her sensors and the control panel at her station to face her Captain, noting his worried look at his crazy brother’s tactics. "David, if what he says is true, then we could follow him in and take out their weapon arrays. It would cause a full breach overload."

David thought about what Regina was suggesting, and nodded.

"Helmsman, follow *Zephyr Bug* in once he takes out the shields." David re-established a connection to Killian. "We’ll follow you in, Killian. But you be careful, or your mother will be having a very bad day."

Killian’s chuckle came over the com. "My mother is bonded to my father - every day is bad for her."

David just laughed as he watched Killian go in. "Order all small crafts away at a safe distance, and sound bracing orders. Helmsman, once we target the weapons array, full engines out of here."

"Aye, Captain," Archie acknowledged.

Leroy targeted the larger support ships approaching to protect the larger cruiser. "Captain, we have..."

"I see them. Full power to our shields, steady as she goes." David watched as Killian went in low and fast taking some hits to his front shield caught in the crossfire of their gunnery cannons. They
were helpless to lay in protective fire with the shields still online.

There was a sudden uproar in the Bridge crew as Killian made his first target. "Captain, he took out the port shield generator and is coming around for the aft one."

"Stay the course, don’t enter into the field until he clears. I don’t want him caught in the wake."

"Captain, our aft shields are down to ten percent."

David swore. Come on, Killian...quit dilly dallying and get that last generator. They were taking increased fire to their portside from the cruiser’s support vessels while they waited for Killian to finish his run.

"Captain..."

"Divert auxiliary power to the port shields. Helmsman, we can’t wait any longer, take us in."

"Aye, Cap."

"Steady as she goes, Archie." David turned in his seat to face Robin, who had been promoted to Killian’s second in command in weapons and security. "Robin, let’s make every shot count. I’m not sure we can make another run."

"Consider it done, Captain. I have the target in sight and targeting is locked."

"David, Killian has taken out the second target, the Legion cruiser’s shields are down and she is defenseless." David just nodded at Regina’s report.

"Take us in, Helm."

They came in fast and low taking hits from the ship’s cannons, but the shields were down and the first spread of torpedoes took out the main weapons array, and on their way out, they took out the rest. Pushing hard, the Enchanted headed away from the Sihvaka.

"Archie?"

"It’s going to be close, Cap. Her main systems just went critical."

"All hands, brace for impact."

Regina strapped herself into her chair and began the countdown, "...five, four, three, two, one..."

The last Legion cruiser of the attack fleet went critical, taking with it most of its support ships that were unable to distance themselves in time. The Enchanted took impact of a full force compression wave, damaging her lower decks, and draining power to essential fields.

David checked his staff, as the flight deck was strangely silent.

"Damage control report. Someone find me the Bug."

David’s command console began lighting up as ship damage reports flooded through. "Put out those fires on decks three through six, and reroute power from the main grid. Helm, what is our situation?"

"We have a full debris field, only one support ship remains and some smaller fighter craft. The remaining ship has sustained heavy damage. She is trying to jump to a slip stream."
"Bring us about. Let's finish the job. Order our fighters to check in and report damages. Tell them to sweep the field and take out the rogue fighter ships."

"Aye, Cap."

David answered a hail to his station.

"David, I’d appreciate if you could re-establish my full systems in Sickbay. I’ve got wounded, and it’s hard to operate by candle light. Romantic as all hell, and I’m sure Will would appreciate the ambiance, but still..."

David looked at his operations officer, who nodded. "Operations is on it now, Graham. We’ll re-establish your systems first." David sighed and then asked quietly. "How is Will?"

"Not too good. Being operated on during a battle is hardly optimum. I’m placing him in regeneration once the surgery is done."

"Casualties?"

"Heavy. Mostly burns and impact concussions. I’ve got thirty dead so far, and reports of missing personnel." Graham paused before continuing. "Lady Mary Margaret was hurt."

David’s hands tightened on his chair. He fought the desire to go to her, but remained at his station. His duty was clear and personal feelings had no place at this time.

"Assessment?"

"I’ll get back to you on that, when I know," Graham’s voice went soft, "on both Will and Mary Margaret. Sickbay, out."

"Anyone get a fix on the Bug yet?"

Regina shook his head no. "Negative, David. I suspect he headed straight for Zion."

"Someone hail his ass. Tell him if he doesn’t respond, I’ll assign him galley duty for the next month." David smiled to himself when the Bridge crew groaned almost collectively at the thought of being forced to eat Killian’s cooking for a month straight. "Belay that order, the only people who’ll suffer is the crew. Has Hermes left the slip?"

"Aye, Captain. She is thirty minutes from planetside."

"Deploy a full squadron to assist. I want our people back. How many did we lose so far from the Apollo?"

"Commander said thirteen so far." David nodded. There was much needed retribution to be had.

"The Dark One won’t take this very well, David. He’s going to feel this hard," Regina said, a smile tugging on her lips.

"Yeah, I’m really worrying about that. I want him squealing from it, and feeling it long after I’m gone. I want him to feel it so hard, he can’t sit from the soreness. Rat bastard."

"He still has the Dagr’du," Regina reminded him. The Dark One was still in control as long as he held the power to destroy worlds.

"Then by God, we’ll take it back! The price of freedom from oppression comes with a cost, but I’ll
go to bloody hell and back before I live on my knees!" Time for caution had ended. "I don’t want a
single Legion soldier left standing on that planet." David stood up from his command chair. "Who
the hell is that ship out there? Ours or theirs? Find out, and if it’s theirs, I want them taken care of!"

The crew was silent, but none protested. Many shared looks of pride and resolve. They had lost too
much. The Dark One took, and then he took more. He held the universe hostage and under his
thumb, and only an idiot didn’t realize that once the Dark One achieved his idea of ‘genetic
perfection’, their entire universe would be scrubbed of the ‘imperfect’ and the Dark One’s clones
would replace them all.

"Welcome to the rebellion, gentlemen. Now, someone get us all some coffee. We’ve got work to
do." David turned in his chair. "Regina, your sisters are in Sickbay. Mary Margaret took a hit. You
might want to..."

Regina quickly stood. She signed over her station to another and left the Bridge to go check on her
charges in Sickbay.

~*~

Killian landed the Bug close to the cave again. Moving slowly and cautiously, he approached the
cavern. There was a full squad of Legion fighters engaged with Killian’s men in front of the cave.
They held them back a good three hundred meters from the entrance.

Moving to circle behind the Legions, Killian saw some of their small fighter craft coming in for a
strafing run. Holding back, he waited until they finished and went to come back around.

Moving in closer, Killian carefully loaded an iso-linear tracking device, and tagged a wounded
Legion fighter left at the fringes.

"Gold Leader, this is ground, do you read?"

"We read you, Commander."

"I’ve tagged the Legions. Pick up your target to narrow band frequency two-two-six mark three, do
you copy?"

"Copy, Commander. I have echo and lock on low band, two-two-six mark three. We are coming
in."

Killian quickly vacated the area, and moved off to higher ground. Moving parallel to his engaged
men, he was swept off his feet by an arm to his neck.

Barely able to breath or talk, Killian recognized the arm. August.

"Bloody hell, Gus. I need to breathe."

The man released him. "Sorry Sir, I thought you were..."

"I know. What com frequency are you transmitting?"

"Delta band."

"Call the troops back. Gold squadron is coming in for a low fly-by. I tagged the Legions."

August quickly called back their men from their defensive position. He and Killian rushed to return
to the cave as their defensive hold. Killian frowned as he watched their few men returning to the
"Where is she?" Killian asked. He looked at the man, and was suspicious when the large man tried to avoid his eyes. "Gus?"

"Well, um...actually, that is to say...I..." the man faltered, and tried to distract Killian by pointing out the incoming fighters.

Killian was undeterred. "Lieutenant. Where the hell is your Princess?"

The man looked embarrassed. He scratched his neck. "Well...I, it’s like this...I, um..."

"You promised to watch over her!"

"I did. I tried. I mean, I really tried!"

Killian’s eyes narrowed. "What did she do?" The man looked uncomfortable again. "Dammit, Lieutenant, just tell me!"

"I tied her up." August admitted quietly.

The shock was apparent on Killian’s face. "I..." he rubbed his face in wonder, "you...you tied her up?"

"Sir, I didn’t have any option. She was everywhere at once. I couldn’t keep tabs on her, and just as soon as I controlled one situation, she was off doing something else..."

Killian’s hand went over his mouth and he tried to hide his mirth. Clearing his throat, he looked at the man over his hand.

"Let me get this straight. You tied up your Princess?"

"And gagged her." Killian almost lost it. "I had to! She...she’s a menace!"

Killian lost it. Laughing so hard, he almost fell over. Gus didn’t seem to amused. He looked guilty and shamefaced.

"Gagged her? She couldn’t have liked that."

"No, Sir! She was a tad bit miffed at being tied up. I only gagged her later," August said quietly to Killian almost in a conspiratorial voice. "She called me terrible things..."

"I can imagine."

"I don’t even know what some of them are, but I think...they were bad." Killian almost felt bad for his crestfallen officer.

"Don’t worry. I’ll explain them to you later. I’m sure I’ve already heard them all." Killian turned and watched the enclave of Legions being pounded by air support. Hermes was landing not far away. "Relief, ground support has arrived. Let's go untie the Princess."

August looked afraid. "Um...do we have to?"

Killian laughed as the force field in front of the cave came down. He could hardly contain his glee at seeing Emma all tied up and gagged on the palate he shared with her the night before. She saw him immediately and started to struggle. For a moment, Killian entertained the idea of leaving her
tied up, but he finally gave in, wanting to hear her reaction.

"About time! What the hell took you so long? Do you have any idea how I’ve been tied up, gagged, and..."

Killian cut her bonds and chuckled. Emma had been shooting angry glances at the unhappy August. But Killian’s chuckle brought her attention to him.

"You! It was you!"

Killian looked at her in confusion. "What?"

"You ordered August to tie me up!" Killian made a face at her. "It had to be! This totally reeks of you! Gus is a sweet, gentle man. He’d never do such a thing unless he was ordered."

Killian’s voice raised in indignation. "You're putting this on me, love?"

Killian looked at his Lieutenant for help, but the man looked only too happy to let Killian take the blame and quickly went to help Emma up, his puppy-like devotion almost sickening.

Killian watched as Emma and Gus walked off leaving him, all the while Emma patting the handsome man on his back and reassuring him. Killian just growled and followed them outside. Emma was off and running as Killian came to stand next to Gus.

"We’re going to have a little talk about this later," Killian said to his Lieutenant.

Gus just ignored Killian pretending to have no clue what Killian was referring to. Before Killian could make another comment, Emma’s loud, biting, and shrill voice rang out. He hurried to her side.

"My ship! Oh god! What did you do to it?"

It was Killian’s turn to look a little guilty. *Zephyr Bug* had sustained some serious damage. The outer ship showed blackened laser hits. Emma climbed up into the ship and started to do a diagnostic of her systems. The sounds of outrage and accusations only increased.

"I lend you my ship and this is how you take care of it?"

"Hey! I was in the middle of a battle. It’s all superficial!" A piece from the ship fell off almost at his feet. Cursing under his breath, Killian quickly kicked it under the ship and out of sight.

"Superficial? This isn’t superficial! Half the systems are down. How you made it to the surface is a mystery."

Killian had to agree with that. It was touch and go on the way down.

"It can be repaired."

Emma just snorted. "I lend you something, and this is how you take care of it?"

"It mostly needs some cosmetic work..." he smiled his most dazzling smile, hoping to win her over.

"Cosmetic? This is a full repair...and don’t think you’re getting away with it. I..." Another larger piece came off the ship hitting the ground with a loud thump. Emma made a sound of distress, and leaning out of the cockpit to see what the noise was. "What was that?"
Killian just groaned. He knew it. He should have left her tied up and gagged.

~*~

David and Regina entered the capital city of Zion. They left air support and ground troops on the front steps of the Doyrilia Alliance. As they walked the long hall, those serving and waiting in attendance moved out of their way.

Regina was in full Eminent regalia, a long flowing robe of purple, fitted tight at her waist, with the emblem of her office clear for all to see. David walked at her side in full stature covered in battle leather, his face unshaven and harsh, and his scar brilliantly stark against his face.

Regina looked at the barely controlled angry man next to him. "Any word from Killian?"

"Not yet. Hermes just set down, and air support took out most of the Legions."

Regina just nodded, but chose to remain silent. She knew David’s anger wasn’t just about the missing Killian, or the loss of life and the Apollo. It was that this system more than likely had betrayed them for a price; a promise of reward from the Dark One to help set up the ambush. They entered the Great Hall and approached the full Council sitting in wait without an audience.

One man stood as the others remained seated. David took out his gun and shot the man dead, directly in the forehead. The room became silent with only the sound of the laser shot echoing.

"Who is in command?" he demanded.

A man sitting beside the now dead body pointed at the corpse.

David repeated his question. "Who is in command?"

There was continued silence, until finally a man to the back of the room came forward.

"I am the one in charge." The man came to stand at his rightful place at the Council table looking down at his servant who had stood in his place only moments before.

"How much?" The men at the table looked at each other, then at the silent Eminent One. All eyes kept returning to David, who held, undisputedly, the highest amount of power.

"I’m sorry. I’m uncertain what it is you wish to know," the Council Leader said.

"I want to know how much you gained for betraying a contract to an Eminent." David’s voice did not alter, did not rise, but remained cold and deadly. "I want to know what the going price is on betrayal."

The man’s eyes blinked at that. "I assure you that we did not..."

David calmly shot the man to the leader’s left, and then the one to his right. The man trailed off in silence. David continued, now that he had the man’s undivided attention.

"What is the going price on my ship? On my men? On my brother? What price can possibly compare to the death and destruction brought to my people?"

Regina might be the owner of Enchanted, but there was only one Captain, one real owner. That was David.

"My Lord," the man said hesitantly. "What is it that you feel will compensate you for this
situation?"

David just looked at the man with eyes lacking in warmth or compassion. "You would have me name a price for over fifty dead, a lost ship, numerous wounded and in despair, along with untold damages?" David seemed to think of the situation.

"My Lord..."

"First, you will pay the full salvage."

The Council stirred at that first request. "But, my Lord, there was no real salvage."

"I beg to differ." David nodded at one of his men who brought forward a dead Legion corpse and tossed it at the Head of the Council’s feet. The protest was silenced.

"Your other demands?" he asked quietly.

David just sighed and looked down at the floor, and then up again. "Now that just pisses me off! Demands? These are not demands, or even requests! Get this straight. This is an obligation...an obligation to the victor, and a debt you owe my people, and to the people of the universe for siding with the Dark One against all that is humane, holy, and right."

The man just bowed his head, unwilling to anger David any further.

"You will pay full replacement cost of my ship, the Apollo. Compensatory lifetime payment to the families of the dead, who are now without them."

The man nodded. "Anything else, my Lord?"

David walked closer to stand practically nose to nose with the man. "Yes. My brother is one of the missing. Know this - if my brother is found among the dead, there is no world far enough to escape me. I will find you, your people, your children, your spouses, your parents, and your siblings. I will remove from this universe any person who knew or came into contact with you. I will lay waste to your cities and worlds, and I will not stop until you, and all those who knew you, are gone."

The man gulped and slowly backed away. "Compensation will be made, my Lord."

David turned to leave, but quickly looked back. "Tell me. Whatever the Dark One offered you to betray us into an ambush, was it worth it?"

"No, my Lord. It was not," the man said softly.

David walked away, but Regina did not follow. She had remained silent the entire time with her hands clasped before her. Finally, the leader lifted his eyes to make contact with the Eminent One.

"The cost is more than you know. To sleep with a viper, one must be careful not to feel the bite. The Dark One will come to investigate. He has lost a full battle fleet. It will be hard to imagine that one ship such as the Enchanted would be a match for four Legion cruisers with support ships. He will suspect betrayal, and for a race of people who would put a price on others' heads? A race who betrayed once? He will suspect that the viper has swallowed its tail."

Regina left them to their fate.

~*~

David and Regina entered Sickbay. Regina immediately sought out Ruby who was sitting at Mary
Margaret’s bedside. David looked in, but left the family alone.

"Graham."

"David. The planet still exists. I'm surprised."

David just shrugged. "The Dark One will take care of it himself. There need be no more blood on our hands." David rubbed his face in tiredness. "Any word from Killian and Emma?"

"Recovery team has them. Hermes will dock in another ten. I guess there was an incident."

Graham pushed David into a chair and handed him cup of coffee made on a Sickbay burner. It tasted like it too. Burnt.

"An incident?" David took a drink and grimaced feeling the liquid burning a hole in his empty stomach.

"Seems they were uncertain the Bug would make it back. She suffered extreme damage. Emma refused to leave it behind, so both she and Killian are bringing her home. I guess Emma had a lot to say about Killian’s ability to take care of her property."

David nodded and smiled a little. "If she doesn’t make it, we’ll tractor beam it home. I’ll not have us lose that little ship. She is small, but she has power." David looked at Graham, the weight of his command in his eyes. "I owe Emma more than I can ever repay. Had she not followed Killian, and that ship..."

Graham nodded. Without the Bug, they would’ve all been lost. The technology of the Ancients had overwhelmed the Dark One’s fleet, unable to stop her torpedoes from penetrating their shields. Her reflective shields prevented them from getting a targeting lock on her, and all the damage she took was from line of sight hits. It turned the battle, and saved them from total annihilation.

David felt tired, more tired than his thirty-four years. "Will?"

Graham gestured for David to follow him. They walked beyond the beds littered with the wounded, to the more severe patients in another medical treatment room. Will was submerged in a regenerative bath, asleep and connected to life support.

"How long before he’s up causing food poisoning?" David asked wearily.

"A week. The damage was almost too far gone to reverse. Thank god Killian brought him home when he did. We almost lost him."

"Any lasting damage?"

"Bad arm. He’ll feel the cold much like Emma does. It will pain him almost like an arthritis, but the break was bad. Real bad. He’ll have full use, just something to bitch about."

David went to the regenerative tank and placed his hand on the glass separating him and his friend, his brother. Squeezing Graham’s shoulder, he turned to leave.

"David." Graham waited for David to stop. "You did well. It was righteous."

"It was a waste."

David left Graham with Will, and stood in Mary Margaret’s doorway. Regina and Ruby were just leaving.
"How is she?"

Regina, holding Ruby’s hand, smiled slightly. "She is resting comfortably. She took quite a bit of debris. They had to dig her out of a collapsed corridor. Luckily, they did not lose environmental and there was not a hull breach. Others were not so lucky. Graham said she can move back to our quarters maybe tomorrow or the next day."

David nodded.

"I’m going to take Ruby back to her rooms and try to get some rest. I suggest that you do the same."

"I will. In a little while." David entered the room and sat at the bedside, taking her small white hand in his. Shaking his head, he couldn’t say what pained him, maybe everything, maybe the day. But the day was theirs. Small comfort. The Dark One would come.

"She’s right. You should sleep,” Mary Margaret said softly. David looked up from where he was staring at their joined hands.

"I will."

"The battle?"

"Over. We sort of won, or as much as a win can be when you lose life."

Mary Margaret looked at his tired face. "I’m sorry. I was in the galley when the full alert went. I never made it back to my rooms."

David leaned forward and ran her hand across his mouth, and then rested his head against it. Her hand moved and stroked his scar.

"So will I have scars like yours?"

David looked at the small gash on her left brow, and the tiny thin lines marring her skin. They would heal.

"I don’t think so. I think yours will fade."

Mary Margaret just nodded, and her voice hushing to the sounds of sleep falling upon her. "Too bad yours never did..."

David watched her sleep and knew she wasn’t talking about the scar on his face.

~*~

As soon as the Bug was docked, Killian was out of it. Emma had fallen asleep once they were in space so she missed the harrowing ride, which was perhaps for the best.

Reaching into the co-pilot’s seat, he lifted her out and without stopping, cleared the landing bay and ran straight to the lifts. But it wasn’t the best of days since all the lifts were offline, so Killian hoisted Emma over his shoulder and made for an access tube running between decks.

"You’re going to kill us." Emma’s voice was tired.

"Shut up." He slowly climbed down the ladder balancing her not so considerable weight. Nothing. Nothing was going to come between him and their bed.
"Okay, but when you kill me...I’m going to wake up and say, I told you so."

"Emma, I swear..."

"You do little else."

Killian finally made it to their deck and looked at the damage. He couldn’t care less. As long as his bed was intact and he could collapse for a few hours...the hell with the universe.

"Cold," Emma whispered against his neck. She was right. The deck was freezing. Internal environmental controls were gone.

Venting his frustration, Killian was further impeded by their door refusing to open. The lock keypad was another system down. Killian propped Emma up against the wall, and took out his boot knife and jimmed the door open.

Carrying her into their bedroom, he didn’t even bother to see if the door shut behind them. Placing her on the bed, Killian was ready to collapse.

"No," Emma said.

"No what?"

"Bath. I need to feel clean."

"Emma, let’s just sleep for a couple of hours, and then you can take a bath."

Emma just moaned against him. Sighing he went and turned on the shower. The water was cold. Going back into the bedroom, shedding his clothes along the way, he quickly stripped her and carried her to the waiting cold bath. A small part of him, actually, a large part of him was gleefully waiting for her reaction to the water.

The scream was well-deserved and anticipated. Even Killian swore under his breath from the stinging cold.

"Dammit, Killian, you did that on purpose!" Killian grabbed the soap and quickly washed them down.

"I’m not responsible for the damage to the ship, love, but you said you wanted to feel clean, so..."

"Not responsible? Just like you refused to be responsible for Gus tying me up?"

"That was completely his own doing, and I refuse to take the blame."

Emma just leaned against him, and said softly, the lack of sleep and the strain of the past few days taking their toll, "You didn’t reprimand him or anything."

Killian just made a face. Yeah, like he’d do that. He was sorry he hadn’t thought of it himself.

"Come on, Princess. Sleep."

The trip to the bed and into sleep became one large blur as the tiredness hit them hard. Emma burrowed as close as she could with the heating units off, and the room being colder than usual, Killian’s body was the only source of heat.

It was hours later that she woke up burning. It didn't register at first, and in her sleep she tried to
toss off the covers. When it did finally register, she was wide awake.

Killian was running a high fever.

~*_~
Maelstrom

Chapter Notes

Hello there and happy Sunday to everyone.

Just a quick A/N as I'm on vacation but wanted to stick with my update schedule as best I can.

I have five minutes so here it is...

Chapter 15 - Maelstrom

"Sickbay."

"Graham? What are you still doing there?" Emma asked into the com.

"Too many patients to take time off. Emma? Are you sick, hurt?" And before Emma could answer, "Or just wanting to check on Will?"

"Yes...I mean no. Well, yes." Emma swore under her breath. "I want to know about Will, but no, I’m calling about Killian. He’s sick."

"Sick? Just wait. I’ll come to you." Graham signed off and Emma turned back to Killian.

Holding his body close to her, she gently wiped his face with a cool cloth. Even his lips were slightly red, and she couldn’t tell what his temperature was, but to her, it was high.

"Emma?" Graham eased himself between the half-open door, and entered the cold, dark room. He followed Emma’s voice when she called out.

"I don’t know. We took a shower - a cold one - before going to sleep. I remember being cold, and he was the only thing warm in the room. I woke up about ten minutes ago because I felt hot...very hot," she explained in a rushed, panicked voice.

"He’s got a raging infection. I can fix it with antibiotics and give him something to help with the..."
fever," Graham said smoothly, hoping his calm voice would steady her.

"Infection? From what?"

"I don’t know. I thought we treated all his injuries. Let’s take a look and see if we missed anything, and if it isn’t an obvious surface injury..." Graham watched as Emma quickly started searching Killian’s body, her hands gently probing the fevered skin, hardly paying any attention to him. "Then I’ll need him in Sickbay for a full body scan."

Emma was gently moving him around when Graham whistled at her and tossed her one of Killian’s shirts from a nearby chair. Emma looked down and noticed that she had been naked the entire time. Quickly putting on the shirt, she watched Graham turning Killian over while she buttoned it.

It was on his back, low, and near the left kidney. A small injury that looked too small to cause problems, but deep enough. Graham scanned the area.

"There is still a piece of metal embedded in his back. Killian must have pulled out the shrapnel, but missed a piece."

"Should we take him to Sickbay?"

Graham just shook his head no. "I can do it here easily enough. Truth be told, I’d rather have one of my hearts removed before admitting another patient to my Sickbay."

Emma held Killian across her lap while Graham quickly removed the remaining shrapnel and sterilized the wound. Emma’s hand kept slowly stroking his hair as Graham gave Killian his first round of antibiotics.

"He’ll sleep for a good ten to eighteen hours. Call me when he wakes up. He’s confined to bed rest for two days, and longer if his fever remains. I’ll be back in the morning to check on him."

"Thank you, Graham." Emma and Graham pushed Killian on his back and covered him up. "This is all my fault."

"How? Did you put the shrapnel in his back?"

"No, but if I had gotten there sooner, Apollo might not have gone down." Emma covered Killian up, checking the covers and then rechecking again. "I ran a scan on him and I missed it."

Graham remained sitting on the edge of the bed. "Then it must be my fault as well. I ran a scan, too, and didn’t find the injury. But the real culprit here is a certain Commander who could’ve mentioned it."

"He could have. That's true. But I don’t see Killian as the type of man who wants to be babied in Sickbay."

Graham laughed at that. Understatement. "Of course, you’re right." Graham reached over and grabbed Emma’s hand that was stroking Killian’s face, forcing her to look at him. "You going to tell him?"

"Tell him what? That it’s his own fault that he..."

"No. Are you going to tell him how you feel about him?"

Graham was serious, and Emma’s eyes narrowed. "You know too much...Reading me, doctor?"
"Normally, no, but you’re pretty open right now."

Emma just shrugged as her hand went back to soothing Killian. "What good would telling him do? We don’t have a similar concept or word for what I feel for him. And soon it will be over."

"Maybe he has a right to know? Maybe he needs to know."

"Why? So he can be like David? Stuck in a ‘sort of’ marriage with no partner? Or so that when I go...and I will go, he feels my end more than he should?" Emma bent down and kissed his head. "He doesn’t need the extra pain."

Graham just shook his head, and stood up to leave. "Think about it. It’s not just for you, Emma. He might not have a word for it or even understand it, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t feeling it. His world walked away from a lot when they made their primary goal to repopulate their world. But of all the matches I’ve heard of or seen...few were happy. The Areenians are bonded by similar chemistry in their brains. Perhaps there's something wrong with being bonded to someone so similar."

"It seems to have worked for them. They survived...pulled themselves back from the brink of destruction," Emma said as she watched him sleep. "I know they feel things that they have no name for, or even want to name. I’d never fault his loyalty and devotion to David and Will - or even you. All the people on this ship mean so much to him."

"He was a freak on his own world. The only way to make a place in their society was to produce children. It was a status maker. Killian had the added stigma of being unbonded, but Will and David are now equally outcast. Now none of them have mates, and none of them will ever mate with an Areenian again. That time is over." Graham looked at his sleeping friend. "He made the people on this ship his own. It’s all he has...all he’s known for a long time. Half a lifetime is a long time."

Emma just shrugged, a frown between her pretty brows. "It doesn’t make the desire any less. He wants what he could never have, and understands little about what he can."

"Dreams change, Emma. He couldn’t want something else when it was all he knew, all he ever wanted." Graham reached across Killian’s body and framed Emma’s face with his hands and forced her to see him. "Tell him because he needs to hear it, even if it's for only a moment, a day, or even a few months. Tell him."

"He’s been so alone," she said softly, "as have I."

"He needs something to save him when you’re gone. Something that tells him that there's hope, and that for a short time in his life, he had something indescribable...something righteous."

"Promise me something?" Graham just nodded. "When I go...make sure he’s not alone...that he’s okay...for me?"

Graham didn’t know what to say. How could Killian be okay? Graham simply agreed because he had no other option.

Emma smiled slightly and snuggling under the covers with Killian, she whispered her thanks to Graham.

"Goodnight." And Graham watched as she closed her eyes. Taking that as his cue, he stood up and left them to sleep.
Emma listened to the door shut behind Graham, and then rolled over on her back bringing a sleeping Killian with her. He was so tired, and it was as if his entire body was concentrating on nothing but rest. She gently held him while he slept, stroking his back and running her fingers through his hair.

Reaching down, she gently kissed his head, whispering an "I love you," at his sleeping form.

~*~

"Archie, report on the current repairs?"

Archie moved in his chair to face David, and frowned. "It doesn’t look good. With Will down, and almost half of his repair crews still offship serving time for bad behavior... estimation can’t be made."

"Do you need some help?" David turned at the sound of Emma’s voice.

"Emma, how is Killian? I heard..."

"He’s better. Still sleeping." David’s eyes narrowed to slits as Emma crossed to his command chair, watching her carefully in case she felt the need to push a button or something. "What’s the problem?"

"We need to do repairs, not only on Enchanted, but on the recovery craft that engaged in battle, along with almost all of our small fighters." Emma just waited for him to continue. "We can’t run and hide from the Dark One long enough to get repairs underway, we are understaffed - plus Will is out of commission, as is Killian."

Emma nodded. "Will a safe haven help you?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"The Thorns. That got everyone’s attention.

David just laughed, half in amusement, and the other half because the closest thing he would ever have to a sister-in-law was more than likely bat-shit crazy.

"The Thorns? No one goes there. It’s not even mapped by the Dark One or his sensor arrays."

The Thorns - a special space anomaly of spatial rifts, energy fields, and tachion radiation. The area was considered a trap where few were able to navigate; therefore no one went there. The negative energy sinkholes pulled ships into their fields and drained them, thus rendering the ship ensnared and unable to break free.

"I can take you through it. I’ve navigated it many times," Emma said with a cunning grin.

David just stared at the woman. Killian was right. She was incapable of watching over herself, and taking unnecessary risks was almost her mainstay.

"Emma..."

"There is a place in the middle, a haven where we can stay until repairs are made. The trick is to avoid the sinkholes and rifts, and ride the energy and radiation waves." Emma knew they thought she was crazy. "The Dark One will never come there to look for us, and we can take the time to
actually get our systems online."

David thought about it. The Dark One had his arrays everywhere. He would be actively searching for them. They had too many systems down, too many injured crewmen, and no time to repair any of it.

"How often have you been through the Thorns?"

Emma laughed. "My people used it as a training field for flight instruction. I’ve been running it since I was a young adult. It's mapped by my ship. I can lead you in. It's just a maze. In the center is a place that is safe. Rather like the eye of a hurricane."

David thought for a moment. It was insane, but if they could find a place to effect repairs...The Dark One and his people would be searching all the usual places to hide. Cora would help them narrow the field.

"Okay. Let’s do it." David ignored Archie’s look of disbelief. "Do you need to take Helm?"

Emma went to Killian’s security station. "No. I can access the Bug’s navigational computer from here. I’ll tie the information into the Enchanted’s computer, and plot the course. Archie can do the actual journey to the center."

The operations officer watched Emma as she quickly worked. Suddenly his computer and system were alive. The main computer bank was receiving an active download from Emma’s ship’s mainframe. It was sending navigational information at an alarming rate.

"Course is plotted in, David. Any time you’re ready," Emma concluded with a smile.

David looked at Archie and nodded. "Take us in, Archie."

Archie looked uncertain, but he took them to the Thorns gateway in almost no time at all and, using navigational control, entered the labyrinth. The Bridge crew was mesmerized by the open field of energy ribbons as they entered a lightning landscape only heard of, but never seen. It was shockingly beautiful and intense.

"Cap, I’m reading rising radiation along the hull. In areas where our shields are weakened..."

Emma quickly made some alterations on her console, and the man just frowned and reread his scans.

"Marco? You were saying?" David asked, quietly waiting.

"Nothing. The radiation is running symmetrically to our hull. It isn’t penetrating. I don’t understand it."

David turned in his seat and looked at Emma. "What did you do?"

"Energy flows from systems of high energy to low. I sweetened the pot, as it were. I changed the polarity of your warp field to emit outward. You aren’t needing to create a warp field at this time, so I pushed the field outward, allowing us to run at impulse within a warp field bubble. That will keep the radiation from moving through the shields as it seeks balance by filling a lower radiation and energy field."

David watched as Emma took the helm seat next to Archie, and they navigated through the Thorns without a problem. The two sat conversing the entire time, and even David had to acknowledge that
Emma was right. The Thorns weren’t that difficult to get through. By the time they reached the center, the area was clear in a nice quiet space.

"Emma, why is there no activity here?"

Emma smiled at Archie and turned in her seat to answer David.

"It’s the same principle that created the corridors we navigated through. The rush of energy enters the Thorns through subspace rifts and ribbons brought from other systems. Because of the energy sinkholes, the incoming energy seeks a balance within the system and rushes to the sinkholes to fill its void. That is the rush of lightening displayed. But what happens is, there are thousands to millions of these microbursts occurring at once, and when one energy field encounters another, they cancel each other out. They balance. It creates a vacuum, or a cancelled field."

"So we travel in the cancelled area?"

"Yes. It is like a neutralized space corridor or conduit. In the center where all these energy fields come together it creates a larger neutralized area...a sort of hub. Here, we can stay indefinitely until our repairs are made and the engines and system can be made ready."

David quickly sent orders for all stations to report on repairs as the engines came to a full stop in the center of the Thorns. With their sensors on full sweep, they were able to read any approaching ships. For a short while, they had a hiding place safe from the Dark One and his searchers.

"Captain, the sensors are reading nothing."

"Understood."

Emma got up to leave, when David stopped her. "Where are you off to?"

"Engineering. I was going to go work on getting the heat and power re-established to C Deck. And to fix your shields."

"I wasn’t aware that shields were down except in areas of the ship with hull breaches."

Emma just laughed. "Well, there are shields, and then there are shields."

David stood and walked Emma off his Bridge.

"Making sure I get off the Bridge without touching anything?"

David just smirked, but then stopped her beside the door. "Okay, what are you planning?"

Emma just shrugged. "Nothing special. Just replacing your current shields with ones like mine."

"The reflective ones?" David’s interest was suddenly piqued. Her shields. He wanted those...bad. Having them would make the Enchanted invisible to the Dark One’s sensor net, and her shields would be able to transverse another shield technology by emulation.

"How much time will it take?"

"Some work. The new system will need emitters placed over the entire hull. Repairs of damaged areas will need to be done first. And it comes with a price."

"Explain."
"You can’t be scanned, but that also means that your own smaller support ships, recovery ships and fighters won’t be able to lock onto the Enchanted. Your options will be to set established rendezvous coordinates, or to break communication silence." Emma stretched. "If we also establish these shields on your other smaller ships, that means you’ll be equally blind to them."

David nodded. "Okay. So can’t you find a way for the ships to detect each other?"

Emma looked embarrassed. "I really wish I could, but currently there is no way. I understand the shielding and how my technology works. But, I’m not a real engineer. I can’t necessarily create new technology."

"But, you understand our systems enough to fix them, or even improve them?"

"Sure I do, but they’re less evolved than my own systems. I understand almost anything below my own technology. I just doubt that I have the expertise to expand beyond it. That would take an engineer - a real one. There are limits to my knowledge."

"Okay, then do what you can. Will will be out of regeneration in about six days. Killian is off duty for another two, which I’m sure he isn’t happy about..."

"Why do you think I’m out and about helping people? He hasn’t woken up yet to hear the good news because Graham gave him something to keep him asleep for at least eighteen hours of blissful bitch-free whining...but," Emma just shrugged delicately, "he’ll be awake soon enough."

"Let’s let Graham take care of it."

"Agreed."

With that said, Emma took off to engineering. She had hours before she would need to go check on Killian again. Looking at the engineer board and all the downed systems, Emma went to round up extra help.

~*~

David frowned at the temperature of the C Deck. Emma was correct. It was cold. Entering Killian and Emma’s quarters, David knew almost immediately that Killian had awakened. And he was unhappy.

"Bloody hell, Graham, let me up from here!"

David entered and quickly swallowed a smile. "What’s going on, brother?"

Killian’s eyes narrowed as he suspected that David was amused. Rattling a restraint on his left hand connecting him to the bed, Killian looked highly pissed.

"Tell this jackin’ jay, two-hearted Nellian ponce to release me!"

Graham just shook his head no. "Absolutely not." He pointed a finger at Killian. "Your history of following medical advice is for crap. So, until I say you’re ready for active duty, this is where you stay."

"David..."

David put up his hands. "Sorry, Killian. You know that the Medical Officer’s orders supersede the Captain’s in all things regarding the welfare of a crew member."
"I’m fine! Great. I don’t feel tired, and there is too much to do to be tied up to a bed," Killian moaned.

"You’re hardly fine. Emma called me here in the middle of the night because you had a raging fever. You were unresponsive, and... when the hell were you going to mention the hit you took to your back?"

"I pulled out the shrapnel. It was nothing."

"Nothing? You missed a piece. You know it poisons the blood. Your fever was the first step in many towards your death. You got lucky Emma was with you and called me."

Killian suddenly seemed to realize that something, or specifically someone was missing. "Where is she?"

"Working, like everyone else," David answered easily, smiling at his brother in spite.

"You? You’re letting her touch the ship unsupervised? Are you insane? She takes unnecessary risks, and..." Killian looked at his bound hand and groaned. Of course. "This is her fault."

"What is?" Emma asked from the door. "What are you blaming me for now?" Killian rattled his bound arm at her. Emma just shrugged. "I didn’t do that...though it’s a great idea."

"You called Graham. You set him on me. And now look."

David ignored him, and studied Emma. She was filthy. Her hands were bleeding in a few places, and she looked tired. It had been almost six hours since they entered the Thorns and she took herself off to do repairs. "How’re repairs going?" he asked, ignoring Killian’s scowl.

"Not good. We’ve got over twenty hull breaches and internal sensors are offline. Sixteen subdeck corridors are blown in, injectors are also offline, the crystalline matrix is showing a full scale fracturing, inertial dampers are..."

"I think I’ve got the picture. I spent this morning helping to reroute blown paneling on the Bridge."

"How long?"

"Two weeks. Things will be better when Will is able to work. His main assistant was killed, and half his repair staff is off the ship. This is the worst time to be understaffed."

"Who is taking control?"

"Eric and Gus. They’re coordinating all important and essential systems first, including all hull breaches and environmental systems. We lost all power to hydroponics and had to set up temporary heaters and oxygen-carbon dioxide mixed generators. It’s still down, and that system is essential. Otherwise all the food banks will be gone."

"I’m going to go check on it now. Internal communications are down again, so wear a com badge, Emma."

David started to leave, as did Graham, when Killian called to him. "You need me, David. Tell Graham to release me."

Emma just rolled her eyes and took herself off for an extra special cold shower. She had repaired the environmental for this deck, but she wasn’t sure when the systems would come online.
David stopped angrily. "What I need is for you to use your head! I’m sick of watching you trying to get yourself killed. So shut up and rest! You’re off duty until I say so, and that will be when Graham okays it. Are we clear?" David looked at his brother hard. "I said, Are. We. Clear?"

"Aye, we’re clear."

"Good. Now be a good boy and let Emma feed you. I’ll check back on you later."

David and Graham left the room. Both men headed for the lift until they remembered it was still offline. Taking access tubes, they both climbed the deck.

"Well, that went better than I expected. Luckily, I went to check on him just before he woke up or I’d have never got the restraint on him. I give him five more hours and he’ll be climbing the walls in boredom."

"I give it less. Killian doesn’t do inactivity well." David started to head away from Graham to return back to work. "What’s the final count, Graham?"

"Eighty-seven dead, thirteen still critical and twenty in regeneration. Sickbay is swelling with the injured."

David nodded, his jaw clenching. "I should’ve destroyed that system before I left."

Graham touched David’s shoulder. "I know, but doing such a thing is beyond us. Beyond you. That’s a tribute to you personally, David. Your people would have exacted revenge and rained destruction on them until all of them were annihilated. You didn’t. You’ve evolved."

"The hell I have. I wanted to, and I would have if Killian and Emma had died. What I left them was the horror that the Dark One will settle on them."

"His hands...not yours."

David rubbed his face. "The Dark One? Does he even have hands anymore? He’s like a scary story you tell your children to keep them behaved and honest. Killian still calls him crocodile."

"I have an order for you, Captain. Forget getting back to work, and go take some down time. We’re in Emma’s playground, safe for now. Let’s rest so we can fight stronger tomorrow."

David thought about it and nodded. Heading back to the access tube he had just vacated he waved Graham goodbye on his way back to his quarters.

"Bridge?"

"Aye, Captain?"

"Tell operations to order a full ship step down. I want only skeleton crews on for the next twelve hours. Repair crews are to fix only what is utterly essential and the rest can wait for the step down to end. No cooking tonight. Order replicator use for all personnel." David paused. "Are replicators working?"

"Not all of them, Cap. I’ll reroute them to the ones that are. Anything else?"

"No. Just goodnight." David turned off his com badge and laid back in his bed. He was tired, so very tired.

~*~
"Emma. Come on, just look at it!"

"No! I’m making us some food."

"The bloody replicator is down," Killian said with a bite to his voice.

"No, it's not. I fixed them on this deck level, and in the dining area. You might notice how much warmer it is? I fixed that, too."

"Okay, you’re the Wiz. Just look at it."

Emma set their food down at the bedside and looked at his wrist in the restraint.

"Yeah. It looks like I suspected. A restraint."

"Well?" Killian waited, an eyebrow raised in anticipation. Emma calmly picked up the plate of food and started eating, shoving food at Killian as well.

"Well, what?"

"Can you disarm it? Get me the hell out of it?"

Emma just shrugged forcing more food on him. "Sure I can. It’s a simple harmonic thirteen tumble restraint. It’s tricky, being so many tumbles, but would probably be under a minute's work." She smirked cheekily at him. “It’s all about the tumblers.”

"Good." Killian smiled, nodded eagerly, and waited, but Emma just kept eating and feeding him.

"Emma?"

"What? You want something else?"

"Get me the hell out of this restraint!" Emma just shook her head no. "Emma," he threatened. "Is this about Gus tying and gagging you up?"

"Nope, but now that you reminded me..."

"Swan!"

"What?" She almost laughed at his use of Swan as a name for her.

"Undo the blasted thing!"

"No!"

"No?" Killian looked at his bedmate. "Why the bloody hell not?"

"Because you told me to mind direct orders, correct?" Killian just nodded. "Well, the captain gave you a direct order and that didn’t include getting out of the restraints. He said you were to rest. I can’t release you without breaking a direct order...so no."

"Dammit! Emma..."

"Don’t swear at me. I’m just following your instructions...to the letter." Emma put the plate away, and pulled off his shirt she had been wearing. Snuggling down close to his body against his raised
left arm, she settled to nap.

"What are you doing?"

"Napping." Emma looked up at him, and then lifting herself upward, she kissed him lightly on the lips. And then again, and then not so gently. "Sleep with me."

"Emma..."

She just snuggled in and was soon asleep. Killian ran his free hand down over her skin and looked up at his bound one. Great.

~*~

Killian moaned as her hand moved over his body and found his hardness in a nice grip. She was asleep, but once again her body was moving against him. Holding his breath, he waited to see where or how far she would go this time. He’d learned his lesson not to not wake her long ago, but the forced moans from his throat were his undoing.

"What?" Emma startled awake, confused. "Are you okay?"

"I will be soon." Suddenly her hand stilled on him as she came aware of where her hand was and what she was doing.

"Oh! I’m so sorry!" Emma sounded embarrassed. "I haven’t done that in a while."

That was correct. Her hands always moved over his body in her sleep, but since the first night she hadn’t taken him in hand.

"It’s okay. But you’re really going to have to release me from the restraint now. I really need to go finish this."

Emma looked at him and nodded. She knew she was going to release him eventually. Sooner or later, he was going to need to use the bathroom, and suddenly it looked like he needed to go now.

"I’m so sorry." She stopped apologizing at his look. "It’s just you scared me over the last few days, and I think I needed to feel you, know you were there."

Killian laughed ruefully. "Oh, I’m very here, lass." It had that look on his face again, that smoldering look that made her melt.

"I know. It’s hard to miss." Killian was surprised that Emma’s hand remained on his lower stomach stroking the soft hair there.

"I should take care of this...soon. I guess you could let me out of this restraint, and I could finish it in the bathroom."

Emma just made a protesting sound in her throat. "No, that wouldn’t work, because when I came back to bed we were both so cold. I guess I could..." Killian stopped talking when her hand moved down his body and took him in hand. "You could let me finish what I started."

Killian smiled in the dark. Door number two. Definitely his choice as well. "I could."

Emma leaned up over him. "You don’t seem to mind this at all."
He smiled at the suspicion in her voice. "Has anyone ever mentioned that you talk too much?"

"No," she smirked. She looked down his body, and she moved the covers away so she could look at him. He was...big. She’d touched him before, seen him naked for a while now. But to actually look at him? Well, she swallowed nervously.

Killian watched her intently as she seemed to really take in his size and smirked at her nervous look. He brought her closer and wrapped a hand around her neck to bring her mouth to his.

She lost herself in his kiss as usual and as if on its own, her hand lightly clasped his length again. He was hard and hot, but he felt almost velvety in her hand. She imagined she could feel the blood pulsing madly, his anticipation for her movement, so she stroked gently, teasingly slow as if testing what he liked.

Moving his lips over hers, he quickly sucked her tongue into his mouth to taste her as his free hand moved down his own body to join her smaller one. Wrapping his hand around hers, he showed her the way he liked it while his mouth kept exploring hers. If he left it up to her, he wouldn't get any satisfaction. She would just slowly torture him the entire time.

"Maybe you should do this alone," she said when he released her lip, her breath haggard.

"Shhhh, no, this is better." Killian smiled at her happy expression as it raced across her face. She seemed fascinated by his body. He’d fantasized about this for so long now, it was almost unbearable. She took over, not needing his guidance any longer and before he knew it, he erupted, shooting a hot liquid stream over her hand.

She flashed a dazzling smile at him as she turned to grab some wipes and in quick strokes she cleaned them both.

"Emma, not that I’m complaining or anything, but if you keep touching me, we’ll have the same problem again."

Her hand pulled away immediately. "Oh!" Killian just nodded and covered her up in the bedding and plastered her to his body under his arm. Closing his eyes, he finally felt relaxed enough to sleep. Emma was having the opposite results. She was suddenly awake.

"Um, Killian?"

"Hmmm?"

"What about the sheets? Maybe we should change them or something?"

"Shhhh."
Eminent Ones, Emma was the last of her kind, burdened with a task she knew she would never survive. How must that feel, to know you have no future? Though this war was uncertain for them all.

When Killian had asked about the Alarch de Prin’c, Regina had been amazed. The Swan Princess of the Royal House was not something that happened in every generation, but something of a wonder, even within their wondrous race. It was the stuff of legends, told eons ago, that Alarch de Prin’c would right an incredible imbalance. Was Emma this Royal Swan, this Swan Princess, this enigma blessed with immense powers, a light to shine within the dark? Did Emma know enough of this herself?

“M’Lady?”

Regina jumped at the soft, gruff voice and turned quickly to find its source.

“I’m sorry to startle you,” Robin said with a slight bow before he entered the space.

“You didn’t startle me,” Regina said in her defense, turning her head quickly from him as he strode leisurely to the large observation window.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” he said conversely.

Regina followed his gaze, back into the vastness with its myriad of colors that danced in ribbon waves. “Yes, it is,” she replied softly.

Robin turned quickly to her. “And you didn’t choke.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, her brows furrowing.

“Agreeing with me, it didn’t kill you.”

Regina let out a snort of disdain. “Yeah, well, hold your breath until I agree with you again.”

“M’Lady,” Robin started with exasperation.

“Regina,” she stopped him briskly.

“I’m sorry?” he returned with his own look of confusion.

“My name is Regina. There aren’t many who still call me My Lady. I wish you to stop.”

“Okay,” Robin grinned, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

“It doesn’t mean we’re friends or anything,” she rushed out.

“Of course not.”

“Merely acquaintances.”

“Without a doubt.”

“I just wanted to make that clear.”

“And you did it so well… Regina.”

Regina smirked and Robin caught the reflection of it in the observation window.
“And what has you awake in the dead of night?” she asked eventually.

“I miss my son,” he answered simply.

“You have a son?” This surprised her. There had never been any mention of a son before, and she wondered if this child was still alive.

“Yes,” Robin smiled. “He is on my home world of Baso.”

“And your wife?” Regina probed inquisitively.

“Roland’s mother has passed,” he answered sadly.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Robin,” Regina said with compassion.

“She’d been ill for some time,” he explained. “It was a relief when the end came.”

“Still…”

Robin turned to her. “Have you heard anything from Zelena,” he asked, clearly ending that line of conversation.

“No,” Regina admitted. “It concerns me.”

“I’m sure if something had happened, Tuck would let us know.”

“I hope so. We meet but briefly in life. If we touch each other with stardust – that is everything.”

“Is that one of your Eminent proverbs? What does that mean?”

“I’m sorry, sometimes I can’t stop myself. And it means whatever it means to you.”

She sighed, suddenly feeling tired, exhausted even. “If you’ll excuse me, I think I’ll return to my room.”

“Of course, Regina.” He bowed slightly again. “Perhaps we can study the stars again soon.”

She turned back to him just before she left the room. “Perhaps,” she answered with a coy smile.

~*~

David rolled in his bed to sit on its side. Rubbing his hands over his face, he felt the sweat still pouring off his body. This nightmare was one that plagued him often. There was no peace, no escape, from the act of killing his brother, his blood brother James, over and over again.

And then there was Kathryn, encouraging him from the sidelines. She’d been aware of the distance between the paternal brothers, knew of how David mourned when his brother eagerly joined the Legion. Not like the many Areenians who were forced into service for the Dark One, James went willingly.

Most disturbing of all was the figure of Mary Margaret sitting patiently at the edge of the battlefield. She was dressed in an elaborate gown that spoke of noble birth.

“I’ll only wait so long,” she’d said as he fought with James.

“I wouldn’t bother,” Kathryn had snarled. “He’s not worth it.”
“I think he’s charming,” Mary Margaret had retorted with a smile on her face.

It was at this point he’d woken up, sweaty and tangled in his blanket.

Mary Margaret. The vision of her in his dreams remained strong, the difference between the two striking; Kathryn had made him want to do violence and find freedom from her, Mary Margaret made him want to stay, to find peace.

"I don’t have time for this shit!" David stood up and left the room.

On his way to the Bridge, David couldn’t be more surprised to find himself standing in Sickbay. Quickly checking on Will, he then went to Mary Margaret, his real reason for the detour. Taking a seat at her bedside, he watched her sleep. David never knew when tiredness overtook him, but there at her bedside he finally found rest. Graham found him sleeping there hours later, and just let him be.

~*~

"What are you doing here?" Emma asked absentmindedly as she studied the six iso-optic wires she held in her hand.

"I’m helping with repairs," he answered with his dashing smile and bright, wild eyes.

Emma just snorted at Killian. Right. In the last ten days, that was a standard joke between them because together, they never worked. Other things distracted them.

"Let me see your list." Killian just scowled at her. "Hand it over." Reluctantly, he gave her his assignment list. "You’re supposed to be working on the manifold and shovels. What are you doing here?"

"Helping you?" Killian replied hopefully with a cocky grin, taking a step closer.

She laughed at that. Right. No help there. He was good; real good. They were going to get caught again. Like the day before, and the day before that. And in the lift. And in the docking bay. And in hydroponics...

"I think Will split us up for a reason," she said as she turned back to the cables in her hand.

Killian just made a face. "Will is a bitch. He ruined dinner last night. I told him not to put all that pepper in, but he refused to listen."

Emma just shrugged. "The pepper wasn’t that bad...just peppery. I think the Argillian Port ale was a huge mistake. It tasted like dirty socks."

Killian scratched his brow. "Aye, I told Will not to do it," Killian shrugged, "but what can you do?" He ignored the fact that he was the one doing the pouring of the offensive Port.

She reattached the last cable before turning back to him. "The point is, Killian, you’re not where you’re supposed to be. Will is going to blow an injector relay if he catches you again."

Killian was sick of it. Ever since he and Emma had stepped up their relationship they’d been working non-stop on repairs. Morning, noon, night, and all the bloody times between. She was so tired the last few nights, he put her straight to bed and she didn’t move or even make a sound. So he took to waylaying her in non-essential areas, but Will was being a pain.
"I don’t see why we can’t work together."

Emma put down her tools and looked at him. Her look of exasperation quickly turned to one of amusement. He was pouting. A pouting Areenian. Emma couldn’t help her response. Bastard. She kissed him.

"Because when we’re together, we don’t work."

"I wasn't planning on distracting you," Killian lied.

He lowered his head to hers, his lips a hairsbreadth from hers.

"Tell me what the bloody hell Will needs with both of us working to exhaustion?" Killian softly rubbed his mouth against hers and talked in a low tone. "I’m getting suspicious that you’re trying to avoid me. That you’ve got Will running interference because we were heading somewhere very intimate since that day I was tied up to our bed."

Her voice was breathy, almost inaudible. "I don't know what you're talking about."

He lowered his lips to hers, his intent clear, and she frantically tried to twist her head to the side. His fingers, twined in her hair, held her immobile. His lips descended and he nibbled at the edge of her mouth, skillfully teasing her and sending shivers down her spine. The kiss deepened, as he forced first acquiescence, and then desire. Emma was trembling, and making a barely audible animal sound as he finally ended the kiss and raised his face from hers with cool satisfaction.

"Tell me." They both looked up in guilt at the sound of Will’s voice. "What does it take to keep you two working and off each other?"

"Aw, Will..."

"Don’t, ‘Aw, Will’ me. I’ve got the two of you mating like monkeys in almost every corridor, and then some. My landing crew is still talking about the two of you in the landing bay. They’ve got bets all over the place when and where we’ll find you both naked and going at it. I think the forward array and the observation deck are the most bet upon. My crew is distracted trying to keep an eye on the two of you. One of my workers took a spill from a ladder trying to twist himself into a knot to watch you."

"We’re not that bad," Emma said in defense.

"Worse. Killian, go back to work." Killian slowly went off to return to the forward manifolds.

Emma watched him leave with a look of exasperation on her pretty face. "Whew, that man is more lethal than a drink of hundred proof rum."

"Getting hard to avoid?"

Emma laughed and picked up her tool. "You have no idea. This last week has been...difficult."

Will had been out of regeneration for only six days. He still looked weak, but he was almost back to normal.

"I'm sure it has been, given that the rest of us are hard and randy."

"Sorry about that. We mean no harm."

Will helped her reconnect a power grid. "So how much longer?"
Emma quickly reran a diagnostic and then reestablished the power flow.

"Just two more days."

Emma gathered up her tools to move to the next assignment, but Will stopped her.

"You could try just telling him the truth."

"I’d rather not." Will gave her a deep look. "I know, but it’s difficult. Who knew so many birth control methods would be worthless with Areenians? Killian is determined to wreck the most effective one...abstinence."

"We’re a fertile people."

Emma just snorted. "I thought the word was ‘horny’. Well, Graham says this is guaranteed, and it becomes effective in my body in two days. Then, I’ll stop avoiding him."

"You don’t want his baby?" Will asked softly.

Emma paused and looked at Will, her anguish apparent in her eyes. "No. I can’t afford to take the chance, Will. If I become pregnant, how can I do my duty, walk with the Dagr’du, and willfully take my own life, thus destroying his child at the same time?"

Will just nodded. He understood it the first time she explained her need for help. Emma knew the course of her life was set. The fates were in place, the first had already woven it, and the second was drawing out the length...then that only left it to be cut. They already knew how, just not necessarily when.

"Emma," he stopped her again. "If things were different, would you...I mean, would you want his baby?"

Emma stopped and looked at the man, a small smile on her face. "Perhaps. Not right now or right away, but perhaps someday. When I think of staying with him, I think of running around the universe chasing dreams, getting into more trouble than either of us deserve to be in, and being just the two of us."

"So, no children?"

"Oh, there’d be children. Just not right away. And when we had them...they would be beautiful, opinionated, tough and hard to keep under control. They would wake us early, and keep us up late. And we’d wonder how we lived all our lives empty until they came." Emma suddenly looked very upset as her eyes shone with tears. "That was just a daydream I have...but it belongs in dreams. It can’t be."

Will swore under his breath. He hadn’t meant to make her sad, or hurt her. "Emma, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean..."

"It’s okay." She tried to pull away. "I just never had a reason to dream this dream before, and now I do. It makes it difficult."

"I just don’t want to see him hurt, and right now, I can’t see how we’ll ever avoid that. Your leaving...it’s going to hurt."

Emma put her hand on Will’s face and leaned forward to rest against him. "I know. That’s why I can’t afford to make a mistake and become pregnant. Watching me go will be bad enough. But I
couldn’t destroy his child, too, or ask him to let us both go."

Will just nodded. "Yeah. Off to work with you. I’ve got ten credits that says he finds you within the next half an hour."

"Keep your money." Emma went to the ladder preparing to climb up three floors to her next assignment. "Oh Will, dinner was lovely last night!"

Will laughed as she quickly went up the ladder out of sight. Cheeky little bit.

"Brat!"

~*~

Killian and Emma were resting in the tub, both too tired to move. They had finished all primary repairs that day. All that was left were non-essential areas. Emma was almost asleep in the warm water, when Killian tried to rouse her.

"We should go to bed."

"Hungry..."

Killian just sighed. "There is no way I’m going to the galley." Killian’s eyes narrowed at her latest delay tactic. "Want to tell me what the hell is going on?"

Emma avoided his eyes and got out of the bath. "Don’t know what you’re talking about, Commander."

"Emma..."

"So I guess I’ve got to add suspicious to the list of Areenian traits?"

"I just know when a woman is avoiding me, love."

Emma smiled at that and laughed. "Lots of experience, huh?"

"Emma."

"I’ll go make dinner from the replicators." Emma fled before he trapped her again.

Killian followed to find her ordering enough food for an army while yawning. She looked almost down for the count. Emma was eating and reading her manuscript.

"You really should be working on your manuscript and not letting Will use you as slave labor," Killian said as he grabbed a plate and sat beside her. "Where is your scurrying mouse-like Honorable?"

"Belle? She’s around," Emma rubbed her eyes, and tried to suppress a yawn. "You might not have noticed her, but she’s been doing repairs along with the rest of us."

Killian’s eyebrow went up at that. "She knows engines?"

"Almost better than I do. Not the same technology, but she knows your technology."

"I thought she was a nun?"
Emma ate another bite, and then helped herself to some food from Killian’s plate. "She sort of is, but not really. Not if we can complete the task. Once that’s done, her life is her own."

"And yours is..." Emma failed to meet his eyes. There was no reason to rehash old territory.

"Anyway. Belle was pressed into service at an early age - practically from birth, when it was apparent that she would be able to handle the yellow gem. All those years in solitude and contemplation at Temple, she was allowed to pursue any education she desired."

"Engineering?"

"Engineering. Not my people’s technology, but almost everyone else’s. She’s a natural, loves learning. My knowledge was required for learning to build and operate my ship, but Belle’s is a lesson in love. She likes it."

Killian stopped eating and contemplated what she was saying. "What do you mean? Belle isn’t one of your people?"

"Not really. Centuries ago, so many centuries that we lost count, the gems were removed from Gaianosis. They were entrusted to three holy women, special women who could touch them. That was when the location of each was written in the manuscripts." Emma got up and ordered some dessert. "Anyway, these special women searched out and tested people on their new worlds with the same ‘resonance’ ability to hold their crystals. So each generation at all female births, the newborns were tested."

"So she was..."

"Native to the world we took her from. She was sent to Temple practically from birth, and taught how to hold the gem, how to protect it, and what her duty would be."

Killian took away the dishes, and helped Emma up. She was falling asleep again. Taking her into the bedroom, he helped her get ready for bed.

"So what did these worlds get from your people that would be worth this amount of devotion and dedication over all these years. Abydos is a sludge pit, hardly worth fighting for."

"We gave them technology when they had none. But for Belle? She gained everything. Women on her world are treated poorly. Used as slaves, sold into bondage as sexual slaves, beaten, and used at times as livestock. Education? A female? Not really heard of or sanctioned."

"No offense, Emma. But it hardly seems like your people helped them at all."

Emma moaned in appreciation as he covered her, and she nestled up to his warmer body. "Not now, but in the past, Abydos was a thriving world. The Dark One had destroyed so many star systems close to Abydos that it threw that system into turmoil. Abydos was one of the planets pulled from its original orbit to another. It devastated the ecosystem, and literally turned the world into a desert."

"The Dark One...such a great guy. He wrote the book on how to make friends and influence people. Rat bastard."

Emma was already drifting off on him. Determined to keep her awake, Killian continued to ask her questions.

"So Belle is working with Will? The Honorable and the ‘Not So Honorable’?"
Emma chuckled softly. "Indeed! It’s so funny. Will seems to really respect her, and he’s careful to keep his hands to himself."

Killian could hear the pause in her voice. "But?"

"But, they make a strange pair. Will talking non-stop, and Belle not even making a noise. He tried to corrupt her to the ways of gambling."

Only Will would try to tempt a nun from her devotional calling. "And?"

"She ignored him for an entire eight hours." Emma laughed remembering the battle of wills. Will trying to get her to break silence, and Belle determined to ignore the infidel.

"So once again...shouldn’t you and Belle be working on the location of your second gem?"

Killian almost bit his tongue. He didn’t want her to find it too fast or too soon. But her working on the translation might remove her from Will’s slave taskmaster hands, and get him some quality time that didn’t involve her falling asleep on him.

"No need. I finished the translation by the second day with Belle’s translation key. I already know the next location."

Killian swallowed a curse and tried to remain calm and reasonable. "It took you weeks with the first manuscript."

"Well, the first was encoded with a riddle of sorts to make it hard, but the following manuscripts are easy because if you find the first translator key, then everything is downhill."

"Where is it?" Killian asked quietly.

"Zenus, on the world of Huoxon in the Laterus System. There, in the Temple of the Honorable, we’ll find the next gem. The red gem, the one that determines the length of life...she that is patient."

Too fast, it was happening too fast. Killian struggled with wanting her to succeed, yet never wanting to lose her. So he kissed her, drawing her close to him, hoping to make her forget, for him to forget, just for an hour or two. His hand tangled into her hair, her golden strands trailing through his fingers like silk. He held her head, angling her in just the right way to move deeper into her. When she moaned low in her throat, his blood pulsed.

His mouth moved to nuzzle her neck, inhaling her scent deeply before his lips caress that area under her ear that made her squirm.

“Killian,” she breathed out with a shudder and reached for his other hand. She slowly drew it up her body until his fingers pressed against her breast. There, she covered his hand with hers and encouraged him to caress her. He didn’t need to be told twice and his fingers danced over her flesh, feather-light touches that made her skin pucker and her nipple grow and harden.

“More,” she pleaded and he complied, moving down her body to take her nipple into his mouth. His tongue twirled around the engorged flesh and his teeth grazed gently, making her arch her back with the sensation.

“Shit,” she hissed, the tingling in her body growing with intensity with each pass of his teeth.

He pulled away, that smirk of knowing and contentment on his face. “You like that?”
“Yeah,” she grinned to him, her fingers delving into his hair to draw him back to her. He went willingly, to wherever she wanted him. He gave her other breast the same attention as the first, his hand squeezing gently, pinching the nipple one more time, before he trailed it slowly down her body.

Her skin was soft and smooth and nothing like Killian had felt before, and he marveled in it. His fingers traced a figure eight pattern on her thigh, each sweep getting closer and closer to where Emma desperately needed his attention. His lips were now biting and licking at her neck, his stubble prickling her skin in a way she’d come to love. Even the red skin she knew she’d suffer through didn’t bother her.

With one sharp nip of his teeth, his fingers found their goal and she half yelped, half moaned as he caressed his bite and her. The pads of his fingertips slipped easily against her and her hips moved, gyrating against him in her search for release.

Killian lifted his head to see her eyes shut tight in pleasure and she moved against him, her movements becoming more frantic as he helped her reach her orgasm.

“More,” she rushed out.

“As you wish.” Killian’s voice sounded deep and husky with his arousal, his need to bring her as much pleasure as she gave him. With a swift motion, his hand turned and two fingers pushed cautiously into her, opening her to him and his gentle, loving caress.

It didn’t take long after that, with Killian adding another digit and the right amount of pressure in the right places, for her to explode beneath him. She stared at the ceiling as she struggled to regulate her breathing, Killian just the same but his gaze was on her.

“You’re beautiful,” he finally said, drawing himself back up to capture her lips in a gentle kiss.

“Every day should end like that,” she said hoarsely.

“I couldn’t agree more, love,” Killian agreed, tucking her body back to his and wrapping her in his arms.

Killian held her as she finally succumbed to sleep. Zenus, he thought. It took her only two days before she knew it was Zenus. And from Zenus, she would soon discover the last gem. After that, it was just finding the Dark One and activating the Dagr’du. Too soon. It was happening too fast. Holding her close and tightly, Killian wondered if he could sabotage a few systems to keep them in the Thorns indefinitely.

~*~
Walls Down, All In

Chapter Notes

Happy Wednesday Everyone!
Still on vacation so I'm not going to ramble on, just a note to say I hope you enjoy this chapter...

Chapter 16 - Walls Down, All In

David was hidden beneath a control panel, trying to rewire the fried system. Most of the Bridge systems were back online, and Killian had spent the day testing new weapons with the special shields Emma had helped him install.

"You want to talk about it?"

"Nothing to say." Killian said curtly.

"You’re in an established relationship, lasting a hell of a lot longer than I thought it would. So what’s got you biting the heads off everyone in sight?" David checked the lights on the console. One was still out. He’d missed something.

"I’m still getting a busy light.” Killian said. “Recheck circuits 3A to 13B. Something must have shorted again.” David nodded and went back under the console.

There was loud grunting, some inventive obscenities, and a thundering crack as David hit his head against the casing. Killian reacted as David did, rubbing the back of his own head as a sharp pain exploded.

“Bloody hell, mate,” Killian swore.

“Did you feel that?” David asked, poking his head back out.

“Aye, I did.”

David grinned as he returned to his work. It seemed their brothers bond was growing. The ability to feel what the other did was nothing new in Areenian brothers, something Killian remembered well growing up with Liam. But until now, this phenomenon hadn’t shown itself with David and Killian. Regina had reasoned this to the fact they weren’t blood brothers, but had told them to expect it, as they were blood cousins.

Killian hit the top of the panel with his fist in retribution, the same time David kicked the control panel from within. Suddenly, Killian had power to his station restored. David climbed out from under it, slowly rising to his feet, the wide smile still on his face.

Killian looked around to make sure no one was eavesdropping. "It’s Emma. She knows the next gem's location."
Wasn’t that her purpose? David was confused. "Okay, so what’s wrong?"

"She figured it out in two days, not two weeks this time."

David just shook his head. Then suddenly it hit him. "And once she finds the next one, it will be a quick translation..."

"To the last one, and finally the Dark One. And then..."

Killian couldn’t say it. He just looked away, his jaw clenching. David felt his emotions, and suddenly understood everything. And then Emma would die, and Killian would be alone again.

David slapped his brother on his back. "Come on."

"Where are we going?"

"To get drunk."

~*~

"So why are we drinking again?" Robin asked in a slurred voice, trying to focus his bleary eyes.

"To feel good." David’s voice floated up from under a table where he was lying.

Killian smacked the table hard. "Aye! To feel...good!" He took the drink that Will poured and downed it.

"Why are we feeling bad?" Will asked again for the thousandth time.

Killian just snorted. "Why do we invite him? He’s too slow."

"Because Regina was busy, and Graham was doing something doctory, like saving lives, or something...maybe a physical?" David’s hand wandered up from below the table and nabbed the bottle. "That just left Will and Robin. Poor us."

Killian just echoed his brother. "Yeah, poor us."

Will noticed the bottle disappearing. "Bloody hell, Killian. I told you not to let him get the bottle. Now we’ll have to get under the damn table, too." Will looked down at David. "What the fuck are ya doing down there anyway?"

Killian made a rude noise. "He has to. He always ends up on the floor sooner or later, this way he doesn’t bump his head on the way down."

"Oh. Wuss," Robin snickered, leaning dangerously to the side of his chair as if trying to look at David.

David’s hand came over the table’s edge to wave a finger at Robin. Robin just laughed it off.

"So why are we drinking again?" Will asked, his brows creasing in concentration.

The brothers just groaned. Again. Will waited until David was off on a rant, and took back the rum bottle. They were on the third one from contraband gained from an Outworld command post. It was illegal in Legion territories.

Will, ever the talker, ignored his surly friends and went off on his own rampage.
"At least you don’t have a bloody...Honulant watching you twenty-four hours a day," Will grumbled, before belching. "She has bug-eyes."

"Honorable," David corrected from under the table.

"Huh?"

David finally sat up and pulled himself up from under the table. "She’s an Honorable, not an Honulant."

Killian was having a hard time focusing on the conversation. "What the hell is an Honulant? Is that like some ugly bauble thing women wear around their neck?"

"No!" Both David and Robin said in unison.

Killian wasn’t paying attention. "Maybe I need to buy Emma her own Honulant. Think she’s avoiding me because I haven’t got her one?"

"Nope. She’s already got the one Honulant person who is scurrying around my engineering bays." Will took another drink. "She’s good. Real good, but bloody hell! I hate her. She refuses to have fun."

Killian’s face clouded suddenly. "Hate her! You hate my Emma? Mate! What the bloody hell do you mean she’s no fun?" Killian tried to struggle to his feet, but Robin pushed him back down.

"Emma? No. Not Emma. She’s a real sport." Will took another drink. "I was talking about the Hono... Honorul...the scurry one with the buggy eyes."

"Huh?" Killian was lost.

David hit him upside the head. "Belle."

"Oh, her." Killian calmed down.

"How can you hate someone that doesn’t talk?" Robin asked.

"Oh, she talks. In this low, whispery voice. She is so damn quiet. I tried to draw her out, but no! No! She wants no help. I invited her to play poker with the boys, and she just ignored me. Not even a word to say no. Like, I’m trying to corrupt her Honulant self...no sir, she is no sport."

"Emma plays poker." Killian informed the others. David just rolled his eyes. Four hours of Killian’s conversation all revolving around Emma was making him need another drink.

"She’s not invited."

"Why the bloody hell not!?" Killian struggled to stand up again to take out Will when David pushed him back in his seat again.

Will just poked Killian in the chest. "Because you banned her from the game last time. She took every one of us for all our credits. And when you accused her of cheating, she said, ‘Yeah, so?’, then she walked away with all our money."

"Aye, Emma cheats extremely well," Killian said with pride, a shit-eating grin on his face. "Did I tell you that she can pick harmonic restraints with thirteen tumbles in under a minute?"

David slapped his brother lightly and pointed to a new drink. "Ad nauseum. Shut up and have
another drink."

Killian looked at his drink and practically pouted. "I don’t know why she’s avoiding me." He downed the drink.

"I do," Will mumbled as he licked the inside of his empty glass.

Will looked up to see his friends staring at him. Frowning, he looked at them confused.

"Just fucking tell us!" Killian’s patience was on a thin thread.

"Oh, sure. She wants your babies, and something about it not being safe until..." Will looked confused, trying to concentrate, "...tonight? And she wants to fight with you across the galaxy, and you’re her dream...and she can’t have you, but she wants you, and I think she’s cursed with the evil love bug." Will scratched his head. He might have got some of that wrong.

Killian’s attitude suddenly lightened. "I feel good!" Grabbing the bottle, he sloshed more into the glasses, pouring more on the table than in the glasses. David took a sniff and realized that his rooms were going to smell bad for a long time. And once Will tossed his guts, David was sure the only hope for that space was from a blaster.

Will joined in the celebration. "I feel per..., um, per..., um, good!"

David wasn’t a talky drunk, so he just took his glass and tossed it back. But as he went through the motion, he didn’t stop. He kept on going, and both Killian and Will laughed as he fell from his new chair back on to the floor.

"Wuss!" Robin teased again as he pointed at David.

"Guess what? Guess!" Will demanded over eagerly. Killian looked at the drunk Will and just shrugged.

"Just tell me, or I’ll kull ya."

Will didn’t know what kull was, but it sounded painful. "David is in luvvvvv."

"Not." They ignored David’s voice once again from under that table.

"With Lay-de Mar-ee Mar-ga-ret," Will sang.

"Shut up, Will," David’s voice once again rose from under the table.

"One of Regina’s non-sisters. Or is she an Honulant, too? Oh god! Where do all of these babbling women come from, and why do they smell nicer than men?" Will asked confused.

Killian smelt himself and grimaced. It didn’t take much to smell better than he did at that moment. He then looking down at his brother under the table. "Is it true? Are you a victim of the love blight?"

David just closed his eyes and refused to comment. Killian swore. Sitting up, he banged his hand hard on the table.

"It’s official. This luv crap is a disease."

"Why is Regina invited to these things, but none of the other women are?" Robin puzzled.
“What?” Will looked at the newest member of their merry band.

“You said earlier, Regina was busy. Why does she get an invite and the others don’t?”

“Regina’s one of the guys,” Killian slurred the answer.

“No, Regina is definitely a woman, a lady.” Robin finished this statement with a goofy smile.

“Oh bloody hell,” Killian whined. “Robin’s been hit by the love bug as well.”

"Told ya, mate, it must be highly infectious," said Will morosely. "Hope I don’t catch the luvvvvv bug."

Killian just snorted. "Yeah, like when was the last time a woman let you near her?"

Will thought about it for a second. "There were those bearded twins..."

David’s voice floated upward in response to that. "I’m going to vomit."

"From the look of things, I think that might be the best idea." The men looked up to see Emma standing in David’s door.

Killian’s whole face broke into a smile, his eyes shining brightly at the sight of her. "Emma! Emma!" She quickly went to his side as he was on the verge of sliding off his chair. "Will said you were finally going to have sex with me."

"Really? Will knows that, does he?" Emma looked under the table at the relaxing David. "What’s David doing under the table?"

Will looked at Emma with watery, bloodshot eyes. "The floor kept sneaking up on him and hitting him in the face. So, he decided to stay there."

"Smart plan."

David voiced piped up from below. "Thanks."

"How long have you been drinking?"

Killian feigned innocence. "Drinking? We haven't been drinking, love."

"Uh huh. How long?"

"Over four hours,” Robin provided helpfully with a boyish smile, before he fell from his chair onto the floor. He laughed loudly, tried to get up once, then gave up.

“Just a quick one.” Killian added.

“It was David’s idea. He was all depressed over catching the cursed disease." Emma didn’t even bother to ask Will what he was talking about.

Killian looked at Emma. "What are you doing here?"

"Came to find you and take you home. I was cold, and alone, and... I missed you." Emma leaned down and kissed his lips, but quickly straightened away from him. "First order of business is to dump you in a shower and do something about the taste of your mouth."
Killian rubbed his head into her. "You’re all I can taste, love."

Will was watching them with a watery expression. "Awww!"

Emma looked at the crying, emotional engineer. "What’s with him?"

Killian just shrugged. "Nothing. Ignore him. Will gets all emotional when he drinks. He once cried buckets over a squashed bug with all its greasy guts everywhere."

Will tipped over and landed hard on the floor, passed out, joining a snoring Robin and a curled-up David.

Emma looked at the sleeping man. "Well, that’s just disturbing."

"Tell me about it." Killian looked at his drinking buddies and tsked in disgust. He could always drink them under the table - literally. Turning to Emma he smiled his most charming of smiles, which actually looked anything but charming, but more predatory. "So, I’ll let you take me to bed and abuse my body."

"Tempting offer, but no."

"Why the hell not?" Killian swore. "Bloody hell, Emma. I’ve been more patient than a saint, which I’m not..."

"Damn straight, you’re not." Emma took his weight as she went under his arm to help transport him back to their room. "But, I’ll make you a deal."

"A deal?"

"Uh huh. If you take the shower, and do something about your mouth, I’ll meet you in bed. And if you’re willing and in any way able, we’ll see what we can do about relieving some of your...tension."

"Deal. I’m always ready for you, Emma," Killian said smugly.

"I noticed," she said with a smile.

She carted him through the door, and dumped him in a bath. It took some doing, but she finally had him in bed, and surprise, surprise...he was instantly dead to the world the moment his head hit the pillow.

~*~

Killian rolled over in pain, and almost lost it when Emma shoved a glass under his nose.

"Wake up, Commander."

Killian didn’t even bother to open an eye. Opening his eyes would be a bad thing. A very bad thing.

"Go away. Leave me to die in peace."

"That bad, huh?" Emma sat next to him on the bed. "Anything I can do for you?"

Killian tried to open an eye to look at her, but the light was too bright and was causing his eyes to be searing in pain. "Got your weapon handy?"
"Yes."

"Good. Shoot me. Mercy. I beg for mercy."

Emma laughed at him and made a soothing noise. "Just drink this."

Killian finally succeeded in opening his eyes, and the vile, putrid liquid in the glass turned his stomach. Emma’s brow went up as his coloring took on a sallow, grayish tinge.

"Oh! Maybe I should help you..." He was already gone. Emma sighed and put the glass on the bedside table. Graham didn’t say that it worked without drinking. Apparently, all it took was looking at the disgusting liquid. Good thing she didn’t have him smell it.

Emma went to the bathroom door, and grimaced as he became sick. Running a quick bath, she helped him into the water. Rinsing out a cloth, she wiped down his face which was covered in a clammy sweat.

"Where the hell did you get that crap?"

"Graham. He came by and gave it to me earlier. I guess he was busy rousing Will, Robin, and David."

Killian just laid back with a moan. "Son-of-a-bitch. Knew I recognized that stuff. Graham’s always pouring it down my throat after I get dru..." Killian peeked at Emma, "...have a few."

"A few?" Emma looked at him as if he were insane. "A few what? Liters, buckets, or barrels? What were you celebrating?"

"Not a damn thing. I was drowning my sorrows."

Emma went quiet. Sitting on the side of the bath, she looked down at him. "Are you sad? Because of me?"

Her voice registered, and he looked at her. Neither spoke as they shared a common look full of pain and regret. Killian just sighed. "It hasn’t even happened, and already..." He stopped talking.

Talk was never his strong point, and emotions were even bigger strangers. Even in the company of even his closest friends and brother, he was often stingy with information and taciturn.

"I’m sorry. I’m so sorry," Emma tried to look away from him, but his hand came up and refused to let her turn from him.

"That you won’t have sex with me, or that you have to hide?" he asked, his voice low and unsure.

"Neither. I’d have sex with you, Commander. In a heartbeat. It’s all I’ve thought about since the moment I saw you. That’s not the problem."

"What is?"

"You." Emma moved her hand to his hair, pushing her fingers through its length, moving it off his face. "It’s already impossible. If...when...we get really physical, actually have sex...how much will you have to pay?"

Killian just closed his eyes. She was right. It was unbearable now. Knowing that her time was limited, that they were limited. Every day, they stepped closer to the end, but if they were lovers...
"I’m hurting you," Emma whispered sadly.

"No, you’re not. The situation is." Killian brushed his thumb across her cheekbone. "I don’t understand it. But...I feel you. I feel bonded to you, and that, to me, is not only strange, but impossible."

"I feel you, too. I have for a long time."

Killian met her eyes. Wrong. It was hurting them both.

"I didn’t know. No one told me. There was never a warning that I’d find you, and someday doing my duty would cost me so much. Before, it was all I knew, and somehow that was easy. But now..."

Killian understood too well. "So what are you saying?"

Emma took his hand still framing her face and pulled one of his digits in her mouth and sucked it hard watching his eyes narrow and grow heavy. She leaned forward and removed his finger to his regret, but quickly replaced it with his mouth.

"I’m saying that I want to have sex with you... be with you. I know it’s only for a short span of time, but I’m too weak to walk away and never know." Emma leaned her forehead to his. "But I can’t be the one making this decision. It has to be yours."

"You’re kidding me, right? You know...I think I’ve been everything except subtle about how much I want to get you under me. I think the decision was made long ago."

"You’re talking about sex. I’m not."

"Okay, put me on the same page. What are we talking about?"

Emma looked at him seriously. "I’m talking more than sex. I want it all, experience everything I can with you. I want you. We’re talking about how hard my leaving is going to be if we take this last step together. I’m talking about not wanting to hurt you, and I’m saying that you need to stop thinking with your penis and start thinking with your head...your real head."

"Emma..."

"No. I need to go work on the stabilizers. If I leave you here in the bath, will you just think about it? Really think about it, Killian. Not what you’ll get out of it in the moment, but what it will mean when, in a couple of weeks, I’m gone."

"And if I decide I can handle it?"

Emma reached down and kissed him again. "Then we see how it goes. We don’t change the formula. We were doing fine all this time. The only difference is, we don’t stop if we don’t want to."

Killian looked at her serious green eyes. So much life and energy shone in their mystical depth, and suddenly the implication hit him. This brilliance would soon be gone, snuffed out for all eternity. It hit him hard, and Emma saw that.

"The decision has to be yours, because you’ll be all that survives. The burden will be yours to bear." Emma kissed him quickly and left the room.
David. He was going to be like David. Living the rest of his life with the memory of her, her ghost reminding him what he could never have...having only been there long enough to give him a glimpse of what could have been. It was cruel.

Rubbing his face hard, Killian leaned back and shut his eyes against the searing pain of it all.

~*~

"Sleeping in the bath can be lethal, especially after the amount you drank last night."

"Shut up, Graham. How could you give that shit to Emma for me to drink?"

Graham just laughed. "I noticed it was still beside the bed, so I take it you never bothered to drink it."

Killian just grimaced. "What the hell are you doing here? Come to gloat?"

"Nope." Graham reached over and injected Killian. "Came to give you a vitamin shot to get you back on your feet. Will is singing happily in engineering, terrorizing that girl, Belle. But Robin is sluggishly tending the corps in hydroponics, and David insisted on going to the Bridge. He’s fallen asleep in his chair three times. So finally, I was forced to concoct a ‘pick-me up’ vitamin mix."

Killian just swore. Fucking Will. Pansy arsed bastard. Couldn’t hold his drink to save his life, but woke up feeling all fresh-like.

"How many times did Will lose it last night in David’s room?"

Killian swore. "Don’t ask. And save yourself some heartache and don’t go in there."

"So you feel better after your little brush with drunken behavior?"

"I feel like shit."

"That’s not what I was asking, Killian. Did the drink help?"

Killian nodded for Graham to hand him a towel. "Nothing’s going to help, is it?"

"Don’t think so." Graham followed Killian out of the bath. Taking a seat in a chair as Killian dressed, Graham decided to just tell him. "David ordered us out of the Thorns today. We laid in a course for Zenus."

Killian took a seat on the side of the bed and rested his head in his hands. "I thought we’d take longer making repairs."

"The new shielding makes it easier to avoid the Dark One and his goons. The Legion can only see us by actually viewing us, but sensors are now worthless."

Killian laid back down on the bed. "Emma and her damn shields. She’s too helpful by far."

"So we’re back on the journey."

"Fuck the journey. I want it over. Finished. I want her journey to fail, and to just live with the Dark One’s reign. And Emma stays with us. With me," he whispered.

"Killian..."
Killian looked at Graham. "This love thing. Does it make you selfish?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Then I’m in trouble because by nature, I already was selfish." Killian rubbed his stomach which still hurt. "She wants me to be careful about deciding to finally join with her. She’s afraid that it will only make things harder for me later."

"And you think...?"

"I think it can’t get any harder," Killian sat up and looked at Graham. "You said it usually feels good, this love thing?"

"Usually."

"Then why do I feel like someone is ripping out my heart? Why do I want to kidnap her and refuse to let her go? Why the hell am I willing to let the universe live in slavery just to keep her with me? Half the time, I feel like there’s a stranger in my body."

"Is it really bothering you?"

Killian struggled to find the words… something to make Graham understand. "I feel...alive."

Graham just shook his head. Love. Great big, unsolved mystery.

"If I could take it away, Killian...if I could give that magical injection you wanted before as a cure, would you take it?"

Killian laid back down with his eyes closed.

"No," he said quietly. "I wouldn’t give up a single moment of knowing her. She’s the first female I’ve ever talked to for more than a moment. First one that wasn’t just about sex. Maybe at the beginning, but that changed. I like the way she nestles beside me in sleep. The way she leans up and whispers her observations about something Will is saying in my ear. It’s like a private joke between..."

"...the two of you?"

Killian nodded. "Aye. I like the way she eats off my plate, or discreetly puts her food on it when she doesn’t want to eat something. I like arguing with her, because she lets me win sometimes, even when I’m wrong. I like how she..." Killian stopped and looked at Graham. "I’ve got to stop doing this, don’t I? But God help me, Graham, when did she become my best friend?"

"It only makes it harder."

Killian just groaned. "Tell me what to do."

"What does Emma suggest?"

"That I think about it - really think about it - and then just let us go on as before, and if it leads us to something more, then it does. And if it doesn’t, then that’s okay too."

"Can you live with that?"

Killian’s voice was tired and weary. "I don’t know."
Graham watched him sleep for a short while, and then left the room. He shouldn’t be surprised that Emma was in the outer room.

"How is he?"

"He’ll be better after some more sleep." Graham for the first time didn’t know what to say to the young woman who had become so much more than just a client. Emma was a real friend.

"I need you to do something for me," Emma said softly.

"Take care of him when you’re gone?" Graham answered with a resigned look.

"That, yes. And this." Emma handed him a vial of clear liquid.

"What is this, Emma?" Graham looked at the vial, and then at her.

"It’s a potion of sorts, something that will help if things get bad with him after I’m gone. It will effectively wipe out about a year of his memories, which will include everything involving me."

Graham handed it back. "No. I won’t."

"Graham, I can’t stand to worry about him being in pain."

Graham knew what she was saying, what she was trying to do. But she had no right.

"No. I’ll keep the drug, but I won’t use it unless Killian asks me to." Emma frowned at that. Stubborn Areenian. He wouldn’t. He’d see it as a sign of weakness.

"Graham, please."

"No. This was a gift, Emma. You might not think so because it is a painful lesson. But it is a gift. He’s evolved. David is evolving in his own right, and even Will is watching it happen and he wonders if he’ll ever get so lucky."

"Graham, he’s not used to this! It’s too much!"

"It’s everything. His people turned away from these types of emotions, but there has to be a reason that an unbonded Areenian male would suddenly find himself bonded to a woman who is outside his own species, outside everyone’s species. You’re an anomaly just as he is." Graham took the vial, and put it in his pocket. "Maybe it’s time for them to stop interbreeding. Maybe their gene pools need new blood, and this is just the beginning. I just know that knowing you has given him something he never had."

"What?"

"A sense of belonging, of feeling right inside his own body. Don’t ask me to take it away - not even to spare him the pain."

~*~

David knew the moment Killian entered the Bridge. The temperature dropped quite a few degrees. The cold fury rolled off his brother, and David didn’t need an open link to him to feel it.

"Why?" Killian demanded coldly.

"Repairs were over eighty-nine percent done, and with the new shielding..."
"You knew how I felt...what I feel. What were a few extra days?"

David turned in his seat, and looked at Killian. "We’ve got a contract with her, Killian. Repairs were almost complete, and close enough to finish over the next few days. She gave us new shield technology." David didn’t feel so great, and Killian looked just as bad. "She asked me to plot a course, and I had no reason to refuse."

"You could’ve stalled. For me." David swore at the look of betrayal in Killian’s eyes as he turned on his heels and stalked off the Bridge.

"Archie, take over. You’re in command." David quickly followed. Catching up to Killian, he pulled him around to face him, as Killian jerked his arm out of David’s grip.

"Bloody hell, David! Was that what last night was about? You knew! You knew we were getting underway, and last night was a pity party."

David sighed and looked at Killian. How the hell did they get so far from themselves? From their people? They were navigating foreign waters.

"Yeah, I knew three days before. I told her it would be three days before repairs were far along enough to get underway."

"You could’ve told me."

David began to push his hands in his pockets, but caught himself going into the defensive gesture. Keeping his hands on his hips, he stared his brother down.

"I could have, but I thought you needed a day off from the worry," David explained before clenching his jaw. "I didn’t know that she had translated it in two days, Killian. That, I didn’t know. She kept the location to herself through the battle, the Thorns, and all the repairs. How was I to know that it didn't take her that long to translate?"

Killian refused to relinquish his anger. "You could’ve given me a few more days!"

"I wish I could. But this isn’t just about you!"

Killian ran a hand over his neck. His bitterness apparent in his tone. "Aye, the fate of the universe, blah, blah, and blah. Heard it."

David grabbed Killian hard and shook him. "Not that either! Emma! This is about Emma. Stop being a selfish prick for a second and think of this from her side."

Killian calmed down for a moment, and waited for David to finish his thought. To tell him.

"You think this is easy for her? Before she met you, this journey was her entire life. Her entire life...all the life she was ever going to have! And somehow she learned to accept that. She was okay with it because all she had in the world was this mission. Her people, gone. Her world and home, gone. She spent over ten years shifted in time with ‘monks’, not touching or being touched. That world is nothing but a pile of ruins in the here and now."

"I know, she told me."

"Then try feeling it. She was prepared to die for the cause because there was nothing tying her here anyway. The journey’s end would’ve released her. Why do you think she’s so insane? So uncaring of the cost? So much so that she swam in sub-arctic waters despite being unable to regulate her
own body temperature? Risk being killed by sea creatures?"

"Single-minded. She sees nothing but the task at hand, and it's do or die at all cost." Killian smiled, just a few of the reasons why he loved her.

"Then she met us. All of us, but especially you. She has ties now, desires and dreams. Suddenly, there is a reason to not die. Every step she has taken with you has clouded her journey, made it more difficult for her. You’ve anchored her to this life, and every day that this journey is extended or is dragged out, she is further sucked in, and it makes it even more difficult."

"David..."

"I complied with her wishes because she’s in pain. She can’t fail and give up because it’s all she knows, all she’s ever trained to do. But you...you make her want to fail, to walk away." David pushed his brother away. "I put us underway as an act of mercy, to decrease the length of her suffering. You want to do something? Lighten her load, and just make these last few days happy ones for her. Go build some good memories, because soon that’s all you'll have."

Killian rubbed his face hard and looked at his brother. He was right, and Killian hated him for it. Selfish. He was thinking only of himself and what it meant to him. God help him. Killian cleared his throat. He had never cried in his life, and he refused to start now.

Cursing and feeling his own bad humor, Killian conceded to David.

"I hate this shit! I hate this fucking love crap. Who was the sadistic bastard that thought this up? No wonder our people got rid of it. It makes you selfish, and at the same time caring, and...giving. Bloody hell!"

Killian turned to leave, but he looked back at his quiet brother. "Don’t think I still don’t hate you for this."

David nodded. If he was in that position, he was sure he’d feel the same.

~*~

Killian found Emma working on a trans-warp conduit. It was out of phase. As she replaced the iso-linear chips, she ran a quick diagnostic, trying to put it back into place, but the locking mechanism was jammed. Coming up behind her, Killian reached around her, trapping her against his body as he used brute force to slam the conduit back into place.

"Emma..." Killian smiled at her, but there was no humor in his eyes. "Need some help? This job looks a little too much for you. Taking on more than you can handle again?"

This implication was clear. She was over her head in trouble, but this time she could feel the trouble was him.

"No," she held up a forestalling hand. "I can cover my own ass, and you will be there if I need help...which I don’t."

"I’m going to be too busy to play babysitter to you..." Killian was picking a fight with her, and he knew it. But somehow he was more comfortable with that approach.

"Hold it right there!" She poked him in the chest. "I can work just as well as you can. I'm even better at it most of the time. And before you start poking holes in what I was doing, please notice it was fixed! I would’ve gotten it back in place myself, thank you very much."
"Do I get to talk now?" he bit out his words. "I was just asking if you needed help. Nothing else. I wasn’t trying to start something." Bullshit. Killian spit out the lie easily.

But Emma was no fool. She knew exactly what this was about.

"Why don’t you get it? This is about me! None of you would be here if it weren't for me. I can't just sit back and let everyone else go down because of my fate. Not you and not my newfound friends. It's my future in the balance here. I can’t stand that so many have already died." She would not cry, she told herself. Weakness was not allowed in front of this man.

"You're right," he nodded briefly. "We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. You came running to us for help. You sought out the protection we offered. Now you want to cut loose because you're suddenly uncomfortable with it? Well, tough. Live with it. You're under my protection now. And that means I will protect you from yourself if I have to." Killian sighed. He was being nasty. "What happened to the Apollo had nothing to do with you, Emma. Nothing. It was about the Dark One looking for Regina. You’re not responsible for the damage or the loss. In fact, you saved our arses. Without you..."

"I don’t need thanks. It was you out there. I knew better than to let you run off all alone, like the big bad pirate you think you are. I can’t believe how much trouble you get into." Emma clamped her hands on her hips. "Face it, you need me."

"You're a bigger liability. If the Dark One learns of your existence, or what your intent is, there will be hell to pay." His eyes belied his anger.

Emma felt a thrill of triumph. She was getting through, maybe not the way she wanted, but she was getting a reaction. They should be partners, like he promised, but he couldn’t get past his protective male response.

"I trust you to protect me. But any excuse you can come up with for leaving me behind, I can throw back in your face," she shot back smugly. But her eyes flashed with fire, daring him to try.

"Oh?" Something dangerous glinted in his eyes, and his jaw clenched. She would find a way to follow him, just as he would have followed her if the positions were reversed.

"Oh!" she answered back, sidestepping him and seeking to leave.

She had to admit that she never saw it coming. Not now. Not here. Not in the middle of a pulse-pounding argument. Before she could blink, one of his hands had cupped the base of her skull, the other was at her waist, pulling her into a kiss.

His lips were hard and unyielding, like the man himself. The moment they sealed over her mouth, her chest tightened painfully and a shock of white heat centered low in her stomach. Killian groaned. This was what he wanted, but with them, there never seemed a direct approach.

She moaned into his mouth and immediately felt him push his advantage. His tongue swept to meet hers, hot and demanding.

Emma melted, wrapping her arms around his neck. She clung to him as the last sane and rational thing in this world. He was her anchor. Unwilling to let it be said that she couldn’t give as good as she got, she found herself pushing back; her tongue tangling with his. He tasted of strength, power, and danger. He was getting too damn good at this distraction thing.

His mouth left hers and she heard a small, whimpering noise just beyond the pounding in her ears. Was that her? She opened her eyes and looked at him. He was staring at her, the blue of his eyes
burning wildly. Hunger and uncertainty warred with each other in his gaze. She didn’t need to see
them; she could feel it, sense it. His emotions were rolling off him in waves, hitting her hard and
fast. Furious. He was furious with his own impotence, his inability to ultimately keep her safe.

She licked her lips, savoring the lingering taste of his kiss. His gaze was drawn to the gesture. She
reached up to touch his cheek, her fingertips tracing the ridge of bone there, loving the feel of his
rough stubble. His skin was hot to her touch. He closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath,
expanding his chest where he held her trapped against him. She felt his hold begin to loosen. His
uncertainty and fear hastily building a wall between them.

"Killian." Was that her voice, so thick and ragged? She didn’t want him to block her out, build an
impenetrable wall to keep himself from her. She’d battled too hard to lower her own walls. There
was too little time left to spend it fighting.

His eyes snapped open and he started to move away. Apology already in his eyes, on his lips.

She stopped his lips with her own before he could utter the damning words. Gently, aware of his
fears, her needs. A soft press of swollen lips to heated ones; a light stroking of her graceful fingers
against his tense throat; a yielding push of her slender body against his own. His grip tightened,
and there was a rumbling vibration in his chest. She felt it move through her. She pressed on,
tenderly suckling on his lips; first the top, then the bottom. He opened to her and she slipped inside.
Delicate touches against his palate, his teeth; a silky glide against his tongue.

She broke the contact to allow them both some space for breath. The air entered and left their lungs
in short little gasps. She had never been so drawn to anyone in her life. She'd never been in love
and felt the blood-tinged bitterness of one-sided adoration, or even the pain of knowing it would
end. Yet no man had ever stirred her soul as this one did.

None had ever challenged her, pushed her, or demanded more of her than this man. He was
constantly demanding and biting, unwavering in his devotion, and in great need to be loved. And
she had never wanted to brand herself on another's soul as she did with this man.

His forehead pressed against hers, his eyes level with her own.

"You don't want this." His voice was a rough rumble that sent shivers across her nerves. He hadn't
released her, though.

Emma nuzzled his jawline determinedly as she spoke. "Don't tell me what I want or don't want. I've
already made up my mind. It’s you that needs to decide how far to go."

"You're stubborn, sarcastic, and infuriating." His tangent ceased when her teeth closed over his
earlobe, tugging gently.

She flicked the edge with her tongue and released him. Her lips touched his ear as she murmured,
"Exactly. You wouldn't have me any other way."

He claimed her mouth again, effectively silencing her.

Emma felt the turmoil of his yearning just below the surface. She knew he didn't lose control often.
She wanted to see him shed his reserve of restraint and just be with her. It was part of the reason
she pushed him. To see the man he was inside, brought to the surface. If anger was all she could
stir, she'd settle for it. But given this glimpse of vehement desire, she no longer wished to settle at
all.

This is what she wanted. This is what she had to have.
His hand stroked up and down her spine, alternately crumpling and smoothing her leather top, the other hand wound through the soft strands of her silky blonde hair. Winding and binding them together. He gently drew her head back, and pressed his hot mouth to her silken throat, his tongue and teeth gliding over her skin, wringing another breathy moan from her. His touch was gentle, his caress almost hesitant. He was an enigma in that such a hard, demanding man could be such a shatteringly gentle lover.

She smoothed her palms down his sides, firm muscle and raw power rippling under her touch. Frantically, she tugged at his clothes, the need to feel flesh and muscle and bone growing within her, just like the hardening length she could feel through his leathers.

"This is in my way." She plucked at the front ties of his shirt.

He released her and his mouth left her throat. He took a step back and then pulled the shirt over his head. There was no hesitation now. Emma found herself looking at his chest, his chest hair as tantalizing as the rest of him. There was nothing soft about his body. He was so completely different from the man she'd expected him to be.

She itched to touch him. Her fingers twitched and she reached forward to brush her fingertips along one of the more jagged scars on his torso. It was faded, barely visible. An old scar that ran from his sternum to his shoulder, over his left pectoral. Her hand shook. What had done that? He told her once, but she could hardly remember her own name at that moment.

She leaned forward to press her mouth against it, feeling the coarse skin and hair against her lips, and the jump of muscle under the skin at the contact. She felt his pulse quicken. She wanted him. She wanted to feel him moving over her. She wanted to taste the sweat on his skin.

She felt his hands frame her face and she looked up at him. This kiss was soft and sweet, a gentle play of lips on lips. Their tongues dancing a slow waltz. They fought so hard, pulling back to protect themselves, but it always came back to this.

His hands slid from the side of her face, down her neck, her shoulders, unbuttoning and pushing open her snug leather top, sliding it off her arms to flutter to the floor. His fingers tenderly grazed the edge of the cropped lace, vest-like garment that covered her breasts, before he deftly removed it from her body, tossing it aside with her shirt. His palms swept up her sides, over her breasts, the thrilling shock of his calloused hands teasing over her nipples made her tremble.

Her own hands traced the definition of his shoulders, his biceps, feeling the strength there, the calm safety and sheltering comfort. No matter how she infuriated him, how she pushed or prodded, this strength was never used against her. Only for her. Only to protect her.

She felt hot under his intense gaze, as well as vulnerable and exposed beyond simple nudity. Neither of them had many hang ups regarding their bodies. It was as if he were the one who could see beyond the mortal body and into the secret heart of a person and not her. Did she unbalance him this much when she read him beyond words and actions, beyond what he tried to project? The bond they had forged unwillingly had left them both exposed.

His fingers hooked into the front ties of her leather pants and released the fastenings. Once there, his hands rested on her waist, just above the open waistband, his fingers curling around her sides, his thumbs making sweeping circles against her stomach. His hands were huge and warm and she became lost in a sensual haze as his thumbs stroked her skin into a fire. Her eyes slid shut and her head fell back. Her own hands drew designs against his shoulders, his chest, pausing to drift gently over his nipples. They were both caught in the emotions between them, one of seduction and need.
Slowly, she unwound her protections and allowed her emotions to slip silently through the contact, taking in his in return. Desire, thick and rich, swam through the connection. Anxiety? She frowned. That he wanted her was irrefutable. That he cared about her was undeniable. He was worried that without her, he would cease to care enough to survive. The stroking of his thumbs stopped and she felt suspicion, a hint of anger.

"What are you doing?" his tone was accusatory.

"Feeling you. Letting you feel what I feel." Her mouth turned down slightly. "Don't you like it?"

"It's... strange," he lied. It was unsettling. This very connection was what he had wanted all his life, but now...it hurt. It was too much all at once, knowing that long after she was gone, he would still feel her.

"Touch me." Her hand covered his, guided it up her side, over her breast. They both stiffened at the touch. She felt herself coiling as he touched her, the sensation of his warm hand on her breast pulled a thread within her body tight, the reaction shooting straight to her center.

He felt it, too. He felt what she felt, and she felt his reaction to it echo back. Everything was heightened in this state. Everything shared. She was aware of the softness of her own skin against his fingers, of the slight weight of her breast and firm resistance. He brushed his thumb over the aching peak and she gasped. The sensation was raw and almost painful in its intensity.

"My God..." His features were lost in concentration as he began to grasp the potential.

He, who had always known about the draw of a bond, was only now really understanding why it was so involving. His people couldn’t, wouldn’t break a bond even when settled with someone they despised, because the flow was too provocative and seductive...too sexual. All he wanted now was to touch it, to see and to explore the possibilities. Emma smiled at the realization.

"And I feel you," she assured him with a soft smile.

She traced the hard length of him through the leather, her fingers pressing hard against his flesh. It was almost auto-erotic. She felt her touch on his flesh, the involuntary buck forward.

Their clothes were hastily pushed aside. They paused to kiss and touch each new bit of flesh revealed, knowing what pleased the other. His mouth on her breasts made them both shudder. Her nails scraping gently up his thighs made them both pulse with need. The delicious friction of flesh pressed to flesh ignited them both. The gentle touches and tastes quickly became more fevered, less controlled. His teeth scraped her shoulder, and she was on fire. Her nails bit into his shoulders, and he was consumed.

She moved her hand down his front, and into his unbound pants. She wrapped her hand around him, and he almost burned her. Her body thrummed in time with his. She could feel his need and knew if she stroked him, it would all be over too soon. He grasped her wrist and pulled her hand away. Something about that slight restraint added fuel to a fire already burning out of control.

Their room, and more importantly their bed, was inconveniently across the ship. He looked toward the corridor they needed to take to get there once, and then twice. Putting their clothes back on and resembling anything decent was too much of an effort.

"Too far," she said, nipping at the tendon where his shoulder met his neck. "Here. Now."

"Here?" His voice was deeper, a gritty rumble in his chest as he tried to rein in his rampant desire.
She nodded with a small grin. "Now."

She felt his sudden decisiveness.

He pushed her back against the wall, a bulkhead, using his body to pin her there. Her shudder had little to do with the cold wall chilling her back, as his body heat fired her front. He held her wrists pinned above her head, the rasp of the coarse hair on his chest abrading her over-sensitive nipples made her cry out. They both felt what it was to be both captive and captor.

This loss of control, this submission, was like fine, dark chocolate in texture and bite, bitterly sweet. His mouth took possession of hers. His tongue coaxed and seduced, hers answering the challenge. One hand released her trapped wrists to stroke down her side, across her thigh, down the front of her unfastened pants seeking and finding her heat as he pushed her pants from her body. His fingers stroked her, the answering shock in him let him know when he found the response he sought. She arched against him and felt his heat warming her. She pressed forward again, loving the double shock of sensation coming from them both.

Now. Now or she would go mad! she thought, her whole body was trembling. On the verge. So close it was almost painful. She felt a tear escape. And a sob. He was close too, adding to her own frustration and need. Her wrists were free and he felt his knee press her legs apart.

Yes. Yes. Now. She raised her left leg, wrapping it around his waist, inviting him inside. He cupped her ass and lifted her to accommodate him as both legs wrapped around his center. Solidly trapped between him and the wall, trusting him to hold her. His hands automatically caught her, to support her as he bore her weight.

"Sex now?" she asked in a voice that sounded nothing like hers.

"Aye," he replied, his voice thick. He captured her mouth again as his hands cupped her ass, caressing her naked flesh until Emma felt like she was on fire. The bulkhead was cool against her back and ass as he pushed her up against it, his body hot and hard on her front. Emma wrapped her long legs around his waist. His strong arms pulled her close to him, the skin of his chest rubbed against her nipples, making them even harder as he pinned her. The head of his erection slipped and slid up and down the folds of her sex wetting itself, moving up against her clit and down to her ass.

Sound rushed in her ears and light exploded behind her eyelids as she moaned, "Do it, do it, do it!"

"Oh, fuck, yes. Yes, Emma. Yes," he groaned in reply, and slowly, slowly pushed his cock into her. The hard width slid into the wetness, stretching her open. Emma was being filled to overflowing by him, and she could barely stand it. There was some pain, but she didn't care as he pushed on, pushing her thighs further apart, making her take him. Wrapping her arms around his shoulders, she buried her face into his neck and held on.

He reached bottom, firmly embedded in her, and he began strong, steady thrusts inside her. He was so controlled, his movements sure and certain. It began to build in them again, tingles of feelings radiating out of their bodies, moving proximal to their extremities and back again, climbing higher and higher with each thrust.

Emma cried out, throwing her head back and hitting it squarely against the wall. She didn't feel the ache from her skull; all she felt was his cock thrusting up into her, again and again and again. The muscles of her sex clamped and contracted around him, drawing her closer and closer to the brink. Sweat drenched his muscular back, causing the grip she had on him to slip.

She groaned her pleasure as she accepted the solid length of him within herself. So full. So tight.
high-pitched hitching sound escaped her throat. She was drowning in him and she wanted no
rescue. They were hot-wired together. She felt his tenuous grip on control. She was a hot, sucking
clench around him.

Bonded as they were, she could feel this, too. She sensed something then, through the languorous,
sensual veil wrapped around her. At the edges of her perception, it was something within Killian. It
was an emotion, yet it was more. It was something undefined and strange, yet it called to her. It
was something that fit with her own mind, her spirit and her soul. Not completing, but
strengthening. It was as if a puzzle piece had suddenly snapped into place. Yet still she couldn't
define this thing, this connection. She had no time, nor will, to consider it.

He was moving inside her and remembering her own name became a monumental task. This was
ecstasy. This was insane. This was bliss. This was reckless. This was passion. This was consuming.
This was... everything. She was having sex with Killian for the first time, up against the wall in an
access tube within the power conduit array. It was so absurd, but so completely right.

His head was pressed against her shoulder; his breath was hot gusts of air across her throat. His
whole body surged and flowed under her hands, over her body. It was an exquisitely sensuous
dance both as old as time and as new as the moment. She could only clutch at him, thrusting back,
accepting the now frenzied slap and glide of their bodies coming together. Each thrust rubbed
against her clit, stimulating that nub of nerve endings almost to the edge of where pleasure
bordered on pain.

His growls of pleasure became louder and louder, culminating in a shout as he thrust one final time
into her, coming hard. The spasms from his cock finally drove her over the edge with him, and
Emma set her teeth into his collarbone and held on as the beginnings of her orgasm danced and
tingled throughout her body. Unable to hold it back any longer, she cried out, her head snapping
back, painfully, against the wall as the world imploded, coalescing into the tight, fierce clenching
and pounding where they joined; where he spilled into her with sharp gasps of his own.

Everything was loud and piercing. It took both of them a few moments to realize that it wasn’t
them. It was the *Enchanted*. She was at full alert. All hands were called to general quarters and
battle stations.

Killian used his hand against the wall to hold them up, as he slowly slid them to the ground
refusing to remove himself from her. Settling her in his lap, he searched for his shirt. Feeling
around him, he finally found his discarded shirt to hit the com badge.

"David, what the hell is going on?" Killian was shocked to hear his voice so husky. Holding Emma
tight against him, he rubbed her back as she nuzzled sleepily into his neck, waiting for David to
respond.

"Full alert, Killian! Get your ass to your station on the Bridge!"

"Just fucking tell me!"

The exasperation in David’s voice was apparent. "We just entered the Laterus System. It’s lousy
with Legions on active search. Your station, Killian! That is not a request, but an order!" David
disconnected.

Killian felt Emma pull away from him. Looking down at her, they made eye contact, their
connection still strong.

Zenus.
Happy Super Bowl Sunday!

I may have been born and raised in California but we are a die hard Patriots household thanks to my dad's East Coast upbringing. So today it's all about the Pat's.

On another note, it's update Sunday as well. Thanks for your continuing support of this fic and hello to new readers. Thanks for the kind, enthusiastic comments, they mean so much to me.

Ultraluckycatnd, I can't express enough how grateful I am that you took the chance to beta this for me, its been unreal to 'meet' you and connect with a fellow CS fan.

Thanks.

Another fairly lengthy chapter here, and if you know my writing, you know how I enjoy creating this long ones. Hope you guys enjoying it.

Chapter 17 - Lachesis: she who draws the length.

Killian made it to the Bridge, pulling Emma behind him. Taking his station, he checked his security scanners. Weapons were already online, and Leroy nodded to him as he gave a report.

"Check the battlements and full armory," Killian instructed. Leroy nodded and took off, smiling at Emma who was standing silently next to Killian.

David turned in his chair when his brother entered the Bridge. His eyebrow raised at the sight of Emma there as well, but he held his tongue when he noticed her hand held in his brother’s. "Princess, we’ve entered the Laterus System."

Emma nodded and looked at the opening star system and a full web of sensor ships littering the space before them. "I see that. What's the time to Huoxon?"

"About eleven hours at impulse," David said as he read a report on his palm computer. "It appears the shields are holding. We’ve yet to be detected."

"You will want to oscillate the shields on revolving frequencies as the amount of scanner ships increases. They are less likely to break the shields. Also, you're visually apparent, so taking cover in a traveling fleet will help decrease discovery."

David nodded. "Archie, there’s a prowler. Pull back to starboard and bring us into her shadow, but avoid her wake."

"Aye, Cap."

Marco, the communications officer, was frowning as he listened to incoming chatter and
intercepted messages. "Cap, I’ve got subspace chatter about the Dark One." David turned in his chair. "The Legion fleet has instructions to scan and test all women for anomalies."

Regina cursed under her breath, as her eyes locked with David’s. So, the Dark One finally knew about Mary Margaret, or at least suspected.

"Cora." Regina said quietly, venom in her voice. "I will kill her one day."

David nodded. "I’ll make sure you do. That I promise you." David sat back in his chair and frowned. "What do you want to do?"

"Nothing. Let them look. Mary Margaret is protected with that cloaking device of Emma’s. Ruby should not be a problem. Though if he knows she is here, he may speculate Mary Margaret isn’t far.

David nodded his head, accepting the truth of that statement.

Regina shut her eyes in weariness. "That must be the reason he set an ambush for us in the Doyrilia system. He knows I’m protecting her and he wants to search the ship."

David looked at Emma. "With added security, it’s going to be hard to get you down on the planet without papers. They’ll be scanning everyone and checking papers. No matter how distracting you and Killian can be at times, I don’t think you can be that distracting."

"I’ll have to get your Honorable," Killian said simply as if it was a done deal.

Emma shook her head no at Killian’s suggestion. "It won’t work. You’ll never locate her."

"I was there last time. Just show your necklace thing, say a few words, assure her I’m not a ‘Princess’ and bring her back. Easy."

"Except you’ll have no papers for her either. So how are you going to get her on board?" Regina pointed out.

"Damn." Killian thought about it for a moment. Then turned to Emma again. "You can open one of those corridor whatsits, like you did on Zion! Maybe from here to the planet, and then back."

Emma shook her head. "I can’t. I’m not powerful enough to transport that distance, and off world. I’ve only been able to move from one point to another on an established world."

David just picked up his coffee and thought about it. "Okay, we’ve got eleven hours to come up with a plan, barring our getting caught in the interim. So we’ll brainstorm and come up with concrete plan for when we approach Huoxon."

Emma stood on the Bridge, watching the fleet of the Dark One’s ships actively scanning the area.

"Why here? Why now?"

David came to stand beside Emma, smiling to himself as he heard Killian bitching about his sensors being offline. Killian worked best when things broke, and David suspected that was because Killian tended to break them.

"What are you saying, Emma?"

"He came here, to the Laterus System for a reason." Emma turned to look at the silent man. He was stroking his scar unconsciously. "Coincidences, I don’t believe in them."
"Neither do I," David agreed. It was too significant that the Dark One would be searching for them in this specific area.

Regina had silently joined them and she studied the fleet of ships as well. Emma started and suddenly looked at her.

"Cora. It’s Cora," she said.

David frowned at the two. "How can you be sure?"

"The matrix...it bends." Regina said softly, and she asked Emma, "You saw it, too?"

"Yes."

Regina and Emma shared a look of Understanding, while David turned and watched the hunt.

"The wind changes, thunder sounds, and the tree is felled."

Emma just nodded. "Hunter and prey, it’s hard to say."

"It is understood, and the wind changes. That which was protected becomes exposed."

Emma nodded again and made a tsking noise in her throat. David looked at her, back at Regina, and then at Emma again.

"You understand that gibberish?"

Emma just shrugged. "Not really. But the mind understands before the consciousness does."

Regina made a sound in her throat almost like a chuckle as David flopped his arms and left them.

Regina smiled as David left, watching him go. Suddenly her eyes became serious and disturbed.

"What is it that you know?"

"Not much." Emma looked at the space in front of them. "It worries me."

"Indeed." Regina grabbed her arm and forced her to look at her. "How does Cora know?"

Emma just shook her head. "Unless she found the Honorable, I don't know. But my instinct tells me that she looks for you, for Mary Margaret, but because I'm here as well, the disturbance is greater."

"We are bending the matrix?" Regina asked in surprise.

"A ship doesn’t see its own wake."

Regina swore. "So no amount of protective shielding can keep Cora from following our trail."

"I think it’s worse than that."

"Explain."

Emma discreetly looked over at Killian still bitching and working at his station. David was busy as well.

"This Universe has been unstable for a while. The Dark One saw to that when he killed the Eminent Ones. But it’s been evolving for a long time."
"Emma..."

"This ship. Look at us. Areenians...they share a mental bond with their brothers...correct?" Regina nodded. "But that bond goes on to include their mate. And Regina..." Emma double checked Killian’s location. "...that bond isn’t ordinary. It touches the Understanding."

Regina looked at the brothers. Killian and David. They’ve had a way to feel each other since she had saved David’s life with Liam’s heart, since she was forced to bond Killian to David, for both their survivals. But the actual mating bond was a mystery to outsiders.

"How much do they touch?"

"Watch Killian." Emma said turning her back to the room and looking out at the search ships. Regina peeked at her and was shocked when she unfastened her top and ran her hands up her torso, touching her breasts, and... "Regina!" Emma whispered adamantly, "Watch Killian and then David. Not me!"

Regina turned, and frowned when suddenly Killian stopped working and looked at his hands, flexing his fingers, and then, just as suddenly, he was searching for Emma. It was David that amused Regina. The moment Killian looked up, David did as well, frowning at his brother, and then at Emma’s back.

"Stop it! You are going to get into trouble," Regina said quickly.

Emma just laughed. "Story of my life."

Regina swore, and swallowed a laugh. "Too late. One horny Areenian bearing down fast."

"Hide your women!"

Regina laughed and Emma quickly fastened her top. Killian grabbed her arm and dragged her into the conference room, not bothering to see whether the door shut or not.

"What the bloody hell was that?" he demanded.

"What?" Emma tried to feign innocence.

"That...you! You were feeling yourself up on the bloody Bridge!"

Emma rolled her eyes. "I was adjusting myself. I got dressed very hurriedly. All things weren’t exactly… right."

"Emma..."

"Killian." They both turned to David’s voice from the door. "I need you on the Bridge."

Killian nodded and walked to the door, but pointed a finger at Emma. "Behave."

Regina watched Killian and David leave, and came into the room. "You are driving him insane."

Emma hopped up on the conference table and checked out the fastenings on her top. "I refuse to be held accountable for a mental state that has been deteriorating long before I came on the scene."

Regina just laughed and sat next to her. "So you are joined."

"Don’t know what that means exactly, but if you mean do I feel him? Oh yeah. And I’m picking up
"static from David as well."

"So they bend the matrix, too."

Emma nodded. "Yes, and Graham."

Regina grimaced. "It will not take much for my mother to track a ship full of empaths and mentally challenged rebels, will it?"

"No."

Emma fidgeted. She was slightly uncomfortable. "Still...Regina, Cora was here before we were. How? Or better yet, why?"

Regina thought hard, and long. Why? How could Cora know?

"Emma, your Honorable Ones...do they bend the matrix or connect to the Great Understanding?"

"In a way, yes. They resonate. That’s how they can hold the crystals."

"She’s tracking your second gem."

~*~

"Will, I can’t shut it down!"

Will swore at his assistant, and tossed himself down a ladder from an upper level.

"Bloody hell! What caused the injectors to freeze?" he demanded.

"I can’t pinpoint the area, but they're frozen solid. The plasma coolants are overloading and are now offline without the injectors."

Will swore again, and called the Bridge. "Captain, we’ve got a problem!"

David’s voice came over the com system. "What’s the problem?" The words ‘this time’ weren’t said, but were obvious in his tone.

"My coolant injectors are offline, frozen like hell. We’re going to be leaking plasma in a few moments."

David looked up and turned to his Operations officer. but Emma interrupted him.

"David, plasma venting will give us away."

The Operations officer nodded, agreeing with Emma. They couldn’t be scanned, but a plasma trail would pinpoint their position.

"Helm, plot us a jump out of here in case we need it." David hit his console. "Will, we can’t be leaking plasma today. Get it under control or you’re fired."

"Great - could use a fucking vacation." Will swore at someone and acknowledged. "Understood."

Emma looked at David one more time. "We can’t leave without my next gem. Cora is tracking her. If the Dark One..."

"Emma, we can’t take on this entire fleet. Your ship is still down and even with your new technology and shields, we’re outgunned. I can’t..."
"I know." Emma did know. David’s first concern had to be the safety of his ship and crew. Emma headed for the door.

Killian stopped her. "Where are you going?"

"To do my job. I’ve got to get my Honorable, so that means we can’t vent the plasma."

"Emma..."

"Killian!" David called to his brother. "Let her go. See what you can do, Emma. I’m sure Will would appreciate the help." Emma acknowledged David and was gone.

"Dammit, David!"

"I don’t want to hear it, Killian. Do your job, and let her do hers." Killian’s jaw clenched, but he took his station again snarling at anyone that got in his way.

~*~

"What is it, Will?" Emma asked as she entered Engineering.

Will’s voice swam up from beneath the grill walkway. "Frozen plasma injectors. I can’t find the reason they’re frozen. It could be some fried wiring from the battle that got missed, or something else."

"Has Belle looked at it?" Emma asked, dropping down to the same level.

Will nodded. "She’s searching the schematics."

"How long until the plasma vents?"

"Core temperature is rising. With the coolants offline, it will be critical in about twenty minutes. Then the failsafe will kick in, and it will vent the plasma."

Belle came to join them. "I can’t find the problem, but I’ve got it narrowed down to three possibilities." Belle pointed out three main junction areas on the pad in her hand. "If there is a failure in any of these relays, it will cause a safety protocol to enact and the vent will be tripped to keep it from overloading."

Will looked at the three positions. "Belle, you take the upper deck access 3C, I’ll cover the lower one in cross-section 6B." Will looked at Emma. "Could you take the one below the forward command module?"

Emma nodded, grabbed a repair kit and was gone. Will looked at August. "Go with her," he quickly said, before sending a small group after Belle, then he took off as well.

Belle was the first to make her destination. Quickly spanning out, the crew she was with checked all the leads into the plasma injector core.

"Will, it’s Belle. 3C is clear."

Will and his crew were finally inching forward into the area he needed to check. It was still a tight fit due to previous damage. "Understood, Belle. Head back to engineering and contact Emma. See how she and Gus are doing."

"Understood."
Will quickly scrambled from the access tube, and nodded for his men to start running diagnostics. The area was clear.

"Emma, it’s Will. You make the forward access area yet?"

Will swore when Emma failed to respond.

~*~

"Princess, this panel is hot." Emma placed her hand next to August’s, and quickly took it away. It was too hot.

"We’ve got a fire in the well." Emma took her tools and quickly opened the access panel. "Go around to the far side and take some of the crew with you. Start rewiring the junction wires to route around this module. The injectors must have tripped because of the fire."

Emma turned to look at a man standing next to her. "Can you find us something we can use to douse the fire?" He nodded and was gone.

"Will?" Emma waited. No response. "Gus, I can’t connect to Will."

The man tried his com badge as well. No response. Emma looked up at the paneling above them. It was a heavy alloy, made to withstand a forward blast into the overhead command module.

"I think the paneling is blocking our communicators. Go forward and contact Will, and then see about that rewiring. I’ll put out this fire."

"Princess…"

"Gus, you know the ship better than most. You know where to start the rewiring. We’ve got no time."

The man nodded, agreeing with her assessment. He cringed when the panel came open and a firewall was apparent. The last thing he saw before he went up ladder was Emma and a few crewmen entering the forward compartment.

~*~

"Will?"

"Gus! What the hell! Our positions are clear. What's going on down there?"

"We found the problem. The forward compartment is on fire. We're dousing the flames now. I’m rewiring the plasma injectors to compensate."

"You’ll need to not only rewire, but within the forward compartment is a Y-switch. You need to throw the junction and reboot by priming it, then turning it back on."

"That might be difficult. The forward compartment is toast. I’m not sure how much damage the fire is causing."

"I’m on my way." Will grabbed another kit, along with fire gloves to handle the hot components.

"Princess!" Gus coughed through the smoke. A few of the crewmen were outside the compartment coughing and trying to get air back to their lungs. He grabbed one and shook him. "Where's the Princess?"
The man just pointed at the burning room. Doom had a name. It had a master. Gus could feel the Commander’s anger already. Rushing into the compartment, he stopped a crew member trying to leave.

"Where the hell are you going?"

"I’ve got to get the fire extinguishers for plasma. This fire is a plasma leak."

Gus swore, and spied Emma over the flames working on a panel not yet engulfed.

He searched for the Y-switch, but couldn’t find it. Making his way to the other side, he came up next to Emma.

"Princess, you need to leave."

"In a minute. I’ve almost got the internal rewire done. But there should be a triggering switch, a primer."

"Yes, Will told me that we need to throw it for the rewire to work."

Emma nodded, and finally spied the red handle she was looking for. It was melting, so it had to be hot. Great, sure it was red. Everything she touched was red.

"Found it!" Gus saw what she was reaching for, and stopped her.

"It’s too hot! You’ll burn your hands!" Emma looked around. They needed something... anything.

"How much time till the plasma vents?"

Gus looked at his work pad. "Four minutes."

Emma closed her eyes. She was too tired and too sore for this crap! Pushing her tools into Gus’s hands, she quickly took off her leather shirt and folded it up. Grabbing the burning handle, she pulled the switch, and then tried to prime the pump. Gus’s hands came around her, and he added his strength to the job. Together, they moved the handle three times back and forth before resetting the switch to an open position.

As soon as it was done, Gus picked up Emma and headed for the way out. She stumbled and protested about leaving their tools, but Gus kept the resisting Emma on a one-way trip to fresh air. The plasma was burning hot enough to send spewing burning metal pieces after them.

Will stopped in his tracks as Emma came through the access panel with Gus pushing her through. She was coughing violently, and her hands were burnt. The dark soot was marring the white skin of her body, as Will noticed her in nothing but a small scrap of material...something lacy, and her leather pants.

Will swore and tossed air units to Gus and Emma. They both staggered to the corridor and collapsed to the ground breathing hard into the units.

Gasping between breaths, Gus said, "Plasma fire. We rewired and threw the switch." Gus went back to breathing.

Will nodded, and winced when he picked up Emma’s hands and turned them over. They were severely burned. A plasma fire burned hotter than a regular one, and even though she used a piece of leather, the heat had burned right through. Gus’s hands looked bad, too.
"Belle, are the injectors online?" Will swore again when there was no response. Emma pointed upward at the heavy paneling and alloy plating.

Fire teams finally showed up. Will stood and took Emma under one arm and Gus took the other.

"Get those fires out, and someone find out why the damn internal sensors didn’t pick it up!" He then led Emma and Gus in the direction of Sickbay.

~*~

Killian was running scans on the different ships in the fleet, comparing them with their databanks on known ships. Suddenly he dropped everything and stood back from his panels with a sharp shout of pain.

David stood up at the same time, reading his brothers pain. Killian was standing there looking at his hands.

"What is it?" David asked as he moved to Killian’s side. "Killian?"

"My hands. They’re burning!" His hands were hot to the touch, and had a pinkness to them. Killian and David quickly looked over his station trying to find where he received the burns.

David shook his head. "Nothing."

Killian hit his com badge. "Emma?"

There was no answer. David moved back to his station and called for Will. Will didn’t answer either.

"Engineering."

"Captain. We’ve got the injectors online, and..."

"Where is Will?" David interrupted whoever had answered his hail. There was a pause over the com.

"The Lieutenant went to control a plasma fire in the forward command module. He’s been out of contact since."

David looked at Killian sharply. "We’ve got a fire onboard? Killian?"

"I’m on it." Killian suddenly hit his console again. "Dammit! Internal sensors are offline again. Leroy, I thought you said this was fixed?"

"Sorry, Commander. It keeps shorting out." Killian just snarled. He knew they should’ve stayed in the Thorns longer. The whole fucking place was falling apart around them!

David reached over and responded to a hail from his command chair. "What?"

Graham’s voice came over the com. "I’ve got Will and a few of his crew in Sickbay for plasma burns. Just thought you’d like to know."

"Graham..." David was interrupted by Graham.

"One of them is Emma." Killian swore and David nodded. He motioned for Archie to take the Conn as he and Killian left the Bridge at a fast pace.
"He’s going to be mad," Graham said simply. Will just nodded at this understatement and decided to take himself off to Engineering before Killian showed up. Kissing Emma on the cheek, he left at full speed.

"What else is new?" Emma winced as Graham injected her hands and suddenly, they were numb. "How is Gus?"

"About the same as you are." Graham watched the blistering pustules as they broke and wept. Shaking his head, he ordered his assistant to prepare a regeneration bath for both Gus and Emma.

"Graham, I don’t want to..."

"Emma, the burns are deep. Too many layers of muscle below the skin have been affected. Regeneration will repair the damage. You’ve also got some burns on your back, a few scrapes, and your lungs are hashed."

Emma just nodded in acknowledgment. She had felt the cinder pieces striking her back on the way out of the forward compartment, and the husky deep tone to her voice followed by coughing attested to the damage to her lungs.

“There’s more,” Graham added, a look of embarrassment on his face. “There are contusions on your body that weren’t caused by the fire, or anything regarding the fire.”

“Huh?” Emma grunted, her brows furrowing. Emma followed his glance to a spot just above the lace of her breast support and suddenly her face turned almost as red as her hands. "Oh! That!"

"You two seemed to have gotten a little...heated?"

"Oh, it was definitely hot. There are plasma fires, and then there are plasma fires!"

Graham laughed. "Spare me the details. My sensors say you’re a little tender in places more...personal."

"Sore," she agreed with a slight smile.

"Well, regeneration will take care of that." Graham looked at her under lowered lashes. "So, you and Killian finally...um..."


Graham almost made a comment about Killian and Emma doing the deed for the first time somewhere so inappropriate, but then he remembered that he was talking about Killian and Emma. A bulkhead sounded perfect for this couple.

Graham tried to appear nonchalant. "So....when?"

"Why?" Emma asked, narrowing her eyes at him in suspicion.

Graham just shrugged. "No reason." He could tell Emma wasn’t buying. "Come on, Emma. I’ve got a hundred credits riding on..."

"A bet? This is about a bet?" Graham tried not to appear so sheepish. Emma looked at him and pursed her lips. "How long in regeneration?"
"Twelve hours."

"Two."

"Emma..."

"Two, and I’ll give you all the details of place, time, and location." She narrowed her eyes, "and nothing more!"

"Eight," Graham bargained.

"Four."

"Emma, I don’t care about the damn bet. The minimum is six."

"Done." Emma squirmed inwardly at the thought of that damn cold regeneration fluid all around her.

"So when will you give me the details?"

"When I come out in six hours," Emma smiled. Graham might have two hearts, but she had watched him play poker, and he wasn’t above cheating.

~*~

Emma and Gus were already sedated and nestling in regeneration baths by the time Killian and David made Sickbay.

"Graham, where is she?" Killian demanded as soon as he entered.

Graham didn’t even try to stop Killian; he just pointed to the rear regeneration room. David watched his brother stride through the door with a frown on his face.

"How is she?" he asked.

"Not good. The burns on her hands were too deep for me to fix. It was either regeneration or she would have lost them. The deep tissue damage was unbelievable. Necrosis was already starting, and major circulatory was almost gone."

"Gus?"

"About the same, but not as bad as Emma’s. She took off her shirt and used it to touch the components caught in a plasma fire."

David just swore. She was insane! Just as much a crazy loon as Killian, and together they were borderline psychotic.

"Just tell me she’ll be okay," he asked, dragging his hand wearily over his face.

Graham nodded and went to get them coffee. "She will. I’m depending on her people having good regenerative powers. I’ll take her out of the bath in six hours."

David looked at the door through which his twin had disappeared, and spoke in a low tone. "Graham, you need to check Killian’s hands, too. He felt the pain when hers were burned."

Graham nodded. "That’s to be expected. They bonded."
"How is that possible? We don’t mate outside our species."

"You choose not to mate outside your species. There’s no evidence that you can’t," Graham answered wisely.

David looked down at his own hands. Mary Margaret. He had felt her stroke on his skin as if it were his own fingers.

David stopped thinking such things and his face closed down. "What’s happening to us?"

Graham passed David some coffee. "Something glorious. Freedom. Chances to not be bonded forcefully into a relationship, but to have free will to choose that bond with someone who doesn’t necessarily touch your mind…but your heart."

"I can’t do it. It unsettles me. Whatever this is, I can feel it raging in Killian." David looked in his coffee. "I don’t want it."

He was lying. He had never wanted anything more, and that was where the fear was. The fear that he would feel too much, too deeply, if he gave in to it.

~*~

Killian stood over her, watching her sleep submerged in the fluid. She looked cold…and alone. Checking on Gus quickly, he went back into the main sickbay.

"How long does she have to stay in there?"

"Six hours." Graham pulled out a chair at a work table. "Sit. David tells me you felt it when she burned her hands."

"Yeah I did. Hurt like a mother bitch!" Killian made a face. "Still does."

"Uh huh. Nice language. Tells me everything I need to know." Graham grinned knowingly as he held Killian’s hands and studied them. They were still red and hot to the touch. Turning them to the side he could see the blisters rising.

David saw the look on Graham’s face, and grew concerned. "What? What is it?"

"Just a second." Graham pointedly looked at Killian. "You stay there."

Killian just made a face. Wonder what bug got up Graham’s butt. Killian was quiet, thinking too deeply about all the questions he had, all the things he wished he could talk to Liam about. This love thing was driving him insane. "Is this what being bonded with someone feels like? What being in love feels like?"

He didn’t even realize he’d asked the question out loud until David laughed bitterly. "How do I know? What the hell does that word even mean?"

Killian shrugged. He didn’t know either, not enough to actually find words to describe it. All he knew was what he felt was true, and that it consumed him.

“We had sex,” he said, opening himself to the man he called brother now. "I felt her when we..." Killian looked around the room. "I wasn’t very careful."

"Did you hurt her?"
"A little… I think… then it was lost in everything else." Killian’s voice went even lower and more private. "I wish Liam had told me, warned me that it would feel like that, that it would…be…everything."

David just shook his head. "How or why is this happening to you now? It should’ve just been sex. Something that takes off the edge, that’s it."

"It wasn’t. It was…more, so much more." Killian went silent as Graham came back with a large bowl of fluid.

"Put your hands in this."

"Regeneration fluid?" Killian looked at David confused; and shrugging, complied.

Graham just sighed. It was bizarre. "I don’t know how it happened, but Killian has burns. Real ones. At least second degree."

David felt like a damn broken record. "That’s impossible!"

"So you told me," Graham sat down again. "I thought the bond was mental...a sensation of feeling, but not really physical."

"It is. It was," David said. Killian remained silent, resting his hands in the fluid. They were already feeling better.

David looked at Killian and frowned. "How much do you really feel her?"

Killian shook his head. "I can’t describe it. I can feel the fluid covering her. I can feel her rising hysteria, even in sleep. And I know she feels cold." Killian was silent for a moment. "She’s afraid to sleep too deeply because dreams will find her."

Graham stopped a technician and asked him to turn up the water temperature on Emma’s regenerative bath, and to give her a sedative in her support line.

"With Kathryn... I could feel her but barely, and our shared sensation was exclusive to sex. This is unprecedented," David said quietly.

Killian rolled his eyes. "Terrific. A freak again. Can’t even get a simple bond right."

~*~

Graham sat watching the inhabitants of Sickbay, occasionally going to check on Emma. She was still agitated. He’d had to sedate her three times, and each time she was on the verge of emerging from the sleep state. Gus was already up and gone but his burns weren’t nearly as severe as Emma’s. She had also inhaled more smoke. It took some convincing to talk the man into leaving his medical bay. Gus had every intention of standing guard over his princess, but Graham ousted him to his personal quarters for rest.

"How long?"

Graham snorted to himself and looked at the woman now sitting up in the regenerative bath. She had broken through again.

"Not as long as I’d like," Graham said as he disconnected her from the support lines, and helped her from the bath. "What does it take to get you to stay in one place?"
Emma shrugged, shivering in a full body white thermal stocking, soaking wet. "No clue. My parents used to complain about my restless nature as well. I don’t think I ever slept an entire night undisturbed."

Emma paused. That was no longer true. She slept undisturbed with Killian.

"Come on. I’ll set you up in a warming bed. It’ll take off the chill and dry your clothes."

"Maybe I should just go..."

Graham shook his head no. "You’re an hour early, and Killian is coming back for you. Don’t make me call him early."

Emma just grimaced at Killian’s name. In her head, she was practicing all the phrases she knew he would use - all the bitching. 'Can’t take care of herself.' 'Taking risks.' Blah. Blah. Blah. Heard it before.

"Have we reached Huoxon?"

"I think ETA is four more hours. They found a supply ship to cruise under. It appeared to be heading for Huoxon."

Emma took the cup of hot liquid from Graham gratefully. After taking a sip, she lost that gratitude quickly.

"What is this?"

"Tea?" Graham suggested.

"Like I said, what is this?"

"You’ve been spending too much time around Killian. His humor is deadly and contagious."

Emma took another sip. "I didn’t realize that the Commander had a sense of humor."

"That’s the point. He doesn’t." Graham said smiling to himself as he checked her vitals, and hands. Killian did have a sense of humor, but at best, it was dry.

Emma silently watched as Graham looked at her hands. He was gentle, careful not to cause her unnecessary pain. His face was an open book, honest and trustworthy, and yet she couldn’t read any emotions from him.

"So why aren’t you married, settled down, and making babies?"

Graham paused, just for a moment, then shrugged. Emma almost didn’t catch his reaction.

"No sane woman would have me," he added with a smile as he gathered up his supplies and passed them to an assistant.

"Oh, I don’t know, doctor. You seem to be about perfect."

Graham laughed at that. "Only for my sins."

"Honestly. Why are you touring the galaxy with this band of rebels?"

"It’s difficult to explain. But they know me, and I know them. They don’t expect me to be
something I can no longer be, so they are the company I choose to keep."

Emma watched him closely. "You're married."

Graham once again avoided her eyes. "Technically, yes."

"What happened?"

Graham just smiled ruefully at her, and sat down. "I happened."

"I don't understand that. So far, I would say you're damn near perfect."

Graham looked away and settled back in his chair. "Not true. Not on my world. I was born with two hearts, an anomaly. It wasn't unheard of, just rare. But all empaths born with two hearts become healers."

Emma didn't comment. Sadly, she listened.

"With two hearts you have twice as much pain to feel, twice as much compassion and understanding, and twice as many opportunities to have them broken. And when they're broken, you feel it twice as much."

Emma was sorry she asked. "It was the war, wasn't it? I imagine it would be hard on an empath."

Graham laughed bitterly. "More than you know. By the end of the war, I was broken. Lost. Killian, David, and Will refused to leave me to my own devices."

All his protective shielding learned from childhood was gone, and he felt everything, all the time, every day. It damaged him, took him to the brink of insanity and despair.

"You went back to your home world?" Emma saw his eyes, and knew.

"For about two weeks. By that time, I was projecting my emotions, all the horror I'd seen, and my wife of ten years avoided me like the plague. No one could bare to be near me."

"The horrors of war?"

Graham nodded. "It stayed with me. It broke my barriers. At night when I slept, my wife would get to share my nightmares, and all the horror I had seen through the war."

"So you and your wife are..."

"There is no divorce on my planet. Just enumeration of events and a type of annulment. My two hearts made it impossible for me to let go of those men I watched die. Not even for my wife could I learn to not be who I am."

Emma looked down at the floor. Was there no end to the amount of suffering the Dark One started and wreaked! The Dagr'du was his stronghold, his power. Emma closed her eyes. Lately she had been faltering from her path, but Graham had reminded her why it was important.

"I'm sorry, Graham. Sorry for you, and for all those lost."

Graham hugged Emma quickly. "Don't be sorry for me. This ship is a walking refuge for people who lost to the Dark One. Some like you, their entire worlds or races gone. Others like Killian have no place in their race, and some like me, who could no longer sit on a planet and pretend that everything was alright."
"Gus?"

"Him, too. He watched his world burn, and after the war was over, went home to help rebuild. But
war changes men. It hardens them. He couldn’t settle. The rage was too great...the anger. Finally,
he returned to the stars and he found us."

"I’ll do it, Graham," she said quietly after a moment.

"What?"

"I’ll do what I must to bring some balance back to this universe, or at least give you and the others
a fighting chance."

Graham suddenly realized what Emma was saying. She was talking about her mission.

His story, along with the others, made her feel guilty. For however many moments Killian had won
her away from her destiny, Graham had just sent her back.

"Emma, I didn’t mean..."

"What is she doing up?" Killian asked from the doorway.

Graham and Emma looked up, both appearing guilty, as if caught. Killian’s eyes narrowed and he
waited patiently for an answer.

"What the hell is going on?" Killian waited two heartbeats. That was patient enough.

Emma just smiled and jumped down from the warming bed. "Nothing you’d be surprised at.
Graham was having a hard time keeping me in the regeneration bath, so he finally gave up. He was
checking my hands."

Killian just snorted. Emma staying still? She wiggled like a live wire.

"Is she okay?" Killian asked Graham, not trusting Emma to give him an honest answer.

"Pretty much healed. They’ll be tender for a few days," Graham said with some regret in voice.
Emma was as firmly on her destined path as ever.

Emma smiled at Killian, and Graham was amazed at the softening of Killian’s regard as they
stared at each other. "Did you come to pick me up?"

Killian shifted on his feet, a finger scratching his ear, and looked at Graham quickly before
answering. “I was planning on being here when you woke.” Killian’s discomfort increased so he
added in a gruff voice, “I know what a handful you can be.”

Emma’s eyes narrowed and a mischief smile crossed her mouth. Leaning in close to him she
whispered against his skin, "Yes, you do."

Killian bit back a retort. She was purposely pushing his buttons in front of Graham. Emma trailed
her hand down his body, and went to change back into her clothes, or what was left of them. Killian
just watched her go, thinking of all the payback he was going to extract from her when he got her
home.

Home? Killian frowned at that thought.

“Killian,” Graham tried to get his friends attention. "Killian."
"Yeah, what?"

Graham grabbed Killian’s arm and forced him to look at him. "Do me a favor."

"Sure. Whatever."

Graham made sure Emma wasn’t returning. "Take it easy on her."

That got Killian’s attention. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, sex...take better care for a few days."

Killian crossed his arms and bit back his anger. "What’s going on? Maybe you could just tell me, or explain how my physical relationship with Emma is any concern of yours."

"I repaired some contusions today." Killian looked confused. Graham rubbed the back of his neck. "Dammit, Killian! Couldn’t you at least have found a bed? She had bruises all over her back."

Killian felt a little guilty about that. The last thing he wanted was him to have caused her physical pain, to mark her body in such a way.

"Graham..." Killian paused. What did he want to say? "Is she okay?"

"The regeneration bath took care of it. But try not to be so rough for a few days."

Killian nodded. His history was bad. The women he knew were a fast slam, or else basically them doing everything. He never had a reason to treat sex as anything more than...sex. "This is part of the ‘love’ thing, right?"

"Yes. Big part." Graham desperately wanted the man out of his medical bay. "I can’t believe you didn’t feel her pain," he said, not really wanting to discuss Killian’s sex life with him.

"I think that was before we made the full connection. I felt something during. It was..." Killian just shrugged. He had felt it but it had been quickly covered up by everything else and the sensation was lost. Once again, there was no language for it.

"Hey, you ready to go?" Both men looked at the door where Emma was standing, and surprisingly they both looked red and embarrassed. "What’s going on?"

"Nothing."

Emma looked at them in speculation as when they both denied it at the same time. "Fine. Whatever. Can I leave now?"

Killian finally seemed to realize what she was wearing. His face clouded over, and Emma just braced herself for his reaction. "Where the hell is your top?"

Emma looked down at her body, and shrugged. "I suspect it’s ashes somewhere below the forward command module. I believe leather burns very evenly and fast."

Killian just made a harsh note under his breath and quickly removed his own shirt and tossed it at her.

"Put that on. I think you need to practice opening those corridors directly to our bedroom. It could become really convenient."
"Yeah, I’m sure David would love all the sensors going insane as we wreck his subspace warp field, and alert the fleet to our position just so we can walk into our bedroom in a wink of an eye."

Graham decided to intervene, and cleared his throat. "You just need to be careful with the hands. They’ll be a little tender. If you experience any more blistering, come back."

Emma looked at Killian after acknowledging Graham’s instructions. "You coming? Or did you need to see Graham about something?"

Killian made a face. "What? No. I’m coming."

Emma glanced at him from time to time on the way to their quarters. He was silent; brooding. She expected him to start ranting and raving immediately upon leaving Sickbay, but he surprised her.

Once in their quarters, she headed straight for the bedroom, dropping his shirt along the way. He absentmindedly picked it up, along with all her other clothes she was shedding along the way. Emma was nothing if not consistently untidy.

"Okay, I can’t take it anymore!" Emma turned to look at him, her back to their bed. "Just say it! Tell me that I was irresponsible and I should’ve taken better care of myself. Tell me that I’m untrustworthy to care for myself, and..."

Killian pushed her down to sit on the bed, and picked up her hands. Kneeling down in front of her, his face was quiet and dark as he stared at them. The palms were still pink and tender to the touch. The regenerated skin was soft and supple, almost translucent, lacking the usual toughness from use.

Emma shut her eyes, and moaned under her breath when he bent his head and kissed her palms, and then rested his face in them. Uncertain what to say or do, she watched his bent head. Tender. He was being tender and it was unnerving.

"Killian?"

"I felt them burning," he told her, finally looked up at her. "The moment you were burnt, I felt it. Emma, I received second degree burns, too."

Emma moved her hands from him, and framed his face. "Is this normal? For your people?"

Killian shook his head. "No. At least I don’t think so. Nothing about you and me seems to be normal."

Killian shut his eyes and rested against her when she shifted closer and moved her hands into his hair, her mouth finding his ear, then the side of his neck.

"Can you feel me, Commander? Do you know what I’m feeling?"

"Yes," he said softly.

"Then you know that I think you have way too much clothing on right now." Killian smiled at that. "How long before we reach Huoxon?"

"Just over three hours. David told me he would put a call through when we reach the outer system."

"Shouldn’t you be on the Bridge with all the security and activity?"
Killian nodded. "Normally, yes. But David wants me off duty until we get there. I’m taking you down to find your newest Honorable. David thinks he has a solution to your lack of papers."

"Three hours?" Emma appeared to be thinking, then she said softly against him, her lips just touching his. "Hardly enough time to do it right, but we can just practice for later."

Killian laughed, and stood to pick her up, pushing her back on the bed, his mouth on hers the entire time. He joined her on the bed as his hands moved along the long, lean lines of her body, and she, in hardly a moment of time, had his pants open and gone.

It had only been a few hours since they were last together, but it felt longer. Killian moved away from her and looked down at her, searching her eyes. The clearness and simmering green looked at him in trust, and Killian groaned at the evident lust in her gaze.

Hunger. It felt alive. It was consuming.

Pausing, he frowned and tried to pull back. Graham’s words gave him pause, made him try to stop the bond from pulling him under. But as usual, Emma wasn’t cooperating.

"What’s wrong?" she asked with confusion, her tender palm cradled his jaw, a thumb brushing against the whiskers covering his cheek bone.

"Graham said you had some damage from...before...that I should be more careful with you."

Emma groaned. That explained the hesitation, the tenderness, and concern. She didn’t want him that way. It was unnatural, against his nature, and she suspected, against her own.

"Graham should keep his nose out of what doesn’t concern him."

Killian closed his eyes as she moved under him, her skin rubbing against his own, and her leg moving up the skin of his inner thigh. Her mouth was sucking on his collarbone.

"Your health concerns him," he breathed out when she lightly bit at his flash.

Emma just shrugged. "What happens between us concerns nobody but us. I like you just as you are. The roughness, the ravenous need, the gotta have you right now or die feeling. That’s you, and that’s what I crave." Emma reminded herself to have a stern talk with Graham later.

"Maybe we need to slow it down and take a little time to make sure you're not going to get hurt."

Killian hated Graham. Bastard.

"I am hurting, Commander. I’m hurting when you’re not you with me." Emma softly ran her hands over his body barely applying pressure. "I could do this." She took him in hand and when he automatically pushed forward for a firmer purchase, she hissed and quickly removed her hand.

Killian moaned. "Emma..."

"But my hands are too tender to do that," she said with a sly smile. Killian moaned again and looked down at his body where her hands were resting. He had forgotten. "But you could do it," Emma took one of his hands and moved it down to where she had just held him. Emma whispered in his ear, "I could watch."

Killian laughed at that. "You could, but I thought you didn’t want me doing that in our bed."

"Circumstances change." Emma took his hand again, and directed him to move over her body. His
hand went low to stroke her, to move inside as his leg settled between hers, opening them to give him more room.

Emma moaned. "Tell me what you feel."

"You. I feel you..." Killian’s mouth found her breast, as his fingers moved in her body, stroking her. He smiled at how much she responded to him.

"No, tell me what you’re feeling."

"You’re hot. Tight." Killian paused. "Wet."

"Then take me," she instructed.

Killian smiled wickedly as he pushed her hard against the bed, settling between her legs. His hands ran up the sides of her body to push her arms up over her head, holding them by the wrists while being careful of her hands.

He lowered himself on her, capturing her mouth in a searing, demanding kiss. His mouth lowered to her right breast, teasing the nipple with his teeth and tongue, causing it to pucker to a hard point. Emma arched her back, trying to push more of her breast into his mouth and wrapped her legs around his hips. His hardness was pressed against the slick folds of her sex. Emma pushed up into him, trying to force him to penetrate.

He moved down her body, licking at her skin as he went, until he was kneeling between her legs, spreading them so she was open to him. His long fingers slid against her wetness, igniting something in the core of her that had begun to build. Emma’s gasps filled the room as he stroked her, back and forth and back and forth and back and...oh! He pressed two fingers into her, lubricating her as he stroked them in and out, slowly, slowly, his thumb caressing her clitoris. Emma frowned at the sounds of moaning until she realized it was her. Killian moved his mouth down to where his fingers were, fucking her with his mouth as he tongued the nub. She moved under his mouth and fingers as he added another digit to open her even more to him.

"Look at me," he growled. "Watch me." His gaze captured hers, and as she watched him, he withdrew his fingers and sucked them into his mouth, licking the wetness from them, savoring every drop.

"Oh, please," she moaned. "Killian, Killian, please—"

He plunged the fingers back into her, stroking a little harder now. The sensation building within her climbed sharply, almost leaving them both behind. Emma grabbed onto the feeling and held on for dear life.

She could then feel his lips and his tongue on her, entering her, sucking her hard. Fuck! His tongue - it was alive! He was licking the sensitive nub of her clit and his rhythm was slow and steady; up and down, up and down. Emma’s hand went to his head, begging him to move faster and faster. Her fingers moved through the locks of his hair, winding her fingers tightly and pulling them, forcing his mouth closer.

"Please!" she begged in a breathy moan.

His pace picked up, faster, but still steady and strong. Emma could feel his rhythm in every muscle in her body, and she moved in time with it, pushing herself harder and harder against his mouth, demanding more of his attention. Her thighs were wrapped around his head, trying to anticipate his swirls and strokes, trying to ride them into more pleasure. His hands clutched and squeezed her
hips and buttocks, in an attempt to hold her still.

Emma could feel the telltale flutter inside, letting her know that she was close. She tried to speak, wanted to speak, to let him know that she was close, but her brain could only form keening noises. Instead, she threw her head back and let out a long, low moan and squeezed her thighs tighter around his neck…

But he stopped. Killian didn’t finish her. She was under him, writhing and dripping wet; on the edge. He unwrapped her legs from around his head and shoulders, taking his tongue away, and moved up her body rolling to his side, showing her, finally, what she was in for. His cock was hard as he leaned into her, taking her mouth in a long sucking kiss, sharing her taste with her. His hand took hers gently in his and circled his cock.

He was magnificent. Broad, strong shoulders, chest defined and muscular with just the right amount of hair, and more than a hint of definition to his abs. The hair around his navel lightly trailed down his stomach in the softest of down to the inverted triangle at his crotch, from which his erect cock bulged hard, long, and thick, and well-shaped. The head was purpled, excited, and wet from his pre-cum. She wondered if she could handle his girth enough to ride him. She hoped so.

Moving one hand down, he looped his arm under her back to pull her pelvis closer to him as he joined them. She gasped when he unapologetically arrowed his cock tip into her slit. She was so hot and wet, he glided into her with ease. He watched his cock stretching her delicate tissues until he was lodged in her at half-staff.

He glanced up when he heard her moan.

“Are you sore?” he asked thickly.

“No. No, it feels so good.”

It was all the permission he needed. He let the fever overtake him once again. He’d denied it while she’d shuddered beneath his hand and her abundant juices anointed his finger. But, bloody hell, he wasn’t going to hold back a second longer. He wanted to see pure lust shining in Emma’s green eyes, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to deny himself a moment longer. He gathered her wrists, holding them down on the pillow above her head. He reasoned this was to protect her damaged palms, but in truth it was because he wanted to own her, to have her at his mercy. He drove his cock all the way into her and grunted with sublime pleasure. She surrounded him like a tight, wet fist.

He withdrew and plunged back in, grunting in supreme satisfaction. He kept one hand on her wrists and with the other, he spread her wider, driving deeper, hitting bottom. The thought of that sent him into a frenzy of lust. He ached with the need to come, to fill her completely. He began to pound into her like a piston going at full throttle. She may look delicate, but bloody hell she was strong, strong enough to take what he was giving her and returning it with frenzied passion. Her hips moved in a fluid, forceful synchrony with his strokes; her precision such that his eyes rolled to the back of his head. In a desperate bid to win one more second of this wild ecstasy, one more moment of control, he grabbed her hip and stilled her frantic bucking. His biceps flexed hard as he brought her to him, again and again.

This was every bit as decadent as he’d fantasized for tortured days and nights, watching himself plunge into her repeatedly. The fantasy was topped a hundredfold when he heard Emma call out and he felt a rush of liquid heat around his cock. It was too much. He let go with a guttural groan and his orgasm scalded him.
A pleasure-infused moment later, he fell over her, burying his face in her sweat-shimmering neck.

“You’re gonna to bloody kill me, love,” he accused with no real heat, busy as he was trying to recover from being turned inside out by cyclonic sex.

She breathed heavily. He moved, withdrawing from her with a slight wince, and settled next to her on his side and rolled her into his arms, her back to his chest. She curled against him, still craving his body, with her hair everywhere. He brushed a silky curl away from his mouth. Bloody, glorious nuisance. He grabbed a handful of it and pressed the mess of golden waves to his lips and nose. It was like holding something soft and alive against a warm, silken curve. He couldn’t decide which sensation he liked better: her skin or her hair.

It was only a half hour later when they were surging hard and fast again, mating without stopping or pausing. Caught in the storm, they rode each other hard. When they finally fell off their bed, Killian hitting the floor first with Emma following, and they both laughed as they became tangled in the sheets and each other.

~*~
Happy happy Wednesday Guys! Hope you are all having a lovely day.

Thanks for the influx of comments and kudos after the last couple of chapter. I'm super stoked to know you are all enjoying this story.

Ultraluckyycat, you know you are loved and appreciated so I'll say not more on that for the moment.

Hope you all enjoy this chapter, let me know :) - Psst - I'll consider all reviews a birthday gift. *wink*

Chapter 18 - Not What They Expected

The communication link was an unwelcome sound. Emma sat up from the floor and rested her arms on the bed to look at the offending noise. Killian came up behind her, his mouth on her shoulder.

"Ignore it," he mumbled against her soft skin. It couldn’t be three hours already! Emma laughed as he arms came around her, holding her firmly against him. "I hate that bloody thing!" It continued to buzz. "Why do you think I sleep on the other side of the bed, away from it?"

Emma looked at him and pinched him hard, smiling at his reaction. "A gentleman would’ve insisted on sleeping closer to the door to protect me."

Killian just snorted. "Fairytales, love. You want a gentleman?"

Emma suddenly became serious. "No. I want you, pirate."

"Hey, our work is legal… now!"

They laughed and then Killian’s eyes darkened. He pulled her back to the floor with him. They rolled around kissing passionately, trying to ignore the world. But the person on the other end of the com wasn’t giving up.

Emma finally untangled herself from Killian long enough to get back on the bed and reach out for the communicator. Killian followed her, his length and reach was longer. Slapping her hard on her naked ass, he laughed at her indignant huff, tucking her against his body while finally answering the page.

"Aye?"

David’s voice came over the com. Killian groaned. Of course it was David. He always spoiled everything.
"Killian, wake your ass up and get to the Bridge. We just orbited Huoxon."

Killian and Emma stared at each other. No way! Three hours had flown by, and now it was time for them to work. Emma extracted her limbs from Killian, and rushed into the bathroom to start a shower.

"Understood. We’re on our way." Killian quickly followed her. Joining her in the shower, he moaned his approval as the hot water hit his skin. He was sore in places he had never felt before, and then some. Gathering her close, he reached around her and took her hands in his to turn the palms up.

"Still hurting?"

"Just a little. My ass hurts more." Emma looked back at him. "I can’t believe you just spanked me. My own parents never did that."

"They should have. You...you definitely could’ve used the instruction."

Emma smiled at his tone knowing he was teasing her, but suspecting at some level he wasn’t. "So, does spanking me turn you on?" She tipped her head to the side and bit her tongue to stop from laughing.

Killian just moaned, and turned her back into the spray of the water washing her and himself quickly.

"Stop it. We’ll get into my favorite kinks later, love," he said as he lathered her body with the standard issue soap gel. Pausing, with his hands on her hips and pulling her back to press against his front, Killian whispered in her ear. "But for your information, everything about you seems to turn me on."

Emma snorted. "Yeah, from what I hear, I shouldn’t be flattered. Your reputation proceeds you, Commander. I understand watching paint dry made you horny and ready to rut."

Killian’s tone bellowed in disbelief. "Who told?"

David noticed when they finally made the Bridge. Handing over his chair to Archie, David ushered them into the conference room. Will was already in there, drinking coffee and giving orders over a com link to engineering.

"Took you long enough, Killian. We were going to send out a rescue party," Will joked. "For Emma." Will smiled wickedly as Emma blushed and avoided his eyes. "But then, I’ve see the lady toss you around in the gym and figured if she was captured, she wasn’t needing rescue."

"Will, I don’t have time to beat you bloody right now, so how about someone tell me what’s the plan," Killian said gruffly as he lowered himself into a chair.

David came to take a seat after pouring himself some coffee, and passing Emma one. Manners. It was the one thing he had that no one could take away from him. And he liked Emma. Killian? Killian just pissed him off most of the time. He could get his own.

"We entered Huoxon’s orbit. It’s lousy with Legions, so we were forced to hold a position over one of its poles. That means getting into the city of Zenus is going to be a long journey on the ground. You could take a transport to the planet and then travel there, but you’ll be stopped by Legions and
they’ll want to know how and why you have no clearance papers.”

"You said you had a solution to Emma’s lack of papers," Killian probed.

David nodded, and looked up as Regina joined them. "Kathryn’s papers. Emma can alter her dampening emitter to read Areenian and pretend to be Kathryn."

Killian had forgotten about Kathryn’s papers. What was shocking was that David still had them. Standing up, Killian decided to stop stealing Emma’s coffee and get his own. Along the way, he stopped to refill his brother’s cup, opening the link between them. They stood staring at each other over their coffee cups.

"Emma can use the papers and retrieve her ‘gem’ by opening a distortion field," Regina said.

Emma frowned. "I can travel maybe twenty-five miles at the most. But it drains me, and I need to concentrate on a set point to open the field. And I’ve never been to Zenus."

"Can you concentrate on the Temple of the Honorable?" Killian asked.

"Yes, but it’s a place with no physical attributes for me. I have no feel for it, but I can try. Once I’m there, I can move us out easily enough to where we leave the ship because that point is fixed. But I can’t promise the trip in. The best I can do is try."

Will sipped his coffee. "We’ll still need papers for your Honorable. While we’re at it, we should get papers for your other two, Belle and the last one. It’ll make transporting them easier, and if by some bizarre twist we actually ever get scanned or boarded, at least they appear normal."

"They are normal." Emma reminded Will. Each of them came from an established world with its genetics already known. They lacked papers because the Priest in the Temple kept them safe.

"Not normal enough, Emma," Regina said softly. "They resonate in an unusual manner, just enough to bend the matrix. Enough to alert Cora."

David nodded. That’s why the place was swarming with Legions. Cora was directing them for her Master, the Dark One. Too many people on the ground would only increase their chances of being discovered.

"Killian, you and Emma will go retrieve the Honorable. Will will hit the seedier bars and find a person who makes fake papers. I’m sending only the three of you. The less exposure, the better."

Killian agreed. He’d have left Emma as well, but they needed her to open the distortion field, unless... "Regina, can you open a distortion field?"

Emma stopped him. "Don’t even think of leaving without me! This is my job. And I hired you to do yours, so stop it!"

Regina smiled slightly. "She is right, Killian. More than likely, the Priests will not turn over their charge except to her, and I have no control over whether I can or cannot open the distortion corridor. It’s a limited thing for me."

Killian cursed under his breath and accepted the inevitable. "Aye, fine. But this operation goes by the numbers. We’re in and then out."

Will shrugged. "I could go with Emma, and Killian could get the fake papers."
David laughed. "No. That wouldn’t work. Killian tends to piss people off at a glance. They’d just shoot him immediately. You? At least you look like you belong."

Will was offended. He didn’t look shifty, like the dregs of the universe. Sure, he once bet on his mother’s life, but it was actually Liam and Killian’s mother, and it wasn’t like he really expected her to die or anything. Not that he could imagine a person strong enough to take that woman down. Still...

"It seems to me that not only am I misunderstood, but I’m misrepresented," Will whined. Killian, David, and Regina just looked amused. So Will appealed to Emma. "You believe me don’t you, Princess?"

"You stole three credits from me at the gaming table the other night."

"Oh! That’s not true, lass. I thought they were mine."

"They were in my pile of credits. They didn’t just walk to your pile on their own."

Will looked belabored and indignant. "It’s hardly my fault your pile spilt over into mine."

"I was sitting on the other side of the table!"

David stood up. "Then it’s agreed. Killian and Emma go to the Temple, and Will goes to rub elbows with his long lost cousins in the seedy underbelly of Zenus."

They left the room with Will bitching under his breath about needing a better class of friends. Emma just patted his shoulder in comfort.

~*~

The drop was quick and fast. They took Killian’s runabout, Jolly Roger, which had recently been fitted with new reflective shields thanks to Emma. Moving from the frozen polar cap, they maneuvered to the interior of the larger land mass, heading for the capital city of Zenus. Killian kept the transport low and fast, close to the treetops to avoid visual sighting.

They set down in a deserted place about six miles outside of the city. Emma passed Will a handful of Legion-pressed credits to pay for the papers, and they quickly headed out for the city. Killian established a meeting place with Will, and worriedly watched him walk away.

"What’s wrong?"

Killian just shrugged. "I hate Will going alone. He’ll get the job done, just god only knows what trouble he’ll get into while he does it."

The lightbulb went on as Emma finally figured him out, or at least as best as she could. Killian was a worrier about those most important to him. Suddenly, she felt flattered he seemed to be most protective of her. Grabbing him, she kissed him hard and with lots of passion.

"What? What was that for?" Killian asked when he was able to breathe again.

"Just because," she returned with a smile. She spotted a nice, ordinary-looking man and went to acquire directions from him.

"Because, huh? She can because me any day, any time," Killian mumbled as he waited, keeping an eye out for Legions. It didn't take long to spot them. They were stopping people left and right for
"I know where the Temple is," Emma said when she rejoined him. Killian just nodded and grabbed her arm, leading her away.

"Let's go. Fast. There are too many Legions around here for my liking." Killian led her down a back alley, but then paused. "Where exactly do we need to go?"

"The Temple of the Honorable is at the top of the city’s highest hill. He said we couldn’t miss it. It’s sort of a center focal point."

Killian just closed his eyes and sighed. Of course it was. They quickly took the back alleys as they worked their way to the center of the city. The closer they got to the Temple, the more Legion patrols they had to avoid.

The Temple was swarming with troops. Emma looked at Killian and shrugged. After all, how much fun would it be to just walk in and leave?

Finally, their luck ran out.

"Halt! Papers!" They stopped at the sound of a voice behind them. Slowly removing his papers, Killian watched as Emma did the same. They turned to look at two Legion soldiers. Passing them their papers, neither spoke.

"What is your business here?" The man read both their papers and looked them over. "Areenians? You’re a long way from your sector."

Killian smiled slightly. "We’re on furlough from the Legion cruiser, Sitari. Our leave is two weeks long."

The Sitari isn’t in this sector," the man said suspiciously.

"She was rerouted. We’re to meet them in transport."

"And the woman?"

Killian pointedly ignored Emma. "She’s my bonded-mate."

Emma just snorted and looked away, bored.

"You’re not his bonded-mate?"

Emma stared the man down. "Hardly. He’s my mate. My family is held in higher regard than his. He married up. That makes him my consort, not the other way around."

Killian forgot himself for a moment. "Fuck that! I didn’t marry up! My family is one of the First Families on Areenia. Bullshit! We’re equals, love."

"Ha! Name only! Where are your ancestral grounds?" she retorted, turning to him and planting her hands on her hips. Killian opened his mouth to retaliate, when the Legion soldier stopped them.

"What is your business in this area of the city?"

"We’re going to the Temple of the Honorable."

"Services?"
"No. We’re renewing our marriage vows." Killian said at the same time Emma said, "Marriage counseling." They looked at each other and shrugged.

"Which is it?"

Emma smiled at the man. "On our world, marriage counseling always comes before renewing the vows. It’s a requirement."

"Renewing the vows is stupid."

"It is not!" she returned indignantly.

"No one on our world gets divorced. Now the marriage counseling I can understand since I have to eat your cooking."

"My cooking! Ha! You poison yourself on a daily basis, and no person can stomach that gruel you produce. I’d rather eat mugrot root then eat your boiled mackerel. The least you could do is try to learn to cook decently!"

"And you cook?"

"I cut up the vegetables very nicely, thank you. That stew you made the other night would kill a moose." Emma just shook her head, warming on her topic of critiquing his stew. "Why can’t you make something other than stew? What is it with stew anyway?"

"I like stew!" Killian yelled. "It’s better than all those vegetables you toss at me. What the hell is wrong with meat?"

"Vegetables are better for you."

"They make you fart!"

"Your stew makes people fart - from both ends!"

"A little gas never hurt anybody."

"Unless they sleep with you and are threatened with a slow, torturous death. Genocide is a capital offense, pal."

The Legion quickly shoved their papers back in their hands and almost begged them to go seek therapy at the Temple. Killian took Emma’s hand and led her up the steps.

"You really hate my stew?" Killian asked her as they climbed the stairs to the Temple.

Emma stopped at the door, and before opening it, kissed him tenderly. "Let's just say that I like you despite it."

Stopping in the door, she quickly laid her weapon on the ground and pulled off her boots. Standing in bare feet, she waved her hand over the sacramental waters in the sanctuary, and Killian heard chimes sounding in the background. Killian waited for the strange Priests to arrive like they did in Aylosa.

There was no response. Emma waved her hand over the water again, and this time Killian noticed a glow of iridescent white on her hand. Frowning, he looked at her, but remained silent.

"Killian?" Emma said quietly.
"Yeah, something is wrong," Killian acknowledged. He drew his weapon, and circled the sanctuary, careful to not cross the Crest of the Honorable on the floor into the inner sanctum.

Emma picked up her weapon and circled the other way, careful to stay on the fringe and out of sight, keeping tabs on Killian. They found the Priests in the back room. All of them were kneeling in silence as a figure paced in Legion robes, wearing the emblem of the Order of the Eminent Ones.

Cora.

"I know that you are hiding her! I can feel her. Where is she?"

None would speak. Cora nodded to a soldier who backhanded one of the Priests. Still, no one spoke or lifted their eyes to make contact. Killian pulled his weapon tightly to him, and quietly checked his energy reserves and levels. He set his weapon to kill mode, but Emma put her hand over his and shook her head no.

Placing her weapon in the small of her back, she nodded for Killian to do the same. "No blood can be spilled in the Temple, Killian. Follow me, but stay slightly behind."

Emma did a quick shudder as if she was getting into a role, and walked into the room. Killian swore under his breath and followed her.

Emma face screwed up in confusion as she took in the scene, and she looked taken aback. "I’m so sorry! I was looking for the Priests. I rang twice, and..."

The Priests all slowly lifted their eyes and saw the amulet Emma wore around her neck. They quickly lowered their eyes again.

Cora turned and looked at Emma, her regard dark and unfathom. She sensed her power, and it confused her.

"Who are you?" Cora demanded.

"No one. My husband," Emma indicated Killian slightly behind her, "and I came for our wedding counseling and to renew our vows. We had an appointment."

Cora moved closer, and Emma refused to flinch. This woman was much darker than Regina. Her demeanor was evil. She was as tall as Regina, equally regal, with dark hair and a smile that held no warmth. It was her eyes that caused the blood to still and congeal. They were black emotionless orbits carved in her head. And whereas Regina was kind and charming, this woman was pure poison.

"You move the air. The grass blows to the force of the wind," Cora said, looking cryptically at Emma. There was something about this girl that confused her, puzzled her.

Emma just shrugged. "We’ve been told that before. My husband and I have a special bonding, unlike others of our world. It transcends the mental to the physical."

Emma removed a knife from her waist, and the Legion guards turned their weapons on her. She calmly slashed the side of her arm, and Killian made a sound of pain, as he grabbed his own forearm.

"Interesting." Cora moved closer to Emma. Cora could feel power in the girl before her, but she was unable to breach her mind. Killian was different, but all she could feel from him was anger and irritation. "Well, as you can see, the Priests are busy today. You’ll need to reschedule."
Emma smiled politely. "I'm sorry. That isn’t possible." Killian watched as Emma’s hand came up, the same pure light he had just seen emanating from her hand pulsed again and suddenly, Cora flew across the room as if felled by a force too great to withstand. Emma quickly turned to the guards and did the same. Killian looked at them in shock and confusion, as they lay unconscious on the floor.

"How did you...?" The energy blast was unlike anything he had ever seen before. It was as if she pushed the fabric of reality forward in a pulse.

"I told you. I can do some things," she said with a casual shrug. Emma quickly went to the Priests. Her legs were wobbly, and she could feel the energy drain. Soon she would be too tired to carry her own body weight, and she still needed to open the distortion field back to the Trinity.

The Priests stood slowly and looked at Killian and Emma. The head Priest came forward.

"You are The One."

Emma just frowned and shook her head. The One? Before she could act, Killian’s actions caught her eye.

"Killian! No!"

Killian was pointing his blaster at Cora, ready to shoot and end the woman’s life.

"No? Regina says she can track us. We kill her now while she's defenseless, and it's over. The Dark One loses his Eminent and Regina absorbs more power. Though, I’m not sure she’s ready for that yet."

Emma rushed to his side, and grabbed his arm. "No blood can spill in this Temple. And if you end the life of an Eminent One, one of the few remaining Eminents, this fabric in space will shift and tear. We cannot!"

Killian looked at the woman and swore. He had twice witnessed what happened when an Eminent died. It was why they were now protected. Lowering his gun, he looked at the downed woman, and took the opportunity to kick her in the shins.

"Next time..."

"It’ll be Regina. Only Regina can kill Cora. She’ll need to bleed her power first." Emma turned to look at the Priest. "She came for the Honorable?"

"Yes. They didn’t know her, but somehow that one knew of her."

"Well, that’s a nice pickle."

The Priest nodded and asked. "You seek knowledge?"

Emma remained staring at Cora. "I seek enlightenment in the House of the Honorable."

"Your journey is long?"

"My journey is too long. I seek the one that draws the thread."

Killian watched as the group of Priests blended into the background. He watched as Emma dropped to her knees and bowed her head. Once again, somehow that position worked for him.
"The path is set. If you can walk it, then your way is clear."

Killian watched as Emma quickly stood and handed Killian her weapon and knife. She shared a glance with him and was gone.

"The path is for The One. Why do you not go?"

Killian looked at the man, and then after Emma. Looking down at where the Legions and Cora laid unconscious, and then at his own weapon, Killian just made a face.

"Not this time, mate. I'd rather cut off my own balls, tie them to a stick, and swing them about my head than walk barefoot and defenseless in this place. I'll just babysit."

"Why do you not seek the higher path?"

"My dashing nature, maybe? What's with all you Eminents, Priests, and crap, speaking in tongues? I'll let the princess seek enlightenment for us both."

The man looked at him. "You walk in the shadow of The One?" He looked at his brethren. "The shadow does not exist without the physical body. What you seek is already within."

"Aye, whatever. I'll just keep an eye out for that shadow thing." Killian frowned at the man. They must have dictionaries or something so they could understand each other. "When these jokers wake up, they're not going to be too happy with you and your silent mates. You know that, right?"

"The journey has passed. We walk our own path now."

Killian didn’t get it, but he understood that Emma’s removing the Honorable left them without anything to do. "Aye, guess your problem is now ours? All we need is another untouchable woman to cloud the issue."

They bowed away, and Killian looked at them for a moment before looking into the main Temple, all the while watching for more Legions. Looking was a bad thing, especially when suddenly, there they were. A nice patrol entering the sanctuary.

"Bloody hell, Emma," Killian swore and left the room, shutting the door in the hope it took a little time for them to find their unconscious buddies. No blood in the Temple? Fuck that. Killian drew his gun and merged into the shadows.

Emma walked forward between lines of candelabras to stand in the middle of a circle of lit ones. Slowly circling, she held the medallion she wore around her neck in her hands, slowly releasing it to open her palms out and upward.

A wall moved to allow the figure to emerge, and in the dim light stood a woman wrapped in full cloaks of red. She stood in place and then suddenly moved, almost in annoyance. Her voice was light and held reverence.

"Are you the Princess?"

"I am. And you are..."

"Mulan." An exotic woman came forward, shedding her red robe to reveal an outfit of red leather pants and vest beneath. "You’re not what I expected. Younger. Now, let's get this damn crap over so I can finally have a life."
Emma stood silently, staring at the young woman in horror, when she heard Killian calling her name.

"We’ve got to go. Killian is calling us. Legions have entered the Temple."

"I didn’t hear anything." Emma grabbed the woman hard and dragged her from the room. "Is there going to be a fight?"

"Shush!" Emma said as she pushed them into an alcove as Legions moved through the Temple.

"Can’t you just blast them? I thought you were the Protector, the Savior?"

"No blood can be spilled in the Temple!" Emma saw stairs, and quickly pulled Mulan up them with her.

Killian, who saw them exit the inner sanctum, made a sound of irritation as he watched Emma pull the woman in dull red up the stairs. Bloody hell! *Not up the stairs, love!* And the red? Might as well set the Honorable on fire and put up signal lights!

Killian took out two soldiers as they passed, careful not to kill them, just make their day a little less pleasant. Pursuing Emma, he swiftly followed her up the stairs.

When he came out on the upper landing that opened to an upper balcony, a hand circled his throat. Emma.

"Sorry," Emma said with a cheeky smile and released him immediately. "I thought you were a Legion."

"What, my smell?"

"No, all the bloody noise you made coming up the stairs."

"I was stealth-like, almost as eerie as a jungle predator."

"Right, stealthy." Emma took her weapon back from him. They could hear Legions below, and some starting up the stairs.

"What the hell made you come up the damn stairs, love?"

"They were there?" she replied with a shrug.

"Never, never go up! Once you’re there, there’s nowhere else to go."

"I can fight if you need me to," Mulan stated eagerly.

Killian’s eyes narrowed as he took in the woman. "Who the bloody hell is she?"

"Oh, Killian, meet our newest Honorable. Mulan."

Killian glanced at her and then quickly dismissed her as someone with no ability to fight and therefore, no help at all. All in all, he liked the quiet Belle better. She was silent and stayed out of the way.

"When are we leaving?"

Killian set his teeth on edge as her voice hit him again. Ignoring the Honorable, he looked at
Emma. "Swan, any ideas? If not, I’m afraid I’m going to be forced to spill blood."

Emma leaned against him and took a deep breath, realizing he tended to call her Swan when he was irritated or in battle. It was something she needed to discuss with him. "I’m gonna open a distortion corridor, I just need a minute. The energy pulses I used earlier were more powerful than I expected."

Killian heard the steps coming closer. Reaching around Emma, he pulled her body tightly against his. "Come on, love. We’re out of time."

Emma rested her head against him, closed her eyes and concentrated. The area in front of them altered and opened into a brilliant corridor. Taking Emma’s hand, he pulled her through with him, trusting that she in turn would drag her Untouchable.

"Wow!" Mulan said with awe as the distortion closed behind them.

Emma had managed to get them as far as the place they were to meet Will. He was not there. Leaning his back against a wall, Killian gathered Emma in his lap as he kept watch, his weapon drawn and ready. She was almost too tired to stay awake, but they needed her to get out of the city. Mulan, next to them, was continuously surveying the area, taking everything in with wonder, muttering to herself and making too much noise for Killian’s liking.

Killian lifted his weapon and aimed it at her, but before he could find some satisfaction and peace, Emma’s hand intervened.

"Killian! No shooting the Honorable."

"I wasn’t going to kill her. Just get her to make less noise. She doesn’t need her mouth to work the gem thing does she?"

"Killian, please." Emma felt so tired that her limbs felt like lead. The amount of energy used to blast the Legions and opening the distortion field something she hadn’t done for a long time. "Where is Will?"

"I don’t know. But this city will be shut down tighter than a drum once Cora is awake. She can feel her, and she obviously feels you. We need to get out of here. Now."

Mulan’s voice piped up again. "When are we leaving?"

Killian shook his head in disbelief. "She who is patient?"

Emma just shrugged and nestled into his warmth again. Not her fault. She didn't write the damn legends.

~*~
Happy Sunday to one and all.
Thanks to everyone who's leaving comments and kudos on this story. It means so much to me that you all seem to be enjoying it as much as I enjoyed writing it.
Ultraluckycat is an awesome beta and friend, I wish you all could have one just like her. But she's mine so hands off!
Hope you all enjoy this next chapter...

Chapter 19 - Fate

"So anyway, there we were, heading for the planet after taking out three Legion cruisers, and I say, 'Killian! Don’t be daft, mate! Stay and fight! We can take out the fourth.’ But Killian was having none of that..."

"Since you're the Captain, shouldn’t he listen to you?" asked one woman with sapphire blue hair, hanging on Will’s left arm and listening to his tale.

"You’d think so, wouldn’t you? But never was there a more stubborn man born than Killian Jones. Aye, you should’ve seen him when we were young. He was the terror, but I get ahead of myself..." Will said, pouring himself and his companions another round from the bottle. "So, there we were, burning up in the upper atmosphere, and I thought to myself, ‘This is it, Will old boy, the last count. You poor hapless bastard. No, you’re never going to discover what all this love stuff is for yourself,’ as the ground was rushing to meet us..." Will paused as the young women sufficiently fawned over him, and commiserated his lack of time and love.

"Anyway, there I was on my way to dying, a virtual virgin with the whole love thing, myself..."

"You’re a virgin?" the other woman asked in wonder, her violet eyes shining.

"In the practical sense?" Will looked his companions over... "Absolutely, a total virgin. Never been in love, never experienced it...but I really, really, wanted to, and with Killian, that blackheart, stealing the Princess from me..."

"And now he was trying to kill you?" blue hair asked in a hushed tone. "That’s just mean!" She wrapped herself around him, the better to pet his poor tortured soul. She leaned in and whispered in his ear, "Did I tell you that I find virgins so incredibly sexy?"

"Really? This could be a dangerous job...you have any friends?"

"Word is you’re looking for special compensation?" Will looked up at the man who would be stupid enough to interrupt him in the middle of making an obvious deal regarding having his ‘love’ virginity tweaked.

"I’m a little busy here, pal," Will indicated to the six women he had at his table.
The man shrugged. "Guess I heard wrong." He turned on his heels to leave when Will groaned. Bloody hell!

"Hey, not so fast there, mate!" Will quickly stood and peeled a few of the women off him, stopping to kiss one. "Ladies, duty calls. But you wait for me, and I'll be back...I promise."

"But, Captain..." Will motioned to the barkeep to bring another bottle to the table.

"Now ladies, what kind of man would I be to shirk my duty? I need to see this man, so have another drink, and as fast as that, I'll be back." Will smiled his most charming smile and set off after his contact.

It took some doing, but he finally talked the man into a drink. They were in the back, in a dark corner that faced the general room. The man seemed nervous and cautious, so Will plied him with drinks.

"Three sets? That's a tall order." The man drank down his drink. "It'll cost and take time."

"Credits, I have...time I don't. I need them two hours ago and I'm willing to pay."

"This price might be too high...show me what you got."

Will just laughed and poured another drink. "Sorry, I wasn’t born yesterday. My credits stay safe until I see the product."

"I can’t work that way. I need some scratch, a sort of down payment of goodwill on your part..."

"How much of a down payment?" Will asked, appearing casual, but his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"Ten thousand now, the remainder when the job is done."

Will didn’t even blink. Instead he tipped his bottle, and poured himself another drink. Taking the drink and downing it, Will looked at the man directly, a hint of a smile on his mouth.

"Well, then we’d be having a problem, wouldn’t we? That’s a lot for a goodwill gesture, and what’s to stop you from making a good profit and then melting away with my credits?"

The man noticed a patrol of Legions entering the establishment. "Well it looks like you’ll need to find some trust in me, doesn’t it?"

Will didn’t even flinch, or appear bothered by the entrance of the Legions. He calmly drew his gun, and jammed it into his companion’s gut under the table, while drinking his next drink with his other hand.

"Then it seems we have a problem. Contrary to appearances, I just don’t trust that easily, mate. Now, I’ll offer half that amount, and I don’t leave your side until you’re done."

Will poured another drink and stared unfalteringly into the man's eyes. Smiling a slow smile that crossed his face, but didn’t reach his eyes, Will watched the man’s nervouslyness increase as the Legions came closer, Will’s weapon still nestled against his gut. Will lowered his blaster to the man's groin and waited.

"Deal! Just take that damn thing away, give me my credits, and let's go!"

Almost out of thin air, Will seemed to pull out the five thousand credits and passed them to his companion. The man quickly grabbed them, and started to count.
"Don’t be a total fool and insult me with counting them here. We don't have the time."

The man shrugged. "Time I've got...trust I don’t." He quickly put away the credits, and walked deeper into the establishment with Will on his heels. They went through a trick door, and found themselves outside in the back alley. Will kept his weapon drawn and at his side in case it was an ambush.

Following the man through twisting alleyways, they entered a shop through the back. The place was quiet and dark. It was obviously a dry goods shop that was closed for the day; the man used it to do his illegal transactions at night.

"This your place?"

The man shook his head. "My sister’s."

"Who is standing right here." Will turned to see a young woman coming out of the shadows to stand next to them. She had moved silently, and Will cursed himself for letting anyone that close.

"I’ve a contract. Don’t ruin this for me," the forger begged.

The woman just shook her head. "Nothing legal, I’m sure." The sarcasm was apparent.

The man just shrugged. "You stay here. I'll go start work on the papers." He quickly went up some back stairs, leaving Will with his sister.

"He’ll get caught one day," the woman said, looking at Will without amusement or even real interest "And what am I supposed to do with you?"

Will just smiled. "You wouldn’t have any food, would you?"

"Perhaps, but it’ll cost you."

"That’s fine, as long as I can watch. I’m a great cook myself."

The woman just made a face. "Really? In my experience men are lazy bastards that want to be waited on hand and foot, can barely feed themselves, and the only thing to get them moving is a quick fuck."

Will followed her up the same stairs that his ‘employee’ had just climbed, watching the long lean lines of her back, and her nice ass.

"You obviously know the wrong kind of man."

"There are other kinds?" she looked back at Will and shrugged again. "That remains to be seen."

"Well, you’re in for a treat. Some say that my stew is to die for," he grinned. "And I have no intention of being quick."

~*~

Killian lifted his weapon into Will’s face. "It’s about bloody time! You’re late."

"I ran into problems," Will said with an easy smile.

"What else is new? You get the papers?"
Will nodded, squatting next to where Killian was resting with Emma in his lap. Will looked at the lump next to Killian that was all huddled up.

"What’s that?"

"That’s the Honorable. Wake her and I’ll shoot you between the eyes."

The woman was agreeable enough, but she constantly talked, asking about the ways of war and techniques for fighting, seeming impatient with just waiting, wanting to fight instead of hide. In other places, Killian would have enjoyed such conversations, but when her constant chatter disturbed the peace, and he was trying to be vigilant with a sleeping princess curled on his lap, he had been grateful when the Honorable One had dropped into slumber herself.

Will noted the seriousness of Killian’s tone and just nodded. Then, looking at the sleeping Emma, he frowned. "What’s wrong with Emma?"

"She overextended herself. She had to use an enormous amount of power to get her Honorable," Killian indicated the lump sleeping next to him and Emma, "and then she had to open a distortion corridor to get us out of the Temple."

"Can she get us back to the Jolly?" Will asked with concern.

"She is awake," Emma said quietly.

Killian put his hand on her face and tipped it up so he could look her over. Swearing under his breath, he took in the exhaustion in her eyes, and her pale, almost translucent skin.

"You can’t open a new distortion corridor, not right now."

"Yes, I can," Emma mumbled as she struggled to stand up. Killian quickly unfolded his body from hers and helped her. When she was straight, holding his upper arm as he supported her, she concentrated.

Nothing happened.

Finally, she sagged against him, and Killian folded her close to him, again. She was barely keeping her feet. "She can’t," he said, his concern for her evident in his voice.

"Walk? We could walk out," Will offered. They had walked into town, so it would follow that if they could avoid the Legions, they might make it out.

"I’d have to carry Emma," Killian started but a mark on Will caught his eye. Looking closer, Killian made a pissy sound under his breath. "You were off fucking a woman...or, something, while we sat here?"

"What?" Will feigned innocence. But Killian pointed to his neck, and Will’s hand came up to cover the offending mark.

"You’ve got a bite mark on your neck. So unless you ran into hickey-producing marauders or Legions, that means..."

"Hey, I was waiting for the papers and sort of had a run-in with the forger’s sister. Pain in my ass it was too, when the damn brother came back and didn’t appreciate me and his sister using the kitchen table."
"Uh huh. I see, and..."

"Oh, stop your bitching! I had to shoot the bastard. And you don’t see me making nasty remarks about the mark on your neck."

Killian’s hand quickly came up to cover his own neck. Emma just chuckled.

"Other side," she said softly. She looked at Will sternly. "I wasn’t going to mention it."

Killian looked at Emma, and a small smile moved over his face. But then he looked at Will, and it was gone.

"Let’s get this straight. You hired a forger, and while waiting for him to do his work, you fucked his sister on the kitchen table. And when he returned to find you...indisposed, you shot him?"

"Only in self-defense, mate, and in the leg. A mere flesh wound. I paid the fair lady her brother’s wages, took the papers and came here, not even bothering to finish what I was doing before being interrupted."

*That had to count for something,* Will thought. He didn’t mention that he was on his third round with the *fair lady,* but that wasn’t pertinent to the situation. The fact was, he had left business undone. He should be commended on his dedication to the cause.

Killian just made a face at his friend and then looked at the quiet Emma next to him. She needed sleep, food, and time to get her strength back before they could leave. They couldn’t stay where they were.

"We can’t stay here, and I doubt we can make it out of the city before the Legions find us. Cora will be able to track both the Honorable and Emma. So we need to find a place to let her rest for a couple of hours, and keep guard."

"I’ll go find us some lodgings." Will frowned at the state Emma was in. She looked distracted and almost unable to understand them at all. "How are we going to mask them from Cora?"

"Regina."

Killian and Will both turned at the sound of Emma’s voice. They had both thought she was asleep again. She was being held up by Killian, with one of her arms around his neck while the other held his upper arm.

"Regina is just as powerful as me. Cora knows her signature, her power, and what she feels like. If you contact David and have Regina come down to the surface..."

"She can lay a false trail and pull Cora’s attention away! Or at least distract her," Killian finished. Emma just nodded and laid her head back on his chest.

"That might work." Killian nodded to Will. "You find us accommodations for the rest of the night, and I’ll contact David."

"Done. So... who sleeps with the Honorable?"

"She sleeps alone," Killian said. “Untouchable, remember? And personally, I refuse to share a bed with you until you’re checked out for herpes and other diseases."

Will looked indignant. "Hey, those space herpes were a long time ago! They never let you forget.
"Regina?"

"I’m almost ready. I was checking on Mary Margaret and Ruby."

David couldn’t stop himself. "How is Mary Margaret?"

Regina knew. She looked at David and she knew. "She is better. This morning, she walked around a little. Ruby has been taking care of her. I think she is almost back to normal but her knee took some damage. Graham said it would heal. He repaired the ripped ligament, so now it’s just sore to walk on."

David nodded. Mary Margaret. The thought of her was bothering him, more than it should. He pushed his own worries aside. "Killian wants you to move around the planet. We’ve prepared a small fighter craft with Emma’s shielding so the ship won’t be detected, but Cora should still be able to feel you."

"Emma thinks that I am strong enough of a force to draw Cora’s attention?" Regina asked doubtfully.

"Yes."

Regina just shook her head no. "She is wrong. She is damn near as powerful in disturbing the Path as I am. And when you add in the Honorable and Killian...they’re in grave danger."

"Killian?" David asked, confused.

Regina nodded. It was Killian who had moved the matrix, bent it so many years ago, she was sure if it now. Even then, unknown to himself, he was reaching out for something or someone. The path of their destinies were wrapped together. There were no coincidences. They were all joined.

"His connection to Emma is growing stronger. As is his connection to you. I can feel them both, and even you, David, are pushing the fabric around you," Regina explained.

"I don’t like this, Regina. It’s not true." Denial. Denial was good.

"How did Killian contact you, David? We are in a communications blackout. So how do you know?"

"Killian. He talks to me."

"Mentally. You’ve been able to feel him, know him, since the bonding ceremony. But did he ever talk in your head?"

David shook his head no. "It was a feeling, almost like images, or a sense of ‘knowing’ before."

"But now?" Regina probed.

"His voice. Actual words." David rubbed the back of his neck. "What’s happening to us?"

"I think the stronger Killian becomes, the stronger you become. Your brother bond link works that way. Will has no sibling and is no longer bonded, so he is not using his innate abilities."
"Killian? He’s changing because of Emma?" David couldn’t believe it. Will and Killian were right. The love thing was a sickness, a disease to be caught.

"No. What is happening to Killian started a long time ago. I think Killian was born to a destiny, and somehow along the way, the rest of us became part of it. Maybe that is why he was born unbonded."

"There’s a legend about an unbonded Areenian. Is it Killian?" David wondered. He always suspected that Killian was different.

"Like most legends and prophecies, it is hard to say until it happens." Regina gathered her remaining gear and walked with David to the landing bay. "I thought he was The One, before we met Emma."

“And now?”

“I think Emma is an immensely powerful being, even more powerful than she knows herself. And I think the two of them together, they are The One.”

"What do you plan to do?"

"Retrieve them before Cora finds them."

"I should go with you."

Regina just shook her head no. "Too many ships looking for us. Your place is here. On your Bridge."

David had to agree. They were hidden, but Cora had to know that Regina was near. Something or someone had to have drawn Cora to Zenus.

~*~

Will stood watch in the small room he had acquired for the night. The Honorable was asleep on a small settee. She was something, this Honorable. She was patient, in her own way. She listened as they planned, then criticized what they had come up with, offering her own thoughts on the best course of action. Will had to admit he now appreciated the quietness of Belle.

Killian and Emma were sharing the only bed. A lumpy narrow cot that barely had room for one never mind the two of them. Killian was awake watching the room as Will watched the street below. Emma was asleep, or what appeared to be sleep.

"She moves a lot," Will observed, his voice low so as not to disturb the sleeping.

Killian moved his hand over her back as if in comfort. "She does."

"Dreaming?"

Killian shrugged. "She doesn’t say what causes it. It rarely wakes her. I don’t think she knows how much she moves, but whatever it is, it disturbs her."

Emma moved in her sleep again, burrowing even more into Killian’s skin, almost as if he were too far away. The sounds she made in her sleep were soft, but full of sorrow.

"She’s dreaming, Killian."
"Yes. Tonight she is." Killian looked down at the small body against his own. "She sometimes cries in her sleep, but the next morning she doesn’t seem to remember it."

"What does she dream about?"

"Not sure. But she once told me that when her people died, all their voices rose in screams of horror and then suddenly they were gone. There was nothing but the harrowing void of silence and she was alone." Killian moved his hand up her back to rest under her hair at the nape. "I think that’s why she can’t be silent or still."

Will suddenly felt tired. Sixteen years of just trying to survive. If this was to be the rest of their lives, he didn’t want it. He looked over at the two on the bed. They were so close and intertwined. Will never thought he would ever see Killian so close to anyone. Then he noticed Emma’s hand.

"Is her hand down your..."

"Aye. Her favorite place, I’m beginning to suspect."

"Maybe we should change shifts? You can watch the street, and I can..." Killian calmly set his weapon to kill and pointed it at Will. "Hey! Mate! Just joking. You used to have a sense of humor."

"No, I didn’t."

Will conceded the point. "Okay, so you didn’t, or at least not one that other people understood.” Will chuckled to himself, enjoying the moment of making Killian react. Returning to his position, he continued looking outside.

"Killian, I’ve got movement on the street."

Killian was suddenly on his feet, standing with Will at the window. In the dark, they could see Legions moving into position. Killian waited until it was clear they were surrounding their rooming house.

"We’ve got to move." Killian went to wake Emma. "Emma, come on wake up. Emma!"

She slowly pulled herself from sleep. Her limbs were so tired. Heavier than she ever remembered. Never had she come so close to...

"Emma! Wake up!"

"Killian. " Will warned.

"I know. Come on, love, I know you’re tired, but we need you to wake up and work."

"Legions?" Emma voice was soft and far away.

"Can you open us a way home?" Killian asked with a frown. She was too out of it. Giving her a shake, he swore aloud when it was apparent she had fainted.

"Emma! Dammit. It’s not going to work, Will."

Killian got off the bed and took his weapon to cover the door. Mulan finally stirred to the sounds of increased action and noise.

"What’s going on?"
"We’ve got company. Legions," Will said over his shoulder.

Mulan just sat up on the side of the settee. "I can’t believe you came here for me without any real plan for escape. What kind of heroes are you anyway?"

"Shut up!" Both Killian and Will said at the same time.

She just pouted at them, and sat back in a huff. Rude. All these people were so rude. Frowning at the wall next to her, she suddenly stood up and screamed, running to the other side of the room next to Killian and Will.

Both men turned to see an opening forming in the wall. A Distortion corridor. Killian swore and grabbed his clutch weapon low on his left leg. Pointing it at the distortion with his other weapon covering the door, they watched as a figure emerged.

Regina.

"Regina, damn you!" Killian lowered his weapon as they heard the doors below kicked in.

"You boys need some help?" she smirked.

"Regina, if you can open that thing again, then do it!"

“That’s what I’m here for,” she sassed back. Regina turned back to face the wall and concentrated. The wall shimmered, the corridor opening but then faded.

“Dammit,” Regina hissed as Killian heard the soldiers mounting the stairs. He reached down to take Emma.

“Regina,” he demanded. “There’s gonna be a very happy Cora and a near ecstatic Dark One if you don’t open that corridor.” He could only imagine how triumphant the dark leader of their universe would be if he had both Regina and Emma in his foul clutches. That bloody crocodile wasn’t gonna win on his watch, Killian swore to himself.

Emma stirred in Killian’s arms and reached one hand out to Regina, resting it in her shoulder. With her eyes closed, Emma’s hand glowed white again as she sent every fiber of strength she had left to Regina, giving her the boost she needed.

Regina concentrated on the wall again, lifting arm to channel her power through her hand, and suddenly the corridor was back. Will broke the cardinal rule and grabbed the Honorable, dragging her into the rift against her will.

"I’ve got her," Regina said as she pulled Emma closer to her. As Emma’s eyes opened to look at her, Emma nodded, a ghost of a smile on her lips, as she moved into the corridor with Regina helping her. Killian was at their side covering the door when it burst open. The soldiers stood, looking at the distortion corridor, stunned, when Cora pushed them out of the way to enter the room.

Regina pushed Killian through, not trusting him to not want to stay and fight. Still holding Emma up, they both looked back at Cora for a moment before stepping through.

Cora watched the corridor close behind them, almost stunned to find herself staring at a wall.

~*~
Cora leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes. She could no longer feel them. Wherever they had gone, they went fast.

"My Lady, we are docking with the Legion cruiser, Interceptor."

Cora just nodded.

"The ground units?" the officer asked.

"Call them back. We are leaving the system," she instructed. Through the observation window, she watched the Interceptor getting larger as they approached for docking.

Once back on the Interceptor, Cora wanted nothing but to rest in her quarters. To work through what she had witnessed on Zenus, and to understand the implications of what she had felt. But the captain was waiting for her as she stepped off the shuttle. They walked the corridors together, with the captain staying slightly behind.

"My Lady, your orders," he asked with a brisk voice.

"Return us to the Upper Kingdom. Take us home to Hamlin." Stopping in front of the doors to her rooms, she activated the lock. She stepped into the warmth of her room. "Contact the Dark One," she ordered without turning around. "I require a communication link."

"Yes, My Lady."

Cora let the door close in the Captain’s face, moving through her own space to stand at the port. She watched the fleet prepare to leave the Laterus System.

The hail from her com link came quicker than she expected. "My Lady, My Lord, the Dark One is waiting."

"Put it through," she said, preparing herself for his wrath.

Cora waited as the man’s voice came over the link. "Report."

"The disturbance was not Zelena," she told him, holding her head high, refusing to be intimidated by her lord.

"Regina?"

"No, it was a young woman."

"Did you acquire her?"

Cora paused. "No. She slipped from my grasp."

There was a cold silence, and when the Dark One’s voice returned, its bass tone was deadly cold. "Slipped? How?"

"Regina."

"Rendezvous with my ship, Baelfire. I wish an audience with you within the next forty-eight hours."

Cora allowed herself to feel fear. Something she hadn’t felt since the change and her power had manifested. She quickly swallowed the fear, confident the Dark One could not kill her without
damaging the universe beyond repair.

"We are preparing to jump from the Laterus System." Cora paused and then frowned. "Another thing, My Lord."

"Speak."

"This woman. She bent the fabric almost like a force, using it as a weapon. She and Regina escaped through a distortion field with the others." Cora gulped hard. "They winked through space."

There was a thunderous silence.

"Gaian. Only they could travel in winks." The Dark One’s voice came over the com. "Belay the order to rendezvous. Order the fleet into a full spread search. I want you to find the Enchanted, and bring me the Gaian. Do not return without her."

Cora acknowledged his orders and disconnected the link. Did Regina do it or did the woman? Could her visions of Regina ruling everything be wrong? Maybe Regina held all Zelena’s power, but this new person, this slip of a girl could take everything from her. Regina, where did you go?

~*~

Killian placed Emma in a med bed in the back of the Jolly. Kissing her quickly, Killian shut the restraining hatch and moved forward.

"Is she asleep again?" Regina asked. She felt tired. Almost too tired to move, but she could feel Emma’s exhaustion and it was beyond anything she’d ever experienced.

"Yes. She opened a distortion field before with little to no problem. What happened?"

Regina shrugged. "I do not know. I not sure why I can do it myself."

"How did you find us?"

"Emma. She is a strong presence. I narrowed in on her." Regina looked at the woman being belted into a seat. "Our Honorable?"

"Opinionated one, maybe. Whoever destined her to be an Honorable had a wicked sense of humor."

Regina grabbed the side of the ship to steady herself. "Killian, someone else should pilot the fighter back to the Enchanted. I’m too weak."

Killian nodded and helped Regina into the back bay and placed her in a bed much like Emma’s. Staring at them for a moment, he went forward.

"Will, take the Jolly home. I’ll pilot Regina’s ship."

Will just shook his head no. Killian wouldn’t feel comfortable leaving Emma in anyone else’s hands. Hitting his friend on the back, Will headed for the door.

"Sorry, mate. You might be one of my best friends, but nothing is going to convince me to spend more time in the Honorable’s company." Will pointedly looked at the Honorable who was pulling at her safety strap.

"Coward."
"My mother raised no fool." Will was gone before Killian could comment.

Killian made his way to his pilot’s seat.

"I can help you know. I know a lot about flying buckets like this,” Mulan offered.

Killian bit back his retort about his beloved Jolly. He rushed to take off and return to the Enchanted so he didn’t have to deal with Mulan for a moment longer than necessary.

~*~

"Captain, the Jolly and her Eminence’s ship have redocked."

"Archie, you’ve got us a course out of here?"

"Aye, Cap."

"Then punch it. Get us some distance from this mess."

"Jump in four, three, two, one..."

David felt his body move forward and elongate in an instant before it realigned within the jump corridor. They moved out of the jump in another part of space, free of Legion searchers.

"Deck Officer, inform the crew that we remain on alert. Normal operating procedures are in effect, but alter the shifts for double shifts at all times."

A tall lean man at David’s right acknowledged him as he went to carry out the orders. They would push the night energy of the Enchanted to daytime-carrying temperatures to accommodate the increased activity.

"Repair crews to all main systems. I want my ship back on line before we meet up with Legions. Full systems diagnostics."

"Aye, Cap."

"Tell Director of Flight Operations to get those fighters armed with new shield grids and the new weapon arrays. I want them to transverse shields like the Bug." David turned in his seat and looked at his operations officer.

"Billy, what is the condition of repairs on the Bug?"

"She’s flightworthy, Cap, but just barely. The Princess made repairs, but has belayed them to work on the Enchanted. Also, the ship maintained some damage that requires replacement of her hull in spots. The metal alloy is unknown to us."

David just swore. He wanted that ship working! Actually, he needed it. It was the fastest, toughest ship on the Enchanted. The loss was unacceptable.

"Captain, the Legion sensors are online in this sector. They are on full scan. We just hit six of them in the last few moments."

David swore a long blue streak. They needed a place...any place...safe from the Dark One in order to take their shields offline and continue repairs. They could hold out there for a short while, but all indications were that they needed to return to the Thorns until all repairs were complete. But then a problem to that option presented itself. The Thorns activity knocked out their sensors, and they
couldn’t see what was approaching. With Cora able to hone in on Emma, Regina, the Honorables, Graham, and even him and Killian, they were running out of options.

The best solution was to find a place safe, let Emma translate the manuscript for the last gem, and then complete the mission. The urgency was tangible. He would bet his share of the Enchanted that the Dark One was aware of exactly who Emma was by now. Killian was going to hate that.

"Archie, keep us out of hot water. You have Conn, I'll be in Medical."

Archie acknowledged David, and took his position reading reports coming in. "Engineering, my console is showing a bus light in the auxiliary fusion generators."

"Acknowledged, Bridge. The powering couplings on the front phaser array just went down as well."

"Get them up, Mister Booth. Full damage control teams."

"Aye."

~*~

"Killian, back off. You’re crowding me."

Killian ignored Graham as he stared at Emma on the medical bed as Graham was looking her over. Regina was in the bed next to her.

"What’s wrong? Why is she so weak? Can you do something? Maybe she needs a..."

Graham, in irritation, turned from his patient and faced a hovering, concerned Killian head on.

"...space to breathe? You go stand over there. Now."

"Graham..."

"Now. Or I'll call your own security teams and have you kicked out of my medical unit. Go!"

Killian’s face shut down. He walked a few paces from Graham and the others, but refused to wander too far.

Graham sighed. It was hard on Killian, he knew. It seemed the more the man rushed to keep Emma out of trouble, the more time she spent in Medical. Reading her life signs, Graham cursed under his breath, as he quickly scanned Regina as well.

Their readings were all wrong. One internal organ system was shutting down, then coming back over and over. If the two of them were machines, it would be as if their internal systems were shutting on and off. Graham watched as Regina’s heart stopped, sending the bed’s monitoring alarms crazy. And then just as suddenly, her heart started beating again.

Emma’s monitoring bed was showing the same results as her kidneys shut down, then were suddenly fine.

"Graham, what the hell is going on?" Killian ignored Graham’s order to stay out from under foot and was suddenly at Emma’s bedside again, holding her hand.

"Best I can tell, and having no experience with this, it appears both of them are fluctuating. Their organs are there, they just suddenly shift out of phase from the rest of their bodies, and then shift
back into phase just as fast."

"Stabilize them...get them back."

Graham looked at Killian and shook his head. "I don’t know how!"

David entered Medical to the sound of his brother shouting in irritation and fear. “What the bloody hell do you mean, you don’t know how?” It looked like he and Graham were having a heated discussion. David looked over at a young woman in red with a worried look on her face as well.

"What’s going on? Killian, calm down and stop harassing Graham,” David demanded.

Killian suddenly became quiet, as Graham explained the situation to David. The Honorable walked around one end of Sickbay, picking up various objects to look at. Occasionally, she looked over to them, her eyes expressing way more than her body language did. She didn’t know these people and while she was wary of them, she was anxious as well.

"Emma opened distortion fields before. On Zion, she opened two in a row and she had no ill effects," Killian reminded Graham.

"Killian, I know she did it before, but that doesn’t change what’s happening to her body now."

"Maybe I should go?" Mulan offered from the corner.

Killian just screamed at her. "No. And put that down!"

David looked at the two. Emma was completely out. She was unconscious, but Regina seemed to be regaining enough energy to wake up.

"Regina, stay with us. You need to tell us what to do. What’s going on?"

Regina opened her eyes slowly as if they were too heavy to withstand the draw of sleep. She cleared her throat. "I feel like shit."

"You look like it as well," Graham grinned as he quickly checked her vitals and organ functions. "What’s going on, exactly?"

Regina turned her head to look at Emma. Her skin suddenly took on a transparent glow as energy rushed across her skin. "We are phase shifting. Emma said distortion fields were the first step in learning to phase shift."

"Emma can’t phase shift. She can, but she can’t. It requires too much of her, and she told me that the sacrifice is her body," Killian told the group as he watched her, his hand tightening on hers.

Graham, who was monitoring Emma’s internal fluxing, frowned. "It’s speeding up!"

"What? What's speeding up?" Killian didn’t want to hear it. He looked down at the hand he was holding, and it suddenly disappeared. Standing back from the bed he watched Emma as she seemed to flicker, and then was gone. "Graham!"

They all stood there helpless and unsure, all eyes set on the bed where Emma had been. A few seconds ticked by with Killian breathing hard when, just as suddenly, she was back. Graham quickly checked the monitors. It had stopped. All her internal systems were stable and in normal working order, and she was breathing normally.

"Emma!" Killian rushed the bed and quickly gathered her up into his arms, holding her tight as if
his arms could keep her with him. He watched as her eyes fluttered, and then slowly opened.

"Hey," she greeted weakly.

"Bloody hell. I swear, Emma..."

"You do little else," she reminded him gently, her hand lifting with immense effort to run her fingers through his hair.

"Don’t scare me like that again, love." Emma didn’t promise. She didn’t want to fail him like that. Killian couldn’t let her go. Reality hit him hard. He’d just had a brush with what ultimately was going to happen to her, except that next time she wouldn’t come back.

"Emma, what happened?" Graham asked, checking the monitors attached to her.

"I used too much energy too fast, and opened too many distortion fields, not letting my body come back into balance. It caused a phasing overload."

Graham looked at Regina and back at Emma. "And Regina?"

"I added my energy to hers to give her the boost she needed to open the second distortion field. I think in my urgency to get us out of there, she tapped deeper into my energy resources, which were seriously depleted to start with, and took too much. Regina isn’t evolved enough to control how much she can take, so it wiped me out completely. My body needed to compensate, almost like a computer reboot, a rebalancing."

“I’m sorry,” Regina said remorsefully.

“Not your fault, Regina,” Emma said with a weak smile. “If I’d have been more in control, you wouldn’t have been able to take so much.”

Killian refused to let Emma go, but he was confused. "You opened two distortions on Zion, and you had no problems." Killian frowned. He couldn’t have missed that.

"The two power blasts I used to take out Cora and her men was done by bending the fabric of space around them, concentrating it into one large movement and forcing it forward. It is the same principle as the temporal displacement fields, except I didn’t allow the fabric to open." Emma ran her hand down Killian’s back in comfort. "It was equivalent to opening ten distortion fields at once...I did it twice. And then I opened another corridor to get us out of the Temple."

David came forward to stand with Graham. "Regina is less able to withstand the shifting."

"She’s not evolved enough to withstand it. In some ways, neither am I. The Ancients evolved over thousands of generations to be able to shift through space and time. My people mixed with the indigenous people of our solar system to add ‘cohesion’ back to our genetics. I am... less evolved than the Ancients, more like you, so my abilities are limited."

"What is the most number of distortions you’ve opened at once, consecutively and without a problem?" Graham asked.

"Six."

Graham’s brow went up at that. She had successfully managed an equivalent of twenty-one. She must have used her energy supply to the point of extinction.
"Why can’t Regina shift more?"

"Her body takes too much energy to maintain itself. My people, the Ancients were once as you... warm blooded with internal self-regulating heat systems. But when they altered to ‘shift’ they became cold-blooded. They needed the energy necessary to maintain and regulate a balanced body temperature to be shunted to ‘shifting’, so evolutionarily, their bodies made a trade off."

She wished they would stop asking questions. There was a buzzing in her head that threatened to erupt into the mother of all headaches. She moaned in relief as the door came opened and a distraught Mary Margaret and Ruby rushed into the medical unit searching for Regina. Emma still felt too weak for the usual thirty questions and the fatigue was increasing. Food and a full day’s sleep would set her right, but the longer she resisted the lull of sleep, the more exhausted she became.

"Regina!" Mary Margaret rushed passed the others, with Ruby fast on her heels. They both stopped in shock at how weak Regina looked.

“I’m fine,” Regina rushed out, her voice muffled by Ruby’s wild hair when the two flung their arms around her.

“I’ll believe that when Graham says it,” Mary Margaret said simply as she pulled back, her hand automatically going to Regina’s head.

“Tell her I’m fine,” Regina instructed Graham as she pulled Ruby back from the death grip she seemed to have on her body.

“She’s tired and needs rest, but will be fine,” he said with a smile. "Let this be a lesson to you, Regina. No more shifting too soon."

Regina just laughed softly, her body still feeling too tired to stay awake. Reaching up she gently stroked first Ruby’s and then Mary Margaret’s cheeks to reassure them.

Graham looked around the room, and then at his two patients. Time to trim the fat. "Everyone out. My patients need rest, and they’re not going to get it with the group of you hovering over them."

Emma pushed away from where she was resting against Killian’s chest. "My Honorable...?"

Killian ignored her attempt to move away from him, holding her tighter. "She is still with us."

"I need..."

Graham took the decision from her hands. "What you need, Emma is to sleep." Graham turned to his new assistant. "Ruby, take the new Honorable and show her to her quarters with Belle. A small orientation on the galley and how to use the replicators would be good."

Ruby quickly patted Regina on her shoulder and approached the woman sitting in the corner of the room. "I’m Ruby, but most call me Red."

"Mulan."

Ruby nodded. "I’m going to take you to your room and show you around."

"Thank you." Mulan stood up and smoothed her hands down the leather pants she was wearing. "This place is amazing. I’ve never been on a ship before, well apart from my transportation to the Temple. This is going to be such an adventure"
Ruby made a sound of understanding. "You’ve no idea."

"I knew it!" Mulan grinned, excited for the first time in a long time. How she had longed to be out of the Temple, to be an active warrior in the fight for peace.

Ruby just smiled to Mulan and led her from Medical.

~*~
Happy Wednesday!
I can't express to you all enough how much I love reading your comments on this story, each make me smile for different reasons. And I appreciate the kudos as well, thanks you guys.

Ultraluckycat continues to be a pillar of support and gets as much of a kick out of your comments as I do. So, thanks for being an ultra luck beta, for me at least!

I'd also like to add a shout out to Katie-dub who created an awesome picset banner for this story. I wish I could share it with you all here but I'm not computer savy enough to work out how to post a picture with this story. Trust me, it amazes I can post at all. So, thanks, Katie-dub, your hard work amazes me so much.

Okay, on to the chapter...

Mary Margaret watched Ruby with what appeared to be a new friend, and felt an increased despair. Ruby with a cohort couldn’t be good.

Graham left to have a warming bed set up for Emma as David sat down on the side of Emma’s bed, noting his brother’s closeness.

"Emma, we need a place other than the Thorns to hide until we can finish repairs. It will give us time to make repairs, and you time to translate the next phase in this journey."

Emma nodded weakly. "The Thorns wouldn’t be good. Cora would be able to trace us to the Thorns, and the sensors wouldn’t alert us of her arrival."

"Someplace that she can’t track then," David pushed.

Emma thought about it for a moment. And shook her head. She was too tired to think, to sort out what was needed. Her eyes closed as she rested against Killian.

David reached across the bed, and pulled her from his brother, giving her a shake to wake her.

"Get your bloody hands off her!" Killian stood and grabbed his brother’s shirt front.

Graham rushed back in and pulled Killian off David, while David shook Emma again.

"Emma! Please! Wake up! I know you’re tired and I’m sorry, but I need a place. Someplace that Cora can’t track us."

"I don’t know..." Emma murmured faintly.
David eased Emma back onto the bed and then stood up and paced. He needed a week. Just a week to get the *Enchanted* back into fighting shape. Emma had spent six years searching for the *Olympus*. She had seen and covered more space than the group of them combined. If she couldn’t think of a place, then there wasn’t one.

"Xanadu."

David turned to Emma quickly. "Xanadu?"

"It's in the outer rim of the Empire. Hard to find. There is a planet system nestled in a field of positronic nexus waves. One of the inhabited planets is Xanadu." Emma's face whitened as all the last remaining color drained from her. "The location is in my navigational computer on the *Bug.*"

David turned to his brother. "Get the information and send the coordinates to the Helm."

Killian nodded. David thanked Emma before he left, but Killian stopped him. In a voice that was low and menacing he said, "You ever touch her again, I'll kill you."

David just looked at his brother. Killian had threatened him in the past, but this was the first time he believed him.

"Understood."

David turned to leave, but Emma called him back. "David, the Xanians...don’t go down to the planet, just use it as a blind."

"Thank you, Emma," he said softly. He ignored Killian as he leaned down and pressed his lips to her forehead. She never heard him or felt him. She had fainted again.

David left the room quickly to return to the Bridge.

"Captain."

David stopped in his tracks and cursed his luck. He’d been avoiding Mary Margaret, and she just caught up with him. Abusing a sick Emma was already kicking up his guilt, and having Killian upset with him didn’t help. But this was the final straw.

"Lady Mary Margaret. You look recovered." David turned and allowed his eyes to move over her face, noting her healed wounds. "No scars I see."

"It was hard, what you just did," she said, indicating back toward Sickbay.

"It was necessary," he reasoned, crossing his arms in front of him.

Mary Margaret smiled at his authoritative stance. "I wasn’t criticizing. I was only commenting that it was a hard thing to do."

"Lady Mary Margaret is there something I can get you?"

Mary Margaret looked at him and moved closer. "Yes, actually there is. But I’ll get to that. I was just acknowledging that your job makes your personal life hard sometimes. Killian is really upset with you."

"He is." David sighed and ran his hands over the back of his aching neck. "Emma is...she’s..."

"His true love?" Mary Margaret finished with a sly smile.
David looked at the woman sharply.

"No shocker," she continued at his look. “It isn’t hard to miss how they feel about each other."

"No, it’s not," David said quietly. He had lost his brother to a feeling that neither of them could understand nor find words to describe. But it was there. He felt it through their link.

"Was it like that for you? With Kathryn?"

David’s face became shuddered and darker. "What do you know of my wife?"

Mary Margaret moved closer crowding him into a wall, stopping mere inches from him.

"I know that when I kiss you, she comes between us. For a moment, you’re completely mine, and suddenly you’re hers again."

"I won’t talk about my wife to anyone. Especially not you."

"Let me tell you what I know. I know she is dead. I know she was beautiful and that she was Will’s twin. I also know that if she comes between us it is because of you, not her. She lives because your guilt feeds her memory. You use her to keep me at a distance."

David grabbed both her arms and shook her.

"You know nothing! Nothing about me!"

David would feel the horror later of his out-of-control behavior. Manhandling women was not one of his customary traits. But his insides were quaking under the stress and strain.

"I know everything,” she said simply. “Or I can...if you let me."

David looked at her in anger, barely able to keep his hands off her, taking in her short pixie-cut hair, the life in her bright green eyes, and the clear honesty in her gaze.

"I can’t." David shook his head, but his hands were his worst enemy. Instead of pushing her away, they pulled her even closer.

"David..." she breathed.

David heard her voice almost like a siren call. His eyes fixated on her mouth. He simultaneously shifted his hands on her as his mouth moved closer to hers. Mary Margaret felt the fluttering in her chest as her heart beat out of control, racing. David’s hands moved down her arms placing his hands against hers.

Mary Margaret gasped as the skin of their palms touched. An electric shock of scalding arousal zapped from her palm, up her arm and then took a sharp U-turn down her body and right between her legs. A tiny whimper issued unbidden from somewhere deep in her stomach.

"I want..." Mary Margaret’s mind short-fused as his mouth detoured to the side of her neck and her whole body screamed.

"Oh Christ..." David growled and then they came together.

Mary Margaret yanked on David’s shirt pulling at it, trying to find the fastenings. She finally gave up, only to violently pull the shirt out of the top of his leather pants and over his muscular chest. He helped her to pull it off, and they threw it to the floor. His hands found the upper tie to her dress,
and pulled it off in one hard pull as it fell to her waist. He then reached to unclas his bra. The bra joined his shirt, as her breasts spilled out into his hands. Both managed to get almost into each other's skin, as his mouth found hers.

David’s hands took both her breasts at once but he remembered dimly he had already been rough with her once, so instead he bent his head forward and began to gently suck and lick each of her nipples in turn. Mary Margaret’s breath came in short gasps. She lifted one breast up, encouraging him to take more of it into his mouth, moaning when he did.

A part of David knew instantly what he was doing was horribly wrong, totally incorrect, and now he had successfully damned them both. If he had stopped to think, the words ‘public corridor’ might have entered his mind. But the overwhelming sensations of Mary Margaret’s breasts drove every thought of impropriety right out of his mind.

He was lost, hopelessly lost, and he never wanted to be found.

He gave in to the moment and focused all his attention on making Mary Margaret writhe and moan under his mouth. The more he worked her, the louder the response she gave and the more he wanted. The movement of his mouth shocked him as he felt the sensation on his own body.

Mary Margaret knew this was probably, no, was definitely the most foolish thing she had ever done in her life. Foolish, dangerous, and damaging in the long term. Yet, she couldn’t stop herself. God help me, she thought, she needed someone’s touch, the feel of someone’s body against hers. She knew the man she really wanted wasn’t this David but the one he hid inside, safe from pain and despair. The first mistake a woman could make was to try to change a man. The change had to come from inside. It was his turn to make the move.

Mary Margaret pulled back from him reluctantly, moaning at the dangerous look on his face, the gleam of his darkened blue eyes. His hands reached for her again, and she took another step back. Not losing eye contact, she pulled her dress top up and refastened it. Unable to smile, or to even joke, they shared a silent moment of lust and longing.

"I want to be in your bed. Feel you in me, over me, and all around me. I want to feel what only you can give me," she said.

David gasped, trying to control his breathing, his body protesting the distance she stood from him. "I want you in my bed, too."

Mary Margaret closed her eyes briefly at the haunting sound of his voice, the stark sound of desire. He melted her with just a word, a look, and hardly a sound.

"I would be there in a heartbeat. And I would stay there, but I can’t." Mary Margaret shook her head when he made an attempt to move closer to her. "Your bed already has too many women in it, and I can’t, and won’t, compete with a ghost. I can share you with her memory, but I won’t share your bed with her."

Mary Margaret didn’t wait for his response. She turned to leave, but suddenly went back to move him back against the wall hard, her mouth on his again as he took her back inside, their bodies immediately out of control moving against each other.

"Captain, I’m coming after you," she taunted with a gleam of mischief in her eye, before she ripped herself from his arms and quickly took herself off to her quarters.

David stood pasted against the wall where she left him, panting, and too aroused to move. A
crewman walked by and looked down the hall to see his Captain standing back to a wall, shirtless and panting. Moving quickly, he left David in peace to regain some of his iron control. David’s shirt and Mary Margaret’s bra remained on the ground at his feet.

"Killian..." Graham gave up. Killian hadn’t moved since David left and Emma fainted. He moved to pick up Emma to take her to the warming bed. She would be too cold in the normal air. Killian reacted violently.

"No!" Killian took her back, cradling her in his arms. "Keep your hands off her!"

"Then put her in the bloody warming bed, otherwise she’ll freeze."

Killian shook his head no. "I’ll take her to our room, keep an eye on her and make sure she is resting."

"Killian, stop it." Graham could read Killian in waves. Desperate. The man was desperate. Pain was almost all Graham was reading. "I need to keep an eye on both her and Regina, and I can’t be leaving Regina to rush halfway across the ship to check on Emma."

"I can’t… I didn’t know it would feel like this. Graham, she..."

"I know."

In that moment, as Killian held her hand and she disappeared into nothing, he didn’t know if she would come back to him. But she did - this time. It was in those moments of not knowing that Killian understood what his future and Emma’s entailed. She was going to wink out of existence with the Dagr’du, but there would be no coming back.

He held on to her like it was the end. Afraid she would be taken from him before it was time, before he was ready. His hovering was increasing. His possessiveness was beyond normal boundaries, and Killian, who had spent a lifetime with warm blood and cold emotions, couldn’t sort through all the feelings racking his body.

He was like an open wound with exposed nerve endings, and Graham was barely surviving the barrage of his emotions.

"Killian, trust me. Let her rest. You have work. She needs rest. Leave her with me, and if she needs you, I’ll call."

"Graham." Killian just shook his head.

"Killian, you need to go do something normal and get some of your control back. It can only hurt Emma to see you in pain. Please?"

Killian finally gave in. He placed Emma in the warming bed and resisted the urge to climb in with her. Standing back, he was shocked to see his hands shaking.

"Graham...Graham, fix me," he demanded in a weak voice.

Graham closed the unit and pushed Killian into his personal office. Shutting the door from prying eyes, he searched Killian’s face. He was on his way to a major breakdown. Graham couldn’t let that happen. He opened a drawer and pulled out the small vial with the clear potion Emma had given him.
"Killian, when this is over, I can give you this drug," Graham stated.

"What is it?" Killian asked quietly, thinking it may be something that could cure him.

"Emma gave it to me. For you. It’ll make you forget the entire last year...and her. It’ll ease your pain."

Killian took the vial from Graham and flung it hard against a wall, shattering the glass and the liquid ran down in streaks. "I really need to spank her when she's awake," Killian said softly.

"Killian, she was trying to protect you from pain."

"Pain I can handle. Lived with it before. I won’t trade one moment with her for all the relief in the universe." Killian paced the room. "Bloody hell, Graham! What is she thinking?"

Graham just shrugged, helplessly.

Killian just laughed, scratching at his ear as he shook his head. "She is a total loon! Even after she was gone she was planning to meddle."

Somehow having to deal with another Emma scheme pulled him from the horror he was caught in. Taking a breath, he was ready to go on. "I'll leave her with you, but you better promise to call me if she needs anything."

Graham held up a hand and made a face. "I promise!"

Killian just looked at him one more time, and the rapidly evaporating liquid, and shook his head leaving the room laughing. "Grief relief!"

~*~

"Belle, how are we doing for damage control?"

Belle stopped working her panels and looked at Will. "We still have twenty-three percent of the systems down or continuously faulting. I'm suspecting some wiring damage."

"Damn. I just rewired the entire ship three years ago. I replaced as many systems as I could at the time with energy relay circuitry to remove hard wire."

Belle looked down at her hands holding the diagnostic pad. "We could install circuitry relays now. Remove all the wiring, and prevent this from happening again. Energy circuitry is just as prone to break down, but an internal diagnostic will pinpoint the break in the system instead of having to crawl through the ship searching."

Will paused and looked at his newest, quietest assistant. Honorable or not, silent or loud, he was hoping to keep Belle when it was all said and done. She was an engineering whiz.

"How much time we talking? Give me an estimate."

"A week on the outside." Belle explained herself as a frown hit Will’s face. "I know that is a long time, and internal sensor grids and shields will need to be taken offline, but we can piggyback the energy circuitry on top of the existing security sensors already in place, running parallel circuitry along the way."

"How many systems can be routed through this circuitry?" Will asked, his mind working through what she was suggesting.
"Everything. It will maintain and flow up to two hundred critical systems at one time. Since energy has no set direction, it merely needs a starting path, unbroken to an arrival point."

Will whistled under his breath. "You’re talking neural relays. Bioptic connections with bioptic inner nodes that allow a signal to jump and be rerouted."

"Yes," Belle smiled, looking slightly embarrassed. "It’s purely theoretical, and has worked in a smaller field. It could work."

"I read the specs on it in an engineering journal last year. I thought it was groundbreaking fantastically brilliant! But the community was skeptical. I was hoping more specs would come out so I could convert some systems to test the waters."

Belle avoided his eyes and fidgeted, trying not to show pride in his flattery.

Will’s eyes narrowed in interest. "You wouldn’t know who the creator of the theory was. Maybe we could get in touch with them...get some help."

Belle mumbled under her breath, scrapping her foot against the deck.

"Pardon, your holy Honorable...did you say something?"

"I’m the creator. I submitted the article."

Will laughed in glee and reached out to smack Belle good and hard across the back, but stopped himself, remembering who she was.

"You know," he grinned. "You could be almost perfect if I could unfurl that stiff back, get you out of those Honorable robes and playing poker, cursing, and drinking to excess."

Belle looked at the man in horror. "It is forbidden for an..."

"Yeah, yeah. Hold your water, little sister. You won’t be an Honorable forever. There’s plenty of time to corrupt you to the pleasures of life."

"Pleasures?" Belle’s voice echoed in a high-pitched squeak.

Will just laughed. He gathered his data pad, and went to go propose a system shutdown to the Captain. Grudgingly, he admitted to liking his young charge and her quiet way of being everywhere at once. He almost felt badly for her.

"By the way, Belle?" Belle turned back almost holding herself for his next horrible suggestion. "I’m really, really sorry."

Belle watched him leave, and her small voice piped up after him. "Sorry?"

She understood what Will meant later when she met Mulan; her new roommate.

---

David occasionally stole glances at Killian as they worked. His brother was silent and closed off to him. Sighing, David went to his Captain’s room and worked from his station there in silence.

They had yet to lay in a course for Xanadu because Killian was having a hard time breaking the encryption code on Emma’s onboard computer. The problem was that the symbols were foreign to him, and he refused to wake Emma to ask her.
"Come," David said at the signal requesting admittance to his private room.

Killian came in, and shut the door. His face was shuttered and unyielding.

"Killian?"

"I’ve got the coordinates. They are laid in at the Helm. We are plotting jump vectors now into a slip stream."

"You finally broke the encryption codes in her computer?"

Killian shook his head no. "Didn’t have to. I guess while I was recovering from a fever and chained to my bed, Emma gave you the coordinates and navigational information for the Thorns?"

David nodded. "She did."

"Aye, well, she did more than that. She dumped her entire navigation data bank into ours. We now have information on more than twice the worlds we did before. Included were the coordinates and navigational protocol for Xanadu."

Before David could comment, Will entered the room without ringing for admittance.  

"David..."

David just rolled his eyes at his friend. "Will?"

Will passed over the engineering plan. David took a moment to read through the proposal. Killian and Will were exchanging blows and insults under their breath back and forth, while David studied the plan.

"You want to take all of our defensive and sensor systems offline?"

"I need to run parallel circuitry. It’ll only be for a week."

David rubbed his scar and thought for a moment. "That’s a long time to be dead in the water and helpless. Especially with the Dark One’s entire fleet actively searching for us."

"I know. I was thinking we could send out small ship fighter patrols to police the general area as an early warning system."

"Killian?" David asked silently, wanting his brother’s input.

"My systems offline?" Killian shook his head. "I don’t like it!"

"The new circuitry will fix the shorts your systems are experiencing, and it will allow us to read areas that are damaged through an internal diagnostic relay panel." Will rocked back on his heels, his eyes gleaming. "Gentlemen, this is state of the art technology installed by the creature herself."

"Emma?"

Will just shook his head, his eyes twinkling in glee. "Belle. That’s right boys, my buggy-eyed, straight-laced, little engineering genie!"

David stopped to contemplate their options. Emma said the system that held the planet Xanadu would shield them from Cora. Steepling his fingers together, David nodded to Will.
"Once we’re at Xanadu, you can take the main systems offline."

"David," Killian’s voice warned.

"I know. It’s a calculated risk. But I’m forced to compare the overall risk versus the benefit. At this point, if we don’t effect some major repairs, we could possibly find ourselves in battle and have the weapons or shields lost due to shorts and damage."

Will felt like whooping it up. Exciting time to be an engineer.

"Killian, have Operations reroute and reassign personnel to engineering teams. I want this done fast and by the numbers. No shortcuts."

Will just rubbed his hands together. "Well, boys, I’m taking myself off to talk to my engines." Will stopped when he remembered something. "By the way, David, this is a good thing. I’ve got first signs of core crystal fracturing. I can use the power module that Emma gave us to re-crystalize them, but I want to save that for last, so all new systems come online with the new power matrix. The Enchanted will be like a new ship; better than when she left dry dock."

Killian remained silent as a whistling Will left, spreading his special brand of cheer around.

"What?" David was almost afraid to ask.

"Why ask my opinion when you discount it?"

"I didn’t, Killian. I just had to weigh the options. Your security module is breaking down all day long, sensors didn’t even pick up the fire in the forward module. And if the core crystals fracture completely before we can replace or re-crystalize, we’re dead in the water."

"I just don’t like it, Dave," Killian grumbled as he sat on the edge of the table and picked up things. "You weren’t there. Cora. She was... she was all those scary things people thought of the Eminents. Why they were so revered, yet held in fear. She exuded power; corrupted power. Regina... Regina is different. Her power is lofty, above, almost god-like...more an observer than a participant."

"Cora is altering things to the Dark One’s favor."

"She is breaking the known rule of the Eminents. Their non-interference clause of being observers, mediators, guides and counselors, but no direct altering."

"I think Regina has altered a few times for us. Perhaps the rules are sketchy and the lines of involving or not involving are smudged."

Killian just shook his head no. "Cora saw them. She saw Regina and Emma. She saw the distortion field." Killian felt the coldness from that stare straight to his core, and his hands still shook from the coldness of the room. "She knows, David. She knows that Emma is special. And once the Dark One hears that we blinked through space..."

David closed his eyes and rubbed his face. "He’ll know that Emma is a Gaian - the last Gaian."

Killian just stared across the room. "I don’t know much, but I know that she touches me, parts of me that have never been touched. I feel... complete."

"Are we okay?" David asked quietly.

Killian finally looked at David, their eyes locking. David could feel Killian, hear his thoughts, and
he smiled at the mental picture of Killian kicking his ass.

"Understood, brother." Killian just smiled and went to leave. "Killian?"

Killian turned back, waiting.

"This love thing? Are you ever afraid of it?"

Killian went serious and silent. With his voice so low, David had to move forward to hear him. "Only of losing it."

~*~

Cora stood on the command Bridge aboard the **Interceptor** as the Dark One’s Legion transport docked. Nodding to the captain, she went to meet a man he considered her Master… for now.

The Dark One was an average height man, with a quick, quipping smile that didn’t reach his eyes in kindness. His dark hair was ragged and untamed, and his looks belied his age. His skin had a tint of a shimmer to it, a true sign of the immense power within him. He wore a full regalia of black leather and robes and the jewel encrusted collar that spoke of his position and power.

"Cora."

Cora allowed herself to be irritated by the Dark One’s unwillingness to refer to her as ‘My Lady’, the title of her Order. Smiling, Cora nodded to the surrounding guards of the Dark One’s personal guards, who were all Areenian warriors.

"Sire."

"What is your progress?"

"I located a disturbance within the Aesculapian system."

At the Dark One’s impatient scowl, Cora added quickly, “It is slow since I am the only one who can feel the disturbance.”

The Dark One stood looking over the working command Bridge from the upper observation deck. The **Interceptor** was the second largest ship in the fleet. His own personal ship that housed the Dagr’du was the **Baelfire**, the flagship of the Legion fleet. It was six parsecs off the **Interceptor**, cresting in her waking shadow.

"Regina, she looked well?" the Dark One asked.

Cora bit her tongue as her eyes narrowed. Regina had always been the Dark One’s favorite and, she theorized, the reason he wanted to create Regina’s child. With a child under his control, Regina would have remained near and willing to do anything to protect it. But he knew that would not be a possibility now.

"She, or the woman with her, opened a distortion field. It could have been either of them. The woman…she was strong in a way I have never experienced. And Regina? She too has increased in strength, from Zelena."

“Your children are a constant source of disappointment for us, Cora.” The Dark One watched her intently as he spoke. “What of your other child," he sneered the word. “The one who is called The Bandit.”
“Elurra still evades me, Sire. I know Regina hides her.” Cora couldn’t help but feel the disappointment wave from the Dark One.

He stood with his feet apart, his hands behind his back. "The other woman. What did she look like?"

"Deceptively delicate, but strong. She almost crushed my skull against a wall with the wave of her hand." Cora, without thought, rubbed the back of her head where it still felt sore.

"Gaians. They were such a mystery. A source of endless fascination. I would’ve loved to duplicate their knowledge, their genetics and their power. Watching them pass from existence was beyond me. I need that woman, Cora. I want that woman."

A man approached Cora with a message. She read it and sent the man away. "Sire, we are entering the orbit of Bevroren."

The Dark One nodded. "Go. Find what is disturbing your precious matrix, and pray it brings me my desire."

The Dark One watched and listened to the events as they played on the surface of Bevroren. His interest piqued at the mention of an Order of the Honorable. Patience was one thing he excelled in but he was becoming agitated and tired with the amount of time it took before Cora returned.

With Cora was a young woman, with striking white hair, wrapped in blue robes. Her eyes were the startling blue of the oceans of that very world. Her stature was tall, defiant, and bold. She walked alone, and refused the hands of anyone that would touch her.

"Is she the Gaian?" he asked eagerly.

Cora felt sweat gather at her neck, as the penetrating stare of the Dark One held her pinned to the spot upon which she stood. "No, Master. She disturbs the force much like the one at the other Temple. It is the same force that I felt. She is like the one that Regina and her people took from Zenus."

The Dark One looked at the woman and smiled a not-so-pleasant grin. "Pray you are important."

The woman purposely turned her head in defiance, ignoring him. The Dark One laughed in delight, despite himself.

"Have her put on my transport. I will take her to the *Baelfire*. We’ll see if she is impressed by my favorite machine." The Dark One looked at Cora. "What are her genetics?"

"She is of this world, Bevrorenan, but she is slightly unique. She is resonating at a frequency almost unperceivable. I believe it was her resonance that I felt."

The Dark One walked to the young woman and met her brilliant blue eyes. Smiling, he lifted her face by the chin. "What is your name?"

She tried to remove her chin from his grasp, but he held it firmly, bruising her. Defiantly, she spat out her name, "Elsa."

"Do you know who I am?"

"The Dark One, low-rated thug of our Universe."
He tightened his hand on her, smiling when she cried out.

"You would taunt me? The one who holds the very life of your world in his hands?" His smile widened as he noticed her distressed look. Staring out the front view, she looked at her planet below.

"Who are you? What is your importance to a Gaian woman and her band of rebels?"

"I know no Gaian woman or rebels. I am an Honorable."

"Not for long." He lifted her hair, winding the braid around his hand, maliciously pulling strands free. Laughing at her cry of pain, he walked away.

"Have her transported and instated in my quarters. I might get a few good uses out of her before she is wrecked. Order the Baelfire to fire on the planet with the Dagr’du."

Elsa ran to the upper banister overlooking the command Bridge. "No!"

The Baelfire, which was out of sight suddenly fired on the world below, and Elsa watched as the Interceptor quickly left orbit to distance itself from her world.

The initial blast set the entire western seaboard of the largest continent on fire. The second blast boiled the oceans, and the third, concentrated blast reached the core of Bevroren.

"We punctured the core!" The alarms on the Interceptor sounded as general quarters were called. All hands were ordered to brace for impact.

The first compression wave hit the Interceptor, and Elsa grabbed for the banister as she was knocked from her feet. The second and third waves hit equally hard, and when, finally, the waves lessened in frequency, she regained her feet and stared down at her world, burning in the cold of space. A large chunk of the planet was obliterated.

"Life signs?" The Dark One asked as he examined his hands.

"None. They lost their atmosphere on the third blast." The Captain tried to keep the horror from his voice, but the destruction was too great, the loss of life too terrible.

"Order Baelfire to kill the two surrounding worlds as well. Let this be a gauntlet left for our band of rebels."

Elsa turned and threw herself at the receding back of the only monster she ever knew. Pounding hard and violently, he turned and grabbed her by her small wrists, crushing them under his hands. Smiling, he took one hand around her neck and pulled her to him, crushing her mouth beneath his. He kissed her with no intent on pleasure; just pain and humiliation.


The Dark One, who had turned to leave, suddenly stopped and looked back at the young woman lying on the ground in renewed interest.

"Explain."

Elsa reached into her cloak and drew out a crystal. Azure, pure and clear. The purity let light reflect through it as she held it in her hand. "My Princess will come for me. She will come for the Gem."

The Dark One approached her again, and grabbed her hard by the neck, bringing her close to him.
Elsa tried to shrug him off, but he was too strong. Looking to her right, she tossed the crystal to a guard standing near. The man reflectively caught it, and in mere seconds, and in a scream of agony, he winked from existence leaving the crystal on the floor.

"What is it?"

"It’s the key to the Dagr’du, the dark blade, I, and I alone can handle and touch the crystal. I resonate to its aura. If I am defiled, my body chemistry will change and I will no longer be able to touch the crystal, as will no other living being."

The Dark One felt rage. He gazed into the eyes of the woman and felt helpless before her. She held in her very body the ability and knowledge he had sought for over twenty years. The secret to the true use of the Dagr’du.

"For your life, I’ll give you the chance to tell me everything."

Elsa laughed. "You’re out of luck. I am only one part of three Gems. Harming me will end it as fast as not holding the other keys."

Enraged, the Dark One hit her again. Elsa fell back to the ground, but she laughed. The Dark One gestured for two guards to lift her to her feet.

"What are you?"

Elsa smiled as blood ran down her chin from her mouth. Spitting the blood on him, she laughed. "I am the gem; I am the one who will assist the Savior. She who will cut the thread of your life!"

The Dark One wiped the blood from his face, and reached over to grab a handful of Elsa’s hair, dragging her head back. Looking in it, his face darkened to pure malevolence. "I may be unable to fuck you to death or defile you in any way, but I take just as much pleasure from watching you in pain...and there will be pain."

The Dark One pushed her away and ordered his guards to take her to his ship, Baelfire.

Elsa looked at Cora, her eyes full of spite and hate. Seeing her Eminent emblem and the cloaks of her office, she spat at her.

"You who were supposed to protect! You betray your oath, your honor...you betray us all!"

Cora watched as the young woman was taken away, and for the first time since she had allied herself to the Dark One, she felt fear. Her voice rose in her head, beating in a rising crescendo into fortissimo. Traitor. Traitor. Traitor.

~*~

"Bridge."

"David, I need Killian."

David swiveled in his chair to look at his brother’s tactical station. "What’s the problem, Graham?"

"Just tell Killian to get down here immediately." Graham disconnected, and David gestured for Killian to take off.

Medical was loud with the sounds of Emma’s cries. When Killian entered, his eyes found her immediately. She was pacing wildly and rubbing her face, running her hands through her hair,
making it wild. Tears streaked down her cheeks, and Graham was talking to her softly, trying to calm her down. Surprisingly, Regina was still asleep.

"Killian! Thank god!"

"What the hell is going on here?"

Graham threw his hands up in despair. "I don’t get it. I can’t keep her down. She keeps waking, and the more she wakes, the more agitated she becomes."

"Then bloody well give her something!"

"I did. Too many times already. If I give her any more, it could be lethal."

They both turned to her as she started to talk, her voice soft, incoherent, yet urgent. “Gone, all gone. Too many lost, too much destroyed. Why? He that burns others can’t understand the meaning of life. It hurts, hurts too much. Suffocates, it chokes everything. Can’t breathe. So alone, lonely. They’re all gone.” She sobbed out the last words.

Killian reached out and grabbed Emma around the waist, stopping her mad pacing. Her body was cold and she was shivering. The sounds she made now were low moans and cries.

"Emma! Emma, love, talk to me!"

She finally seemed aware that he was there and relaxed against him. Killian tucked her in close, talking low in her ear. "What’s wrong?"

"Tired." Her voice was so wispy and small, Killian frowned.

"Then sleep."

Emma sobbed against his neck. "Can’t. I can’t. I’m too tired to sleep. They won’t let me sleep"

Killian looked up at Graham. "Did you catch that?"

"No. What did she say?"

"She said that she’s too tired to sleep and they won’t let her sleep."

Graham understood. She couldn’t calm down or rest long enough to let the tiredness be taken over by healing sleep.

Killian swore under his breath, and picked her up. This was bullshit. Forcing her to sleep in Medical was insane.

"Killian, where are you taking my patient?"

"To her bed, in her room, in the dark...with me. I’ll monitor her. If she needs anything, I’ll call you."

"Killian..." Graham gave up when the door closed behind Killian and Emma.

Killian headed straight for the tub once they reached their rooms. Emma hated sleeping without bathing. He quickly ran the hot water and removed both their clothes. Settling in the hot water, he moaned his appreciation as did Emma. Hot water relaxed her, making it easier for her to sleep.
The bath wasn’t a long one, just long enough to do the job. Settling into their bed, Emma found her favorite position covering his body, and she was soon asleep. Killian called the Bridge to inform David of his whereabouts, and then he too went to sleep.

It was almost six hours before anyone bothered them. Killian quickly reached over Emma to answer the hail before it disturbed her.

"Yeah." He ran his hand down Emma naked back to warm it, keeping her asleep.

"Killian."

Killian just shook his head. David. Of course it was David. Who else would it be?

"Yeah."

"I need to talk to you."

Killian looked down at Emma. She was still restless, but at least she was asleep. Kissing her brow, he groaned as her hand stroked his skin. "I can’t leave Emma."

"I’ll come to you." Killian swore as David ended the conversation. Emma was moving deliciously over him, mouthing his masculine nipple in her sleep and making a low sound in her throat.

David entered their room to find the large expanse of Emma’s naked back facing him, as she laid sprawled across Killian. His brother’s hand was holding her close, spanning the length of her back. His other hand was moving through her hair, carding his fingers through the silky length.

"Killian?"

"Shhh, not too loud. She doesn’t sleep very peacefully, and it took forever to get her asleep."

"We’ve orbited Xanadu."

"So you’re taking the ship’s systems offline?"

"Some are already down." David took a chair and brought it next to the bed so he could talk to his brother in a lower voice. "I looked up the information Emma dumped into the computer."

"Bad place or good?" Killian asked with a raise brow.

"Good, as far as I can tell. It’s an independent world within this energy field, and the inhabitants are friendly. There are no Dark One sensors. It appears they’ve been left alone." David leaned forward and put his hands on his knees. "I contacted them."

Killian frowned. Emma had told them to stay away from the inhabitants; to use their world to shield them, but not to contact the people.

"They offered us furlough privileges."

"Did you accept?"

"Yes."

Killian stopped stroking Emma’s skin and concentrated on his brother. "I thought you wanted all personnel to concentrate on repairs."
"I do, but if we rotate the staff and allow them to go down to the planet for a few hours at a time, to enjoy some time off, I think they’ll work better. We’ve been running for a while, and after what happened in the Doyrilia system, and the loss of life...I think everyone needs a break."

Killian had to agree, but getting their systems online...

"Repair crews will continue to run double staffed, but those down can take the option to get some off time down on the planet," David continued.

"What does this have to do with me?"

David looked at Killian and gestured at Emma. "She’s had it rough lately, and both of you seem to be taking turns in Medical. I was thinking your name should be high on the list for taking furlough. You should take a ship and Emma and go find yourselves a small place on one of the seabords with long empty beaches, and spend time with her alone for three or four days."

Killian was silent. David was offering him a vacation away from worrying about Emma, the Dagr’du, and watching her blink away from his existence. He wanted nothing more.

"The thought is tempting. But Emma...I’m not sure she's up for a trip. Take us both off the work schedule for the next forty-eight hours, and if, and when, she wakes, if she wants to get off Enchanted and take a trip down, we’ll take a ship. Otherwise, I’d appreciate having forty-eight hours uninterrupted to just get her awake and healthy."

"Okay, you decide. Just let me know." David stood up. "You should know though, Emma only made one personal comment in her records about this place."

Killian waited for David to just tell him.

"Pleasure Planet."
Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday!

First, I have to say sorry. I intended to give you all a heads up about the Snowing interaction in the last chapter, because not every CS fan wants to read Snowing, just like Snowing fans are too hot about CS (personally, I just don't get it). I’m sure you can understand with a story like this, involving an ensemble of characters, that certain aspects of their story line need to be included. On that note, there is more Snowing in this chapter and it is more ‘intense’ than the previous chapter.

Second, thanks for all your continued support. This story is still bringing readers and that make me super stoked. If you feel inclined to leave a comment, please do, I love to hear what you readers think.

Ultraluckycat, you know how much I appreciate the time you spent on this fic with me, just thought I’d tell you again.

And on to the next chapter...

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Chapter 21 - Atropos: she who cuts the thread

Will dropped into main Engineering, his hands and face covered in grime. He had just crawled through endless access tubes that had collapsed during the last battle, preparing them for the transition to energy conduits. He was tired, had cuts all over his body, and his relief team was missing.

"Where the bloody hell are Gus and Jeff?" Will yelled, a question that was ignored by the working shift. Predictable. It was bloody predictable. This is what happens when you take it upon yourself to rant and rave at a consistent and ongoing rate. People learn to tune you out. He checked his work schedule. Six crews. He was missing six of his crews! Grabbing one of his workers, he asked him where they were, and why they hadn’t reported for duty.

"Sorry, Sir. Far as I know, they're still on the planet on furlough."

Will was beyond cursing. David had promised allowing time off wasn’t going to slow down his work. This was the fourth time in the last twelve hours he’d had crews not showing up for duty.

"Call the Operations Officer and inform him of our missing crew members." The man just stood there and Will let his irritation take over. "Now!"

Ignoring the scurrying man, Will located the one person who was working nonstop. Belle. "What's the word?"

Belle looked up to frown at Will for distracting her. All of these interruptions. It was a wonder anything ever got done.
"I think I found a backup protocol that will work."

"Does it involve me crawling through more crapped-out corridors and access tubes?"

"Unfortunately, yes. But..." Belle held up a hand before Will could interrupt, "nothing you haven’t been through before. All the others can be done as we go. And we’ll only need to hit the internodes."

Will rubbed his dirty face and scowled at his bleeding hands. Running them through his unruly hair, he made an executive decision. *Bloody hell, when the hell did he grow a beard?*

"Time for a break. Come on."

Belle paused and just stared at him. Break? Almost afraid to know what he had in mind, she stood her ground.

"Oh, for the love of Cressida... a break, Belle! You know...food, some coffee in the cantina while you tell me the latest plan?"

Belle shrugged delicately. Okay, she could do with some coffee. She followed Will to the source of hot coffee, taking her work-pad with her.

Will sank in a chair tiredly and took a long drink from his cup. "Okay, tell me what you’ve got."

"Redundancy."

Will just shook his head. What? Okay, redundancy.

Belle warmed to her topic. "I am proposing a redundancy system for the backup relay. You realize that most systems are overly glutted with redundancy to protect the system from a full meltdown during damage, right?"

"Our hardwiring system has it. It can be rerouted and switched on at all main power junctions and modules."

Belle smiled. "Exactly. But in terms of hardwiring, that mean endless amounts of excessive wiring that is more of a hamper than a help since it all must be maintained and diagnosed."

"Tell me about it! With half my engineering staff spending time on a nice cushy planet, and the remaining half blundering their way through a long list of overhauls, I can barely repair a crushed light casing."

"Well, the new system doesn’t need such an elaborate redundancy plan. I can put in the backup system at the same time on the same diagnostic paneling, and they will work in conjunction so any breakdown will immediately become known."

Will sat up straighter at that. Normal maintenance of his systems was his nemesis. That alone ate up more than seventy percent of his scheduled man hours.

"Tell me the proposal."

"At the internodes, we can run circuits in series off the parallel ones. Then, it is a matter of a double trip and a double pull mechanism to reroute essential systems away from damaged ones."

Will thought about it. Ingenious. If it could work.
"So the redundancy systems don't lie in wait to be needed one day..."

"They run at the exact same time. So one system goes down, the backup system is still working, and immediately reroutes..."

"...the power relay through a series circuit." Will smiled into his cup. It was so simple...too simple! Looking at the Honorable, he could feel his eyes getting watery. His Honorable. He could turn Belle loose in a series of engineering modules and just occasionally toss food in, and she would work.

"Damn, your Honorable soul! I think I’m finally in love!"

Belle took a drink of her coffee and just shrugged. "I hate it when you get all weepy." She knew he was talking about his engines.

Will sat back and enjoyed the fun. Laughing hard, he had to admit his fondness for the young woman who was his complete opposite, and yet, his equal. She was replacing his lost sister in his life. Penelope had been a bitch, but he was connected to her. And the two of them were born with ‘fixit’ genes. Penelope could wire a relay in seconds flat, build weapons of destruction, and blow the crap out of anything. Will was more into engines. Together, they had been a working team. Only difference was Belle was quiet and respectful, did as she was asked and never complained. Penelope was not.

For the first time in her life, Belle was doing the work she wanted to do. In the Temple, they brought her supplies and she mocked up model systems, but the *Enchanted* was a real-life working system. And it was...exciting. Will was teaching her beyond books. In her mind, everything had to be done exactly right, but after a few weeks of watching Will's innovative rewiring and jerry-rigging, Belle was coming to understand that there was more to it than just doing it by the book; that real success was in being flexible and dynamic.

"Will?" She waited for him to stop trying to con someone into getting him more coffee. He finally looked back at her with a new steaming cup of brutalized beans. Whoever made the coffee was a sadist.

"Yeah?"

"When I’m no longer called upon to be an Honorable, do you think the Captain will let me remain?"

Will looked at the young woman with interest. "You want to stay on the *Enchanted*?" Belle nodded. "What about your world and your family?"

"I don't know my world. I was taken to Temple practically from the moment I was born. My family turned me over. I never saw them or knew them. I don’t even know their names. The Priests and the Temple are all I know."

"And the Priests? Aren’t they like home?"

"There are no more Priests. Once I was removed from their care, hundreds of years of service ended for them. They performed the last ritual of Kel’ rah Tehl’."

Will frowned at her. "Cal-rah-tel?"

"Ascension. They no longer exist at this plane of existence."
Sounded like mass suicide to Will. He looked at the young woman, far too young to be left in a universe without anyone. "I'm sorry."

Belle just shrugged. "Don't be. It was their life's work to obtain that state, and my life path was set at birth. It wasn't a bad life. I might have lived and died at Temple, and been replaced by another if the princess hadn't come for me. On my world, I would've never been allowed to become educated, and all things I know would be gone."

The horror of her fascinating mind lost all because a world was too stupid to educate their women! Will couldn't wrap his mind around it. It was too much.

Will cleared his throat. "I'm not for religion. Actually, religion and I would get along okay if it didn't have so many things that were forbidden; all of which are all the things I do the most. But I've got to reconsider it if it's responsible for giving you more of a life." Will made a snorting sound. "Damn, I've never been in a house of worship. I think I spit in front of one once." Will hit the table hard. "Nope, I'm wrong! I was married in a religious hall on my world."

Belle was suddenly interested in this jovial, unruly-headed man with twinkling eyes and a touch of the devil in his soul. "You're married?"

"Was. Not anymore."

"What happened?"

"It didn't take." Will scratched his brow. "About around a certain time on my honeymoon when she tried to kill me."

Belle nodded stoically. "I suspected as much. Desperate times require desperate acts out of many women."

Will just laughed. "You have no idea!" Will got up and waited for Belle to follow him back to Engineering. "So, are you eating in the cantina tonight?"

Belle looked at him discreetly with a growing trepidation. "Why? You're not cooking, are you?" Will chose to ignore the dawning horror in her voice. Jealousy was a terrible emotion in most people. He wasn't responsible for the crew's growing envy.

"Yeah, me and Killian. That's if Killian's awake and not down on the planet."

Belle rolled her eyes. She had forgotten to check the mess schedule and didn't save any food from the night before. "I'm fasting." Will looked at her sharply not remembering her ever fasting before. "It's a religious thing."

That explained it. Religion and Will, they had an agreement. They occupied opposite places. Will believed in religion. His own. That included anything that made him happy, sated, or just plain horny. Or smelt of grease.

"Pity. I think Killian switched the schedule so Emma cooks with us now. Their new togetherness is just disturbing."

Belle had to agree. The idea of Killian, Will, and Emma in the kitchen at once was enough to change a person's belief in survival. Emma insisted on vegetables, and the boys wanted all meat, so it was open warfare as they indiscriminately tossed things into the pot and the salad.

"I am definitely fasting tonight." Belle looked straight ahead and said in her expressionless,
monotone voice keeping a deadpan face, "One of the monks told me a joke once."

Will looked at her in interest. "Did you laugh?"

"The joke wasn't that good."

~*~

Killian woke to the most incredible dream. It was more like a sensation, and it took him a few moments to realize that it wasn’t a dream. Emma was awake and she was busy. Her mouth was wicked and hot. Moaning, he threaded his fingers through her hair.

"Emma..." His voice was thick and passionate.

"Ummm?"

"What are you doing?"

Emma gently nipped his inner thigh with her tongue coming out to smooth the bite. Laughing against his skin, she looked up at him in the dark.

"You’re the last man that I ever thought would need a diagram for this!"

"I don’t mean that! That I got. I mean..." Killian groaned deeply as Emma went back to work on him. "I mean...we’ll talk about it later."

She lifted the shaft of his cock and licked every inch, from bottom to top, which caused a ripple of pleasure to shoot through him. Emma sensed his eyes on her as she coaxed those tiny tremors out of him again and again by wetting his cock with her tongue. When it glistened, she paused to examine a blue, pulsing vein with the tip of her tongue and Killian growled, low and deep.

The skin was smooth and hot, the big vein pulsed against her tongue. Stroking slowly on the shaft, she took the head into her mouth, licking away sticky, salty drops of pre-cum. She made a study of the succulent head with a pressing, stiff tongue. He felt and tasted so good. When Emma looked up at him, his head was thrown back, exposing the arch of his strong neck. His hands, strong and powerful, caressed her hair. He was resisting the urge to thrust his cock hard into her mouth. If she had been of his world, he wouldn’t have resisted the urge, the need to use her mouth hard and violently. Emma made a sound in the back of her throat as she pulled his hips closer, sucking his shaft deep into her throat. His moans were the most beautiful sound in the world. The only sounds she ever wanted to hear. These Areenian men were loud!

She took him as deep as she could on her first draw and put her hands beneath her lips. She set a brisk pace, bobbing her head over him, jacking the few inches at the base with her hand. From the sounds of Killian’s grunts of pleasure, the pace and pressure was working for him, sending him spiraling into an overheated state. She entered a sublime, focused moment, her awareness utterly on the sensation of Killian’s straining flesh filling her mouth and stretching her lips. The scent of musk and aroused male filled her nose. With every pass of his cock, she worked him deeper and deeper. Her hunger mounted.

When he began to move his hips, she sucked as he thrust and her hunger didn’t dissipate; it grew. Her clit tingled with excitement as she took him deeper and he groaned. This is what she wanted. His pleasure was her gift to him.

She pulled back so only the tip was in her mouth and her teeth and tongue played over the small slit as he breathed out harshly at the sensation, his hips bucking as her name fell from his lips in
reverence. With that sound, she drew him back in, swirling her tongue around the head, alternating the rhythm with flicks against his shaft. With her left hand, she massaged his scrotum, rolling the balls around in the delicate sac. With her other hand, she stroked her fingers against her clit and inside, getting herself ready for him as he watched her masturbate herself and blow him. Killian groaned as her fingers in her own body created electric jolts through her and she rewarded him with deeper suction, working him harder to get him to explode. Which he did, gladly.

When she’d squeezed out every drop of cum he had to give her, she released him slowly. The sensation caused one last shiver of pleasure to course through him. Killian blinked dazedly when he felt her press her forehead against his hip and nuzzle him with her nose.

~*~

David woke in a sweat, his breathing hard and raspy. The moan came from deep inside as if it were drawn from him by an invisible hand. His bed was a mess. His body was equally sticky and covered in his release as he reached an orgasmic climax. For a minute, he was confused, as his hot body pulsed and his breathing settled, then he realized Killian had let his emotions run rampant and he had been on the receiving end of the raw, euphoric feeling Killian was currently experiencing.

Sitting on the side of his bed he called Killian all kinds of trash as he rubbed his scar hard. It pained him suddenly. "Damn you, Killian. Put up some damn walls!"

David treated himself to a shower, and because it didn’t seem like Killian and Emma were going to finish anytime soon, he decided to go to work to put some distance between himself and his otherwise engaged brother. Bastard.

"Billy! What the hell is going on?" David asked as he looked around his almost empty Bridge.

"Umm, things are quiet, Cap."

"I can’t imagine why," David said dryly. He entered the Bridge and walked around, noticing the unmanned stations. "Where the hell is the Bridge crew?"

"We had a few people not report for duty."

"How many exactly?" David asked as his face darkened.

"The last two shifts."

David swore, and went to sit in his chair. "Order all stations to report. I want a status report."

"Aye, Cap." David just kept swearing and went to get some coffee.

"Cap, Medical and Engineering have reported. They are reporting missing staff as well."

"And the other system chiefs? Have they reported in yet?"

Billy looked uncomfortable. "No, Sir."

"Why the hell not?"

Billy wavered on his feet shuffling back and forth. "They’re missing as well."

David just counted slowly. "Don’t bullshit me, Billy. You’re my Operations Officer. It’s your job to make sure all stations are manned. So just tell me what the hell is going on."
"They’re on the planet, Cap."

"Then call them back."

Billy sighed. "I’ve tried. There was no response."

"And?"

"So I sent some of the security teams to the planet to retrieve the missing crew that were overdue."

David wasn’t liking the situation at all. "And?"

"They didn’t come back or report in either. The next two retrieval teams I sent also failed to report. I cancelled all remaining furloughs." Billy added something under his breath that David didn’t quite catch.

"What did you say?" David demanded.

"I had to cancel the remaining furlough because the transport ships haven’t returned either."

David stood up and paced his Bridge, stopping in front of Billy. "I have a crew of over four hundred and thirty. How many are missing?"

"I can’t be sure, Cap."

"Estimate!"

"Three hundred and sixty-seven, the Eminent’s two sisters, and one Honorable."

"The Ladies Mary Margaret and Ruby went down to the planet?"

"Regina okayed it," Billy rushed out quickly. "Since there were no sensors and they’ve been housed in their room for months…"

"And the Honorable? Which one?"

"The newest. She went with the sisters."

David couldn’t believe it. "Does the Princess know that her newest Honorable is running around on the planet?"

Billy turned red and rubbed the back of his neck. "No, Sir."

"Why the hell not?"

Billy cleared his throat. "You ordered the Commander and the Princess were not to be interrupted."

David felt his irritation rising to the point of a full meltdown. "When exactly were you going to report all of this?"

"Soon… once I had an accurate count of the current staff on the Enchanted."

David just shook his head. "You have the Conn. No one, and I mean no one, is to go down to the surface. I’ll take an individual fighter."

Billy didn’t like it, not one bit. "Cap? What should I do if you don’t return?"
"Oh, don’t worry. I’ll return."

David was on his way out of the Bridge when he ran into Regina. The Eminent seemed puzzled and confused.

"Regina? You’ve got a problem?" Other than her sisters and the Honorable, Mulan, being planetside.

"The space. It bothers me. The energy field is too strong here. It is altering. Causing me dreams."

Regina turned and walked with David towards the fighter bay. She walked with her hands clasped behind her back and her brows furrowed in thought. She was pensive and worried.

"Dreams? About...?"

"Two that is one. The One. The Savior. The silence of isolation thundering in sounds. It speaks without words uttered. Light that is bright and dark. The sun becomes new. The space burns as the Destroyer comes."

David just ran his hands over his face. He had no time for Regina’s Eminent spiel.

"Look Regina, I need to get down to the planet. In case you haven’t noticed no one is coming back, and that includes Mary Margaret, Ruby, and the new Honorable."

Regina just nodded and walked off, distracted. David wasn’t sure Regina had heard a word he said.

~*~

Killian and Emma were lazing about in the bath after waking up and finding food. Emma was still partially asleep, resting on his bigger body as one of his hand moved water up over her back while his other hand moved through the wetness of her hair. The silky golden strands fascinated him in the way they curled around his fingers and gripped him - especially when wet.

"Emma?" he said softly.

"Hmm?"

"Is that how it’s going to be?" Emma, who had been rubbing her cheek against his chest, became still. "Except when you blink out, you won’t come back?"

Emma sighed and slowly rubbed her face into him. Looking up, she sat up a little and took his head in her hands.

"Time is short. The thread has been woven, the length pulled...all that remains to be done is for it to be cut. Do you really want to spend what is left of our time sad, angry, and upset?" Emma leaned in and kissed his lips pulling his bottom one in for a long suck. "I don’t."

"Emma..."

"I’ve never lied to you or misrepresented how this will go. My destiny was drawn long ago. You...you, I didn’t foresee." Emma moved her hand down his body and under the water. "I don’t want to fight with you. I just want to love you like it’s all there is, like it will last an eternity, and then once more into forever. Can you do that?"

Killian eyes darkened, too much of what he could never say was in his eyes and so much of it he had no language for.
"Aye. I can do that." Killian framed her face, kissing her deeply with his eyes closed tightly, concentrating on everything that she was. Memorizing it for a time when they would be no more. "But know this. There will be no relief. When you’re gone, there will be no more me, no more you, and no more us. How could there ever be again?"

Emma cried a little in pain, pulling away from him, tears flooding her eyes. "Killian, please... this is too hard. Harder than I ever knew. Can’t we just..."

Killian pulled her back to him, letting her cry. "Aye," he whispered. "We can. I never asked for promises, and I never gave you any."

"I know."

"Then we do this regardless. You’ve got this destiny, but it touches mine. And as much as you hate to admit it or even see it, you can’t control or stop what will happen to me when you leave. That is my destiny."

Emma nodded. He was right. She was so concerned for him - more than herself. But no more than he could change her duty, could she change what they had already forged between them. It was too late for them both.

"Pretend?"

Killian nodded, taking her smaller hand in his, sucking a long lean finger in his mouth, nipping at its skin.

"Go away with me for a few days. The Enchanted is under repair, and even though we can help...don’t. Just take a moment from all of this and come with me."

"Where?" Emma wiped tears away sniffing, smiling slightly, but the smile never reached her eyes. She was too busy searching his face as if memorizing every detail.

"David suggested a long empty beach on the planet."

Emma just shook her head. "The place neither of us should go in our state. We’d never return or break free."

"I don’t know...a beach sounds nice to me."

"Sure it does. But not on this planet."

Killian was confused. The planet sounded perfectly normal to him. "What’s wrong with this planet? It’s protected from Cora, and David said the people were nice..."

Emma sat up suddenly, the water sloshing around them. "What do you mean David said the people were nice?"

"When he contacted them and they offered furlough to the crew," Killian explained. He frowned when she suddenly was up and out of the water. He wasn’t ready to get out. He was planning a much longer tryst.

"Did he go down? Did anyone go?"

"More than likely. Emma, come back..."

Emma gave a sound of exasperation. "Didn’t I say not to contact the inhabitants? Did I not say to
only use the planet as a blind?"

Killian just shrugged. "Sure. But David searched your travel data logs. It just said ‘Pleasure Planet’. So, what’s the big deal?"

"Oh damn! Get out of there! We need to see what damage has been done!"

~*~

David finally tracked down a few of the transport teams and ordered them back to the ship. The capital city of Xanadu was flooded with his people having a good time. They were happy, laughing, and seemed more than happy to comply with his orders, and yet...no one left.

David tracked Mary Margaret, Ruby, and the Honorable to a large luxury resort. He stood and watched in wonder as Ruby and Mulan swam in the nude and occasionally got out to have large men with glistening muscles rub them down. They chatted and laughed the entire time, and were eating to excess.

This wasn’t good. David didn’t know what constituted the corrupting of an Honorable, but watching Mulan making overtures to the masseuse and the constant attention his hands were giving her body...it didn’t look good.

He ordered them back to the ship immediately, and told the Honorable to dress herself. Both Ruby and Mulan turned over, giving him a full view of their naked asses as they chose to ignore him. Angry, David went to find Mary Margaret, hoping she could exert some authority or reason over the other two.

So stormy were his thoughts that David didn’t even bother knocking. He just entered the suite. Mary Margaret was standing at the window looking out at the beautiful scenery; her calm and regal body seemingly calling to him.

Turning at the sound of the door opening, she was stunned to see him standing there. She had been thinking of him, wishing for him, trying to reach him mentally and wondering if he could feel her desire to see him.

"Mary Margaret..." David was silenced by her beauty. She stood lean with her pixie haircut, wearing a full body sheath of white trimmed in golden piping. The sheath was in a full Grecian style, leaving her upper arms bare and the full length of her back naked to his glances. She was damn near a goddess.

Need. Want. Desire.

Both moved so fast it was impossible to see who initiated the first movement. Suddenly, they were in each other's arms, kissing passionately, as David moved Mary Margaret backwards towards an open door, and what he hoped was a bedroom.

"Good... You taste so good..." It was what his body was thirsting for. She was like a cold glass of water to a man lost in the desert.

"I'm not Kathryn," Mary Margaret gently reminded him as she nipped at his neck.

"Thank God." Dealing with Kathryn had been difficult, and Mary Margaret was proving to be her own brand of hard. But it was Mary Margaret he wanted, needed, and desired. Kathryn was, in all things, finally surprisingly silent.
"You're here now. I'm here now. Things have been building to this point," Mary Margaret murmured as she wrapped her arms around his trim waist. "I want this. I want you."

He tipped her face up with a large hand, and she was instantly lost in his blue eyes. He moved forward very slowly, as if giving her a chance to change her mind and pull back. When she didn't, he pressed his lips very gently onto hers. Mary Margaret kissed him back gently and then opened her mouth, her tongue sliding over his. He tasted so good, strong, like rum and mint. She nibbled on his bottom lip and the side of his neck. His gasps were a surprise, almost breaking the silence. David pressed his lower body harder against hers. Mary Margaret moved against him urgently, feeling his hardness between their bodies.

He gasped again. "Oh, shit..."

"Please," Mary Margaret pleaded. "Please."

Something loosened in him and then they were on the bed, his bigger body covering hers, molding her to him. His mouth rained kisses on her lips, face, and neck; his hands were strong and insistent against her thighs, pushing up the hem of her gown. Thick, broad fingers and quick moving hands removed her clothes and slowly moved along the soft skin of her inner thigh, slipping into her. Her whimpers went straight into his mouth as she kept their mouths joined in a lusty kiss.

While Mary Margaret struggled with the fastenings on his shirt, he reached to remove the dress completely, pulling it over her head and tossing it across the room.

It landed near the fireplace.

"David..."

He moved one hand up her body, along her sides, to take her arm in his hand and push it over her head as his body leaned hard into hers.

"Don't worry. If it burns, I'll buy you another one." He was too rushed to worry about ruining her clothes as his hand quickly went to his waist to unbuckle the belt there.

Mary Margaret stopped him. "No, I want to do that." She unbuckled and unfastened him as he finished taking off his shirt. He wore nothing underneath.

Mary Margaret squeezed his length and he hissed, "Oh fuck, that's good."

"Let's shut the door," she said as she wriggled under him, thinking of the soon-to-be-returning Ruby and Mulan.

"No."

“No?” she repeated, her brows lifting to go along with a suggestive smile.

He answered her with his lips pressed firmly against her. His hands buried themselves in her hair as he sent ripples of desire up her spine with his lips. She let go of his length to run her fingers up his bare back and then back down again, and lost herself in the feeling of his kiss; moaning softly into his mouth as his tongue explored hers.

The passion of the kiss fanned her smoldering desire into dancing flames, and she gripped his shoulders hard as he bit at her neck. He pushed for another kiss as he ran his hands around the skin of her waist making her shiver. She threw her head back as he pulled out of the kiss and moved his lips to her breast, softly teasing her nipple with his lips until she was gasping for air. He then took it
into his mouth fully and grazed it with his teeth, making her cry out and dig her fingernails into his back.

Every inch of her skin he touched felt white hot, and his lips seemed to make her nerves scream. She lost herself completely to his hands, his lips, his skin. He ran his hand lightly down her body and he leaned down to kiss her again with a passion that seemed to consume him. She slid her hands around his waist and up his back, pulling him closer to her. His mouth still locked to hers, his hand found its way to her core. At his touch, she writhed under him and ground her pelvis against his fingers. He flicked her clit once with his thumb, and feeling her wetness, roughly pushed two fingers inside her. She let out a long gasp as she broke his kiss again.

She thrust her pelvis into his hand as he moved his fingers inside her, occasionally teasing the small bundle of nerves that made her shudder.

He wanted her, and he wanted her now. He was painfully hard, and almost shaking with anticipation. It was probably because it had been awhile since he’d been with a woman. He moved himself to her entrance and teased her, moving himself back and forth across her. She groaned, and pushed back against him. Her eyes were closed and she was biting her lower lip. As her arms wrapped around his neck, her fingers brushed softly against his neck. He used himself to open her and then drove home.

She tensed slightly, then sighed as he sank fully into her. He closed his eyes tightly, fighting for control. The sensation was so strong, he moaned, “Oh God…”

She was so tight it hurt him. He wasn’t sure what to do. It seemed as though time had frozen and he contemplated what to do next, unable to breathe, still buried deep inside her. Opening her eyes, she turned to look at him full on, staring right into his eyes. Her eyes seemed to be pleading, and when she moved slightly underneath him, her gaze growing wider, he understood that she wanted him to move.

His hand caressed her face softly, fingers trailing lightly from her forehead down to her jaw. She watched him carefully with her eyes wide as he did this, and then closed her lids softly and leaned her head against his hand. She was beautiful. Her features were soft and round, like a china doll, and her skin was like porcelain.

His mouth was still at her ear when he began to move against her. ”I have wanted--” he whispered, his voice so soft she could barely hear him.

"What? What?" Mary Margaret asked wildly, distracted by his solid, throbbing cock. "Oh, God, what?"

"I have wanted this for so long," he said, his hips moving faster and faster. "So, so long."

Smiling, she tilted her hips up, giving him easier access. After a while, she wrapped her legs around his waist. Somehow, everything moved naturally, smoothly. Her legs urged him to move faster, to go deeper and he did, filling her to the hilt, then leaving her body quickly to do it again… and again…and again. No words came out of her mouth, only moans and sighs and groans. Her eyes remained closed, and she thrashed her head wildly on the pillow beneath him. If he would change his rhythm, or reposition her hips, she would let out a little gasp and arch her back off the bed.

Everything she felt, he felt. Each time her lips would form a silent ‘o’ of pleasure, he found himself closer to the edge. She was intoxicating. Her complete abandonment to the moment, her reaction to every thrust, her tiny fingernails digging into the flesh of his neck…
He couldn’t hold out much longer, it was torture. Moving his hand down, he worked his forefinger in circles over her clit until she was unable to contain her cries. The muscles of her inner walls clenched and unclenched repeatedly as he drove into her, milking him, bringing him with her.

Afterwards, they lay together, their panting the only sound in the room for several minutes.

"Are you okay?" he finally asked, pushing strands of hair from her sweaty forehead.

Mary Margaret looked up at him bemused, drawing his mouth into a deep kiss. "Wonderful," she said, when she was able to reply.

"Which side do you want?" he asked. Mary Margaret gestured aimlessly, not really caring, and he settled her to his right, her arms and legs still wrapped around him. He lay down gently beside her on the bed, drawing her close to him.

"Next time," he panted, wiping the sweat from his brow, "you get to be on top."

Next time? There's going to be a next time, Mary Margaret smiled. "Next time..." she repeated drowsily, her fingers lazily stroking the lines of his face, especially his scar as she drifted off to sleep. Next time.

~*~

Ruby and Mulan entered the suite for the third time in the last six hours, both of them sighing and shaking their heads.

"They’re still going at it!" Mulan sounded impressed.

"Well, at least we shut the door. Walking in on them was just disturbing," Ruby said with a frown. It was more disturbing that neither David or Mary Margaret seemed to notice them, or even care that they were rutting like animals with the door wide open.

The sight of the charming captain behind Elurra Blan, who was on her hands and knees, with him pounding into her and his hands on her ass, was more than Ruby ever wanted to see. And the sounds of their combined screams were enough to put Ruby off food for a month. It was a total nightmare. Rubbing her eyes viciously, she still couldn’t erase the sight.

The sounds from the closed bedroom were ever increasing to a climatic howl, as David’s voice rose and demanded more of Mary Margaret.

"Damn, I can’t believe it. The Captain is killing Mary Margaret with his cock."

Mulan agreed. "Hey! If she dies, do you think I can have that one dress of hers that is sparkly green?"

"No way! I’ve had my eyes on that number forever, and she won’t even let me borrow it." Mulan and Ruby went into Ruby’s room shutting the door to try to drown out the sounds of the howling menagerie. "But I’ll be nicer and lend it to you from time to time."

~*~

"How long has he been down there?" Killian paced the Bridge in anger as Emma tried to establish contact with the planet.

Billy pulled at the collar of his shirt which suddenly felt too tight and was choking him.
"Eight hours? Give or take."

Emma looked at Killian who seemed wired and irritated. "Killian can you reach him...make a link?"

"Oh, I’m feeling him just fine! It’s diluted, but I can definitely feel him."

"Well then, tell him..."

"It won’t work. He's fucking himself into an early grave!"

Emma paused. Both she and Billy suddenly were very interested. "Really? You can..." Emma made a gesture and lifted up a little so she could look over the railing to where Killian was pacing and check out his package. Yep, very erect.

"Not in images... just endless sensations," Killian explained, flopping his hands about in helpless irritation. "We can’t go down or we’ll be trapped like fucking rabbits. We can’t contact anyone because no one seems interested in answering. And what the fuck is wrong with you? Pleasure Planet? Like that’s not like offering candy to a fat baby?"

"I didn’t write my comments for anyone but me! I know what the hell a pleasure planet is! Why the hell don’t you?" She paused, shifting her gaze to Billy before asking, “If you can feel him... ya know, does that mean he can feel you when we..."

Billy discreetly tried to move away from them as they argued, motioning to the officer manning the communications to continue trying to contact the planet's Council of Elders.

“Aye, he can,” Killian answered curtly. “And what the bloody hell is a Pleasure Planet?"

Emma flushed a bright shade of pink with embarrassment at the thought that David knew when she and Killian had sex. "Pleasure,” she said distractedly. “They provide you with any and every pleasure imaginable." Emma suddenly felt bad. After all, she had found herself stuck on the planet the first time she went there, and barely found a way to escape. "It’s like a sinkhole of pleasure. The more you want or desire, the more is provided, and thus, the more you want."

Killian frowned. "So you tell them that you want something, and they provide you with whatever it is...endlessly?"

"Something like that, but not quite. You don’t realize you're asking. The Xanians are telepaths, strong ones. That’s why this is a protective planet and the field of positronic nexus waves has helped to mutate or evolve them into pure thought. Their philosophy is that the greatest pleasure is the greatest good, so no one works."

Billy came to stand at the banister next to Emma. "Then how do they survive? Someone must do work, run the government, grow food, and stuff. A civilization can’t live on nothing."

Emma nodded. "That’s true. And they live well. They have endless replicators and power that provides them with everything they need."

"They built replicators?" Killian was impressed. Fuck in the morning, build a replicator in the evening, and spend the rest of the night glutting yourself.

"Hardly. They are an advanced society, but not of their own making. Their way of life and abilities traps people, almost like sirens calling. The ships are trapped here, and then the Xanians offer them a way out, for a price. They steal technology in an ingenious way."
Killian’s face stormed over. "So they’re holding our people...hostage?" Killian’s rose in anger. "Tactical, arm the forward photon array and target the capital city."

"Wow, power it down, Pirate! You can’t randomly fire on the city without hurting our own people," Emma advised. "Technically, they’re not captives. The crew is trapped by their own desires, not the Xanians. Basically, they’re trying to entertain them, so it becomes a self-feeding cycle. Sooner or later, the Xanians will offer an escape, but we don’t have the time to wait, so if we can get one of the non-working Xanians to pick up the link, we can make a deal."

"How will they release our people?" Billy asked quietly as Killian paced the Bridge, swearing under his breath and devising tactics to blow the hell out of this planet without harming their crew.

"We make the deal, and the Xanians, as a collective consciousness, will transmit a desire to return home," Emma told them.

"What can we offer them? They have everything they need. Maybe more replicators with your isolinear chips that allow them to interface with the mechanism?" Killian suggested.

"Nope, can’t do. That’s what I gave them the first time I was trapped on their world."

Killian’s eyes narrowed as he tried to think of what exact pleasure it was that had trapped her in their web. "Then what? What can we offer?" Killian wasn’t sure he wanted to know. Not the Zephyr?

"The stroynium-plutonium-curium power node."

Killian exploded. "Absolutely not! Our warp core crystals are showing first stages of fracturing. If we lose the power node, we can’t re-crystalize."

"Killian, their power systems run constantly. They don’t understand the concept of abstinence, denial, or even moderation. Their power source is always needing a re-matrixing. This nodule will do it. It will give them years of much needed power."

"No."

"Dammit, Killian. What is David doing right now?"

"Sex. He's having sex."

"For how long now?"

Killian rubbed his face. "Hours."

"Does it feel good?"

Killian just shrugged, but in truth he knew. "He’s feeling uncomfortable. The acts are becoming more frantic and desperate, taking on a hint of violence. He’s appalled."

"It’s the feedback loop. The more pleasure he achieves, the more he needs to reach the next level of satisfaction. At first, it would’ve been easy and he would have felt sated. But the lull between sessions would shorten until he and his partner are so trapped they will literally kill themselves."

Killian rubbed his face, trapped and unhappy with the circumstances. "Billy, call Will to the Bridge. Graham as well, if he’s not down on the planet."

"Graham wouldn’t be," Emma said quietly. Killian looked at her with a raised eyebrow waiting for
her explanation. "He’s an empath. He and Regina are too connected to mental things to withstand how upsetting the positronic nexus is to the mind. My gifts are different so it doesn’t affect me except as a low humming. The *Enchanted*’s shields offer some protection, but on the planet, they’d be overwhelmed. Just being in orbit is probably already bothering them, affecting them, and with the shields down..."

"This is bloody stupid!" Killian kicked a console before flopping down into the command chair. He sat there brooding, so Emma left him alone while they waited for Will.

~*~
Happy Wednesday
Thanks to all who took the time to leave comments and give kudos. I do my little happy dance every time I receive something from you guys.
So glad you all like the Snowing smut in the last chapter.
Warning: this chapter contains OutlawQueen smut. Just giving you all a heads up before you read! (which was incredibly hard to write)
I doubt, at this point, I need to give thanks to ultraluckycat but I'm going to anyway.
Thanks, Chica!

Chapter 22 - Pleasurable Consequences

"This better be good!" Will looked around the Bridge and whistled. "You know, a starship works better with people at its helm."

"Shut up, Will! We’ve got problems," Killian blasted.

Will held up his hands in surrender. "I’m telling you those blown relays on deck sixteen wasn’t me. It did it all on its own. Now, I know that I estimated repairs would be completed in a week, but fuck me, almost my entire staff is missing. Don’t think I won’t put the whole lot on report..."

"Will...Will..." Killian paused as Will kept rattling off his accomplishments, why he shouldn’t be held accountable for anything that might be wrong. "Will! Will you bloody shut up? We didn’t call you to the Bridge because we discovered who’s been stealing Ensign Aurora’s undergarments from the ship’s laundry."

"Oh!" Will looked skeptical. "Are you sure? I mean, I’m sure if a few scraps of her things landed in my laundry bundle I’d be not knowing how that happened. Not that I’m saying it did happen, mind you, but if it did...theoretically...It wasn’t me."

Emma snickered at his large, insincere, cheesy grin.

"Will, almost the entire crew is trapped on the planet." That got his attention. Emma quickly explained the Xanadu people, and Will’s reaction was swift and predictable.

"Blow their fucking planet to hell and back!"

Killian nodded his head in agreement, looking to Emma with hope shining in his eyes.

Emma looked at them. Amazing. Just amazing! Did all Areenians immediate seek the most violent, expedient resolution for all problems? "We can’t. To attack them would be like attacking the crew. They’re all over the place, caught up in whatever pleasure is their..." Emma stumbled over the words, "pleasure."

"This is sick. They hold other species hostage to help support their worthless, slothful ways?" Will
was appalled. He loved being slothful, layabout, worthless, and shifty with an eye on the main prize, or at least a skirt. But not work? That was just wrong.

"Different cultures, different strategies. Theirs has proven to be effective for them for generations, and now I’m not sure they could be taught to work," Emma reasoned.

"Okay then, Killian, you're number two and in charge now. What do we do?"

Killian looked at Will and then quickly at Emma. She just shrugged, with a smile. It was his decision.

"We get them back. We can’t wait. Some of them aren’t going to last long depending on what ‘pleasure’ they chose."

"Well, good thing I didn’t go down. I’d never come back," Will said truthfully.

"You said it, Vice Boy." Killian looked at Emma again, but she was strangely silent. "We need to offer them something so they mentally suggest to our people that it’s time to go home."

"Good plan. That’s a good plan. We should give them something they need; something they’ll want...something juicy and choice. We should give them anything they want. Whatever it takes," Will said, nodding eagerly the whole time.

"Good. We’ll need the stroynium-plutonium-curium power node," Killian said quickly, and then waited for it.

"Oh, they’re dead. Bury them and let's move on." Will walked away, heading off of the Bridge as fast as he could. "Anything but that!"

"Will."

Will turned around and flopped his arms about in exasperation. "No, Killian. Absolutely not! I need it. We need it." He gestured around them. "Who needs them? They make noise, take up space, and eat food. We’re better off without a huge glutted crew. We can manage."

"Will..."

"They're down on that planet eating to excess, fucking, and partying. They’re corrupted beyond repair. I say we cut them loose. They’d thank us for it."

Killian shook his head no.

"I hate them!" Will rubbed his face. "Who needs them? Emma can take over hydroponics, you command...Billy, Billy is an excellent crewman, and I’ve got Belle crawling through access spaces sweeping as she goes along. She hardly eats anything, easy to maintain, and Graham’s in Medical...and...and...we’ve got an Eminent!"

Killian had known Will was going to be tough. "Will, we need our crew. And even if you can live without them, I can’t. I’ve lost one brother. Don’t make me lose another."

"Don’t make me do it, Killian. Don’t. I need that power node. My crystals are fracturing. Bloody hell, mate! I can hear them from here!" Killian stood firm. "Fucking mother puss bucket! I protest. I sorely, strongly protest!"

"Will..."
"Aww, don’t ’Will’ me! Just don’t! By all that’s holy, on the very steps of Valhalla, I swear Killian that was my first SPC power node. My first! Do you’ve any idea what that means?"

Billy interrupted Will’s tirade. "Commander, we’ve got a response from the planet."

Killian acknowledged. "Will, just get me the node." Killian took the command chair. "Patch them through."

"This is High Councilor Kal’rah, how may I assist you?"

Killian looked at the smiling, pleasant woman and felt his irritation increasing. "You could send my crew home."

"Captain..."

"Commander."

"Commander, your people are free to return home at any time."

*Bullshit.*

"Pardon me?"

"Bullshit! I think you can read me just fine, Kal’rah." Killian sat back as Emma came forward to stand next to Killian’s command chair. Killian was correct. The woman was reading him and his thoughts to get the upper hand. Killian was purposely thinking of all the hideous and heinous things he wanted to do to that planet; to that woman who would bargain for his brother’s life.

The woman seemed taken aback. *Areenian. Brother?* The woman broke out in a sweat. "Princess?" she pleaded as she saw Emma and recognized her.

"Kal’rah, you are keeping well?" Emma greeted with a regal dignity Killian hadn’t seen before.

"Yes." There was a scurry of information and exchange of ideas off the viewer. Emma and Killian patiently waited.

"We’ll transmit a list of what we require," Kal’rah said as she stood up straighter. "If the Princess would be so kind to deliver the requests."

Killian stood up. "The Princess will do no such thing."

"Commander, we prefer to deal with..."

"Me. The Princess is my mate." Emma looked at Killian sharply, her eyebrow rising, but she remained silent. "The crew is mine. You’ll deal with me or you’ll deal with my weapons."

"That would be unwise. Your people are intermixed among our populations. You could only do them harm." The woman sat down in her own command chair. "I am sure you wouldn’t want that to happen."

"I’m sure you know nothing of me! Death before surrender. I’d rather kill every member of my crew before I allow them to be used and oppressed in tyranny."

Emma was impressed. The woman faltered. A Xanian never faltered or backed down. Their survival depended on them remaining strong and in power, which meant showing no mercy and staying in control.
A crewman handed Killian a list. It was the Xanian’s demands for the return of the crew.

"This is what you want of us?" Killian said.

"Yes."

"And how do we negotiate? I can’t possibly meet this list of items. Most are not available on our ship, and others would cripple the Enchanted."

"There is no negotiation. We know what is on your ship from your crew’s minds. You have the treasure of the Olympus."

"That is not ours to give. We can’t negotiate with other worlds’ treasures." Killian stood up and walked towards the viewer screen. "Is there no room to compromise, or is this your last word?"

"We don’t negotiate."

"I suspected as much. That would stink of work. Then we have no deal." Killian looked at Robin manning the tactical station; his station.

"Robin, do you have the High Counselor's coordinates?"

"Yes, Commander."

"Then lock the forward tactical array and fire a full dispersal. Fire on my command." Killian looked at the woman again. "Goodbye."

They could hear the rush of noise at the other end. The other people in that room on the planet became utterly agitated and their voices rose in panic.

"Robin, fire," said Killian as he sat down in the command chair again, purposely not watching the woman, but Emma instead, who stood at his side.

"Wait!"

Killian motioned for Robin to belay that order and then calmly turned to look at the woman. Killian refused to talk. As he sat there in silence, Will returned to the Bridge.

Desperate, the woman tried to appeal to a reasonable authority. "Princess, please."

Emma just shook her head, and turned away. Standing by Killian’s chair, she stood facing him with her back the view screen.

The woman sighed when it was apparent Emma would not intervene. "We’ll entertain a counteroffer if you wish to transmit a list."

"There is no list." Killian said. "Just one thing, and no more. My suggestion is that you take it happily, because it far exceeds your request."

"One thing?" The woman sounded doubtful.

Killian held out his hand for Will to give him the node. The reluctance of the engineer was apparent when he hesitated. Killian just snapped his fingers, and a thoroughly put-out Will placed the node in Killian’s hand.

"One." Killian confirmed as he held it up for the view screen. "One stroynium-plutonium-curium
The offer sent the Xanadu High Council into a flurry of activity. The woman conferred with other members.

"Manufactured?"

"Real." That increased the excitement.

"You have a deal."

"Expect me within the next half hour." Killian looked at Will. "You take the Conn. If I fail to contact you or fail to return, you know what to do."

"I’ll blow every motherfucking blasted one of them to kingdom come," Will said as he tossed himself down on the small flight of stairs, dejected.

"Then the deal is made." Killian made a motion to have the transmission cut.

Emma looked at him with her head cocked to one side as her hand moved up his shirt front. "I could fuck you right here in David’s chair. Hard-ass Killian. I like it."

Killian chuckled as he leaned in closer to her, their mouths just touching. "Gets you hot?"

Emma nodded. "But what was with all the ‘she is my mate’ crap? Everyone knows that you're my mate, and not the other way around."

"You think?" Killian smiled and pulled her around the chair to stand between his legs as he kissed her within an inch of her life.

"We’re still here!"

Killian reluctantly pulled away, and looked at Will. "Shut up, Will." Killian pushed Emma away from him. "Once again, Princess Swan, you’d be wrong. Stay here with Surly Boy and I’ll be back soon."

"What if..."

Killian kissed her again, quickly. "Don’t worry. They have nothing I want. That’s why you’re staying onboard. My greatest pleasure would be to get back to you immediately." With that, Killian left.

Emma blushed at his words, a sweet smile spreading. When the hell did he get so gosh-darn romantic? And because her legs were feeling a little weak about the knees, she sat down next to Will.

“I fucking love that man,” she said in a daze.

"My node... Bloody hell. My poor engines needed that." Will was truly in mourning.

"Don’t worry,” Emma consoled, patting his back in comfort. I’ll give you another one.”

Will looked at Emma with a return gleam in his eyes. "You’ve got more?"

"Yes. Obviously not here, but yes, I can get more." She amazed herself that in her moment of weakness, she had told Glut Boy she had access to more SPC nodes.
"Can I have two?" Will asked in his sweet lost little boy voice. Emma just laughed. Glut Boy had missed the pleasure planet. Unreal.

"So why didn’t you go down like the others? This planet sounds like your idea of paradise," she asked.

"Leave my engines in the middle of repairs?" Will just snorted. Emma laughed, but she understood. Engines were Will’s greatest pride and pleasure. “Wait… you love him?”

~*~

Regina found Robin on the Observation deck. Again. She was feeling… unsettled. The energy coming from the planet, along with the positronic nexus waves that protected the planet and the space surrounding it, was strong. Incredibly so. It was altering, causing her strange dreams, but not only that. She was experiencing sensations, feelings she hadn’t felt in a long time.

She walked the decks, hoping to settle herself or find some sort of outlet for the sensual waves she found pulsing through her body. And what had her body led her to, to Robin.

“You didn’t go down to the planet?” she asked in way of a greeting.

“No,” Robin smiled. “I haven’t been cooped up on board for as long as the other crew members, so I offered to stay and cover some shifts.”

“That’s very kind of you,” she returned with a gentle smile before her brow furrowed slightly.

“Are you okay?” Robin questioned with concern.

“I’m fine, just a little headache,” she reassured with a wave of her hand.

“Anything I can help with?”

“No, but thank you, Robin.”

At his smile, Regina felt a wave of emotion rolling off of him. She was aware that he was attracted to her, had felt it from the moment they first met. But it was something she had ignored. While the notion of being in love, of finding that special someone, was not as foreign to her as it was to Killian, it was usual for Eminent’s not to have romantic relations. They lived solitary lives. Needing to be available at any time for every being in the known universe to teach, to give advice, to mediate if necessary. Having a family would complicate things.

But today, in this moment, she wanted nothing more than to shake off her shackles and live. For both herself and this man before her. She blamed her feelings on the planet and its nexus waves.

She moved before she registered her thought to move, her hand reaching out to press against his chest. Her hand clenched a little, her fingers digging into his flesh, as if her mind was warring with what her hand wanted to do, needed to do. Then she was moving again, her hand sliding up his body, her fingertips grazing the side of his neck before they settled at the base of his skull, pulling him toward her.

Their first kiss was tender and sweet, both unsure of what was happening between them. They pulled away from each other, searching for something in the other’s gaze. They then moved back, this time more forceful, with need and passion.

They moved with fluidity, just like a dream, as clothes were pushed aside and flesh tasted. Her
fingers grazed his masculine nipple as he removed her pants, and they both tumbled to the soft floor in front of the large window displaying the vibrant space beyond.

Robin felt her hands, could smell her scent, hear her sounds of passion, and taste the perfume of her body. The sound of passion from Robin’s own body was impossible to keep contained. He was almost startled to hear himself. He never considered himself to be very vocal, and the sounds seemed very personal and telling of the effect she had on him. Regina’s body responded almost immediately. What was once soft and yielding quickly turned into hard, blazing, and demanding passion. Robin felt Regina turn him over onto his back. He opened his eyes to see a sight more appealing than an explorer conquering uncharted territories. That territory was his body, heart, and soul. Sometimes, a smart man has to know when to yield.

“Robin, Robin I need to feel you. I need your hands and mouth.” Regina’s mouth plunged onto Robin’s, giving him a kiss unlike any they had ever shared before. Previous kisses had been passionate and eager, but this kiss was nastier and almost earthy in nature. It spoke of consumption, of devouring need.

Robin’s own passion rose to meet hers as his hands found her clothes and disposed of them. “God, yes. Oh, Regina, yes,” Regina’s head came up, letting her eyes make contact with his. Robin couldn’t keep the gasp from escaping his mouth. Regina’s eyes were wild, more like an out of control animal then the regal spitfire he was used to. Regina was not willing to give up her control. The wildness in her eyes sparked something primitive inside of Robin. It was as if her wild need for him reached out for his, up until now, repressed side. Their mating grew more wild and primitive, bordering on violent. They were like wild horses.

Robin’s whole body almost exploded when Regina’s mouth found his nipple. Her hands and nails were hard on his back, while her teeth and mouth pulled at the nipple, making it even more sensitive. His hands quickly found her hot, wet core, finding it tight and inviting. The smell of her arousal invaded his senses, leaving him slightly drunk and dizzy. Regina’s body kept his pressed hard into the floor as her nail scraped across his chest just under his clavicle. Robin watched in fascination as his blood pooled along the groove. He could feel her beautiful, elegant hand finding his hardened cock. His eyes shut as her hand tightened around him, making him even harder than before. Regina sighed happily, looking down to see his endowment. Big hands, big feet, and he was packing major heat. Robin opened his eyes to watch her looking at him and his heart picked up speed as her eyes met his. The heat and hunger in her gaze almost sent him over the edge.

“Anything you want Regina. Anything.” Robin couldn’t believe that the husky impassioned voice was his own. His fingers continued to work themselves against Regina, stroking her clitoris. She closed her eyes and began moving her hips, thrusting herself harder upon his fingers with cries of abandonment while her hand started to work Robin’s cock. Her eyes looked drugged as she once again met Robin’s eyes. Using her other hand, Regina pulled Robin’s body her. Her tongue soothed the scratch mark on his chest. She nipped at him as her body exploded around Robin’s hand. His own body joined her in the release at the feel of her teeth on his chest. The last thing he remembered before he lost consciousness was stars and planets racing past him.

Robin came back to himself with Regina’s naked body lying heavily on him. He looked down to watch her sleep. Without thought, his hands began to move over her again, mapping every curve and turn of her body. They had wild and dirty sex without penetration. Robin couldn’t help but smile, because he couldn’t remember the last time he felt so great, so sated. He could only imagine what full sex with Regina would entail. Robin’s smile grew when all he could think about was how eager he would be to die that way a thousand times, over and over again, if they ever got to that
phase in this crazed relationship.

“Feeling pretty pleased with yourself, huh?” Robin looked down to see Regina watching him with sexually hot eyes, a smile around her mouth telling him that she was pretty happy. He almost sighed a sense of relief. Post-orgasm anxiety and regret would be something he couldn’t handle right now.

Taking her hand that had jerked him off into his, Robin sucked her fingers into his mouth licking his own cum off her hand. Regina’s eyes became heavy at the sexual sensation Robin was causing in her body. Reaching up, her mouth and tongue joined his in licking at her fingers. She gave a pleased squeak when Robin hotly swore, grabbed her and flipped her onto her back, joining her mouth to his in a kiss that was furious enough to snap her neck. His body hardened on hers, and pushed her into the hard floor. Opening her legs, Regina pulled Robin between her legs, giving him a hot place to reside.

“Fuck me, Robin. I want you so bad.”

“Don’t you mean, make love to you Regina?” Robin could admit to being slightly taken aback by this earthier version of his Regina, but being a lot turned on by her. Having Regina talk dirty to him could become a major kink.

“Later, make love later. I want you to ride me hard. You said anything? That’s what I want. I want you inside me, deep inside me. I want you so deep that I can feel you in my throat.”

Robin buried his head between her breasts at her words, feeling his primitive side rising, and he needed a minute or two to settle his racing pulse. Regina wriggled under him, impatient for him to start; to drive her to the heights she desperately sought. Lifting her legs, she clamped his hips with her thighs and rolled them.

His eyes became heavy as she straddled his hips and placed her hands on his shoulders, now pushing him into the hard floor. Placing one hand on her hip and the other around his cock, they slowly moved together, with him aligning himself to enter her slowly. Regina slowly pushed herself down on him, impaling herself at her own speed. Robin’s eyes shut and a deep groan left his throat as he felt himself slide into her hot, tight channel made slick from her earlier orgasm. Regina’s small moan of pain brought him back to himself. Moving his hand from his cock, he sought out her clitoris. The stroking of the small bundle of nerves helped her to move beyond the pain of their first penetration. They both held their breath as their bodies finally settled with his cock completely buried in her. Robin pulled her into his arms and held her tightly until she was ready to move.

“Robin,” she stammered, “I can feel every inch of you.” Regina leaned heavy into Robin’s chest, her hips slowly rocking. Both lovers groaned as the feeling between them swelled, Regina’s movement becoming faster, while Robin’s hands tightened on her hip, pushing her heavily onto his cock while he pushed up into her.

“Yes,” Regina cried out, her head falling back and her nails biting into Robin’s back. He grabbed her tighter into himself, taking her breast into his mouth, and flicking her nipple with his tongue. Her screams of ecstasy were in between her demands of harder and faster. Robin grabbed her body, rolling them once again, onto her back. Grabbing her legs, he opened her up more, his hips pummeling into her, driving into her hard. Her voice lost all control with primal grunts and cries, pushing him harder and faster, his own voice demanding her to take him, to take all of him.

“Take me, Regina. Take it all. Come on, baby, open up. God, you’re so beautiful. God, you feel so good. More, more, take more, Regina.” Robin watched as her eyes glazed over with passion. He
could see the bruises on her breast and mouth, and he could feel her orgasm as she went over the edge. Her screams inflamed his passion beyond reason. He took her hips into his hands and rotated her hips to give his thrusts a different angle. His hips pushed hard and fast into her, as he no longer could hear her cries of release as the sounds of his own panting and groans grew in his ears. As he reached the edge and his orgasm moved up over him, he felt her coming again as the lights burst around him.

They lay as one, panting hard to regain some composure, both seemingly coming back to the room they were in.

“Shit,” Regina swore, pushing Robin from her sweat-soaked body. She scrambled away from him, pulling items of clothing on haphazardly. When Robin didn’t move, she looked at him confused.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, suddenly fearful he regret what they’d just done.

He waved his hand at her. “Are you that eager to get away from me?” he asked, his voice straining slightly.

“What?!” Regina was flabbergasted. How could he think that? The sadness in his eyes pulled at her heart. “I have no regrets, Robin,” she offered softly. “It’s just, this room is pretty public. I think we should take this back to my rooms.”

Robin never moved as quick to struggle back into his clothes. Once they were as decent as they were going to be, he pulled her back to him and kissed her. Kissed her hard and with passion. They pulled away, smiled, and quickly lift the Observation Deck in search for something a lot more private.

~*~

Emma was waiting in the landing dock when the first transports returned. Surprisingly, it wasn’t Killian who came back first, but David. A very upset, very angry David. He was carrying Mary Margaret, who appeared to be sleeping.

"Deck Officer!" David bellowed. Mary Margaret made a distressed sound and burrowed deeper into his neck. "I want everyone accounted for, and once all the crew is back on board, no transports are to leave without my consent. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Cap!"

"Report to the Commander once he returns to the ship."

"Aye, Cap."

David saw Emma and only said one thing, "Pleasure Planet?"

"Sorry. I never expected anyone to read my notes. I told you not to contact them." David just nodded, admitting his mistake. Looking down at Mary Margaret, he swore and took off with her toward Medical. He could barely walk himself. He felt crippled.

Emma watched them leave for a moment when both Ruby and Mulan disembarked. When Mulan saw Emma, she faltered.

"Mulan?" Emma’s expression said everything.

"Princess, I can explain."
"Save it! Is this permitted by your office?"

"No," Mulan answered, suddenly ashamed.

Emma just shook her head. "You’re confined to your quarters until further notice. We’ll begin translation in the next few days."

Emma sighed when the woman did not leave. "You’re dismissed!"

"Actually, Princess, I was wondering about changing my accommodations? The other Honorable, Lacey..."

"Belle."

"Right. Her. She doesn’t do anything or say anything to me. She just disapproves."

Emma felt her anger slipping. "No. Now go!"

She watched as Mulan and Ruby scurried off together, frowning at them. As she watched, the fighter craft that David had taken down to the planet was landing.

It was Killian. Emma smiled at him as he approached. "You survived."

"I did. I really should make sure that this planet does not."

"Killian..."

"Don’t worry. They remain a trap for another day. But sooner or later, this trap will no longer work as they take from every species around them."

"They implant a memory suggestion that erases the circumstance but keeps the sensation of pleasure."

"You’re saying that in a short time, everyone will forget they were trapped and will only remember the pleasure? So they’ll want to go back?"

"Yes."

"Fuck that! I should end their games and kill them now. If I don’t, David will. He’s very angry, very, very pissed."

Emma took his hand and they were leaving the bay when the deck officer stopped to report. Emma waited politely as he finished.

"David took Mary Margaret to Medical, I think," she told him as they continued.

"Yeah. He was pretty upset. More so than I can ever remember."

"So, he and Mary Margaret had sex. I don’t see..."

Killian just rubbed his face, hard. "Emma, imagine us going at it wildly for eight hours non-stop. No food, no water, no sleep. Just sex."

"Okay. Done." Oh, she could imagine it. All too well. They were doing just that earlier before they were interrupted by having to rescue the crew. Granted, they took naps, bathed and stopped for food, but still...
"You don’t understand. Areenians don’t mate outside their own kind for a reason. Sexually, we’re very..." Words failed him.

"Primitive?" Emma suggested with a knowing smirk.


Emma chuckled at his tone and, after scanning the corridors, she pushed him up against a wall and mated with him fast and furiously. Her mouth was on his, at his neck, and then back to his lips again. Her hands were everywhere as he mimicked her actions until suddenly, he found himself in her, slamming her up against the wall hard, ignoring where they were or who could find them.

They finished fast, Killian pinning her to the wall; his arm resting above her head as he struggled for breath, hers coming in pants as well. Emma wiggled beneath him, and the part of him still embedded in her suddenly became interested again.

"Bloody hell, Swan! Stop that. Let’s get out of this frickin’ corridor and back to our rooms."

Emma brushed her fingers along his jawline, his stubble prickling the pads. “Why do you call me Swan when you’re annoyed with me?” she asked, still panting as her heart was slowly calming its rapid beats.

Killian shrugged. “You’re the Princess Swan. Swan is your family name.”

“So I can call you Jones?” she questioned, not in the least ready to uncouple from him. "And to answer your question? I think you’re perfect just the way you are.”

Killian smiled at that and rested his head in the crook of her shoulder and neck, moaning softly. She was going to kill him. She really was. As they both straightened their clothes, he said, “You can call me whatever you want, Princess,” he told her.

“Okay, Pirate,” she returned sassily, and they were off to their quarters with Killian impatiently dragging her with him, Emma doing quick double steps to keep up.

Areenians were self-serving and very primitive sexually, but Emma couldn’t see that as a bad thing. Their species were warriors for a cause, soldiers trained literally from birth. They approached sex like they did a military campaign. Something to be fought for - hard and dirty. Winning was everything. It left their species with a touch of violence to everything they did, a lack of gentleness, and it was the trade-off they made to quickly and efficiently repopulate their world.

All three Areenian men onboard the *Enchanted* were guilty of engaging in sex that pushed the limits. It wasn’t that they didn’t take care as much as they saw sex as one goal with one outcome. On their world, women were equally single-minded and vicious, sometimes even more so than the men, making the unions tolerable and evenly matched. It was when they involved outworlders that things became dicey.

~*~

David entered Medical calling for Graham in a loud voice. He was barely keeping on his own feet, and Mary Margaret winced as he shouted. His voice was gruff and thick.

"David? What the hell?" Graham rushed towards the couple. Emotions were running off both of them in waves, making even Graham pause before approaching.
David laid Mary Margaret down on a medical bed and leaned back against another one in disgust. Graham looked Mary Margaret over and swore. "Who did this to her?"

"I did." Graham swore and turned his scanner on David. "You’re in almost as bad shape as she is. Lie down."

"Just take care of her!"

"Then get in that bed! You’re dehydrated and I can read your pain."

David swore and rolled onto the bed, groaning in relief and pain. He felt bad. Really bad. Almost like he’d been run over by a large object called Mary Margaret. For a non-Areenian, she’d kept up and gave him as good as she got. It was terrifying.

When he was finally released from the Xanians mind control, he rolled over to look at the exhausted form sleeping curled up next to him. There were bruises and bites all over her body. He was truly disgusted. Watching Graham working on Mary Margaret, David suddenly was up and rushed to the side washroom, vomiting up whatever was in his stomach.

Graham came up behind him, quickly injecting him with a sedative and an antiemetic for the nausea. Helping him back to the bed, Graham gave him a neural block to cut off the pain coming from his groin.

"I think I pulled something," David grimaced.

"I think you did more than that." Graham looked at the sleeping Mary Margaret. He gave her the same medicine he gave David and started her on an IV for fluids. His staff was slowly trickling back in and with them, survivors of Xanadu.

"I feel like my dick is going to fall off, and you know what? I fucking don’t care!" David continued, his voice low and hoarse.

"David, this isn’t your fault."

"The hell it’s not! Emma told me not to contact them, and I did. I made the choice." David could feel the drugs taking effect as Graham inserted an IV into him as well. "I was so rough with her, Graham. Not once, but for hours. I thought that part of my life was over. I hoped it was."

"It’s okay. She not any worse for wear, and she was equally consenting, David. It was just intense sex that went on too long. Just rest. It’s going to be okay."

David’s voice thickened as the need to sleep became too great. "I hate myself."

Graham looked at the sleeping couple. He quickly treated them both for internal tears and pulled groin muscles. Mary Margaret had some interesting bruising on her inner thighs, and David had nail marks marring his entire back including some deep bites. Repairing the damage quickly, he left the real damage unrepaiired. It would take time for them to fix things mentally.

~*~

It was three days before Killian finally gave up. Emma had Mulan in their rooms translating the final manuscript. Killian went to find David. Their old room was dark and silent, and Killian entered without permission.
"Get out."

"Make me." Killian found David sitting in the dark drinking himself sick again. "I thought I would report. Let you know that the world is going on and repairs are coming along."

"Thanks." David went back to this drinking.

"You want to talk about it?"

"Nope. I want to be left alone."

Killian shrugged and took the bottle, taking a drink. "I fully believe in delay tactics and avoidance as much as the next person, mate, but drinking yourself ill isn’t going to change things."

"Killian, fuck off! I just want to be alone."

Killian made a face and took a chair. "You talk to her yet?"

"No." David said quietly.

"Hmm, well, Emma did." Killian ignored David’s stillness and sudden interest. "You interested in knowing what she told Emma?"

"Just tell me."

Killian took the bottle and another drink. "She said that the planet needed to come with warning labels." David just snorted. A page from the book of ‘Duh’. "And Emma said Mary Margaret looked good."

"So... your point is...?"

"She doesn’t seem to be blaming you, so why are you sitting in the dark, beating yourself up?" Killian let irritation thicken his voice. "Your damn Captain’s chair is poking me in the arse! You know I hate being in charge. It makes me all insane and power-crazy. Just this morning, I ordered someone to kill the coffee maker and placed the morning crew on report for not standing at attention when I entered the Bridge. Cited the plants in the Hydroponics Bay for growing too slowly, and pissed Emma off by ordering her around all morning. Having her draw my bath and rub my feet is the least she could do! I lack patience when I'm in power."

"Damn right you do!" David sighed. "Okay, I’ll move my ass. It’s just that..."

"Just what?"

"The things I did to her. It was too much. I let her do things to me as well, and even when a part of me was screaming to stop, I couldn’t."

"Aye, it’s official. You’re a sick pup."

"I... I just never thought this would...that what we are, what I am... would touch Mary Margaret."

"Don’t you mean Lady Mary Margaret?" Killian teased.

"Shut up!" David stood up wavering on his feet. He was slightly drunk. "Get the hell out of my rooms. I need a shower and to get back to work. And next time, ring for admittance to my room."

"Sure I will," Killian smirked as he headed for the door. "And mate, do something with your
breath. Smells like something died in there." David just waved a choice finger at his brother as he headed for a shower and the return to his life.

David exited the shower wearing only a towel and rubbing his hair dry when the request for admittance rang. Killian. Dammit. David walked and opened the door standing shocked in the doorway. Mary Margaret.

"Well, are you going to invite me in, or are you still trying to avoid me?" she asked quietly.

"No, of course not, Lady Mary Margaret."

"Can the Lady Mary Margaret crap. Call me Mary Margaret, or Elurra." She walked past him as he rolled his eyes and rubbed his face.

"What did you want?"

"For you to talk to me."

David just looked at her. He was being unfair. She was entering into a situation he couldn’t explain, and he was being a coward about it and somehow, that made it even worse.

"I can’t."

Mary Margaret literally stomped her foot. "Fine. But you will talk to me sooner or later!"

"Elurra..."

She just walked around him and headed for the exit. He was a thick-headed prick. "And I know you will. Want to know why? No? Well, too bad, I’ll tell you anyway. We fucked. We fucked a lot."

David looked guilty suddenly, and he stared down at the floor. His refusal to look her in the eyes infuriated her.

"Fine. Whatever! But put this in your stupid gullet and chew on it. Unless you’re sterile, we may find we have a lot more to talk about soon!"

Mary Margaret raced to the door. But David was suddenly in front of her grasping her arms tight. He searched her face, and then looked down her body and then her face again. Pregnant? He closed his eyes. They had been so out of control, he didn’t even think to use protection.

"Oh damn," David said rubbing his scar. Mary Margaret reached over, ignoring his flinch and removed his hand.

"Don’t try to distract me. I know that scar is nothing but a blind to misdirect and deceive."

"What are you talking about?"

"It keeps people from noticing the real scars inside. The ones you hide."

David shook his head. "I can’t talk about this with you. Not this."

"Then what? I think I’m very involved now. For eight hours I had your body slamming into me at breakneck speed, and you know what? I don’t care if you regret it. I don’t care if you think I should! I just know that all I think about is you. The taste of your skin, your blood, and your semen. I think about the sound of you and the smell, and after an endless session with you, tell me
"why I want more?"

"This isn’t about you, Elurra. It’s about me."

Mary Margaret hit him across the face, hard. The open-handed slap left a red mark across his face.

"That’s once," Mary Margaret said shaking with anger. How could he keep doing this to her? Keep just discounting her involvement. "I’m very much involved. Don’t discount me."

David just rubbed his face. His eyes were violent and angry.

Mary Margaret just shook her head. How could she have already lost him? "This isn’t about sex, or us, or even the planet. This is about Kathryn." Mary Margaret laughed bitterly. "Of course it is. Why should I think it would ever change?"

"Elurra," David warned.

"No. You’re right. You stay here with your rum, your dark room, your lonely life, and your fucking ghost. I have nothing left to give you that you haven’t already taken. I can’t compete with her."

David stopped her before she could leave. Looking down into her stormy green eyes, he couldn’t stop himself. He kissed her. Mary Margaret’s arms went around his neck, and they were off and running again. So fast and furious that David lost his towel, and it took moments for Mary Margaret to become aware that she was on her back on the bed, with a severe lack of clothing. It took him surging into her for any real sense to hit her. She bit his shoulder as her arms pulled him into her even closer.

David held her later, moving his hands through her hair. He had kicked the covers from his bed, so he could look at her, take inventory of her body for any scars left by him from the time before. His hand stroked down her skin and settled on her stomach low. They had done it again. Unprotected sex.

"David?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you think we’ll ever do anything normally? I mean, like go out together?"

David looked at her, and suddenly his eyes were brilliant with mirth. "Like on a date?"

Mary Margaret laughed at his tone of horror and slapped him lightly on the chest. "From your tone I take it Areenians don’t date?"

"Hardly! We’re settled with a mate at age eight, married by eighteen, or seventeen in my case, and we generally spend the rest of our lives trying to avoid having to talk to our spouses outside of sex. And that usually entails telling them to do it hard, or not like that, and so on. Purely instructional. We’re a very instructionally driven society. Ever notice Killian following Emma around the ship instructing her on what she can and cannot touch? Most of the time, Areenians try to convince their mates to wear a mask so they can fantasize about someone else."

Mary Margaret laughed harder. "You’re making that up!"

"Unfortunately..." David just made a gesture and shrugged. He played with her hand and took a deep breath. "If I tell you something, will you promise not to hit me again?"
Mary Margaret nodded. "Okay."

"It really wasn’t about you." David stopped and looked at her. His eyes were dark and turbulent.

"Then what?"

"Kathryn. My wife," David paused, but things had been left unsaid for too long.

"You loved her."

David laughed at the simple matter of fact tone. "No, not really. And that was the problem."

"I don’t understand."

"No, no you wouldn’t. The only person who could would be Killian. See, until a few months ago, I missed Kathryn. She was this ache inside me. It wasn’t just the sex or companionship, but something else. Something I couldn’t even begin to understand. Killian would ask me why I wasn’t over her, and I couldn’t say. I didn’t know; it was a mystery to me. We thought it was the bond, but Will was feeling no effects from his broken bond. Then, this happened."

"What?" Mary Margaret sat up a little, confused.

"Emma. Emma happened. Killian, my brother, was flooded with these feelings - things he had no understanding of, no language. Graham calls it love."

"Your people must have a name for it."

"No. No concept whatsoever. But I knew. I felt it through our bond. I felt his feelings - the richness, the deepness, and how it overwhelmed him. A lifetime of his pissy manners and nonchalant attitude was totally bowled over by a simple girl."

"She's hardly simple. And they do seem to fit together."

"As if they were born to it. Yes. But it taught me something."

"What?"

"It gave me words for the first time in my life. I finally had a word that described why Kathryn still haunted me. I didn’t love her." David’s eyes became slight watery. "She was just there. And the thing was, it wouldn’t have mattered because she wouldn’t have understood anyway."

"Maybe she loved you, too?"

David laughed bitterly. "No. I have no illusions about that. I can feel Emma in the bond. Her connections to Killian are so strong that they bleed over into me. I can feel what she feels for him. It’s this touch of awe, almost like witnessing creation. When she looks up and sees him, she is exposed and I get this rush of warmth from her. It's alive, inviting, and feels like everything. I felt Kathryn in our bond, and believe me, she didn’t feel anything near that for me. I had my uses, and that was about it. We had sex, but her sister was the person she socialized with."

"You don’t know. Maybe..."

"Elurra, no. She left during the war to work on the colony. Left, even though she knew there was a strong possibility we would never see each other again. She didn’t care. If she was to die, she wanted me dead as well, and not free of her."
Mary Margaret was silent. There were no words. He was living with the knowledge that his own wife, whom he may have loved, had no real regard for him. That she thought of him only as her property.

"I’m sorry. I’m so sorry." Mary Margaret knew there was something else though, something more than Kathryn's death.

"It was worse. She bleeds over into this thing between you and me. Especially down on the planet. The intense sexual violence. That is a legacy. It is natural to my people."

Mary Margaret was still sore in places from three days previous, and what had just occurred between them didn’t make her any less sore. But it was tolerable, considering it came with other things.

"I don’t understand."

David looked at her with so much hurt in his beautiful blue eyes that it made her want to weep for him. "I was too rough with you; I raped you."

Mary Margaret understood a little more about his reluctance. "What we did wasn’t rape, David. It was very consenting, and just went out of control. But I didn’t want you to stop. And even when we were so exhausted and I begged you to stop, my body still wanted more. I didn’t beat on you or try to get you off. It was many things, but it wasn’t rape."

"Maybe not, but it was close. Women on my world, they have no nurturing genes. That trait has been selected against for centuries. My own mother never touched me except to breastfeed. Once I could eat solid food, that was it. My brother James hated me the moment I was born. Killian is the only person who had touched me in kindness, and he tends to hit, not hug. Over the years, Will and Graham, and even Regina..."

"That’s why they’re your family."

"Yes."

Mary Margaret was silent. Thinking. "David?"

"Hmm?" He was rubbing his face in her hair.

"Maybe the reason your people don’t feel love or have a word for it isn’t because you don’t feel it or can’t feel it. Maybe it’s because you’ve just never experienced it. I bet that Emma showed Killian a lot of nurturing and tenderness long before they became sexually active."

"She knocked him sideways and back. He didn’t know what hit him," David grinned.

Mary Margaret was right. Emma did nurture Killian, touched him with kindness, growing love, and then she turned around and tossed his ass on the ground during their training sessions. They spent weeks and weeks touching, kissing, talking, fighting, and laughing before they actually joined. Killian never stood a chance. He didn’t understand that his little ploy to get her under him and wiggling during sex was a self-trap of his own making...not until it was too late and he had fallen hard. And he didn’t care. By that time, it was all he wanted.

Mary Margaret laughed. "Well, good for her." Mary Margaret didn’t know if it was the right thing to say or even if he wanted it, but she couldn’t let him continue living his life without something. "I think you know that I love you."
"Mary Margaret..." She stopped him with a hand to his mouth.

"No response necessary. I feel you. I don’t know why, but I do. When your hands move across my skin, I can feel it on my fingertips. And I do nurture, and I do love." She took his hand and placed it over her stomach. "So if we've made a child, unlike you, it will know love from the moment it is born, and it will know you."

David looked at her, and felt something too vast to explain. It was as if his entire body was an open universe, too large to span or feel the edges. He gave her a heartfelt ‘thank you’. He never thought to be a father.

~*~
Chapter Notes

Happy Sun... Monday!

I'm so sorry this update is a day late. I was out of town for the weekend and forgot to prepare the chapter so all I needed to do was press a button. I guess late is better than never, right?

Thanks to everyone who continues to support this fic. We are almost done now, a couple of weeks left.

Ultraluckycat is one of the nicest people I have met through this fandom and she's an awesome beta.

Chapter 23 - And Then There Was One

Emma paused in the doorway of the large conference room off the Bridge and listened to Will arguing with David and Killian. Both Graham and Regina were present, but they were strangely quiet.

"I thought you said just a week?" David complained.

"I told you a week, Dave, before the entire crew took a vacation on planet Pleasure Me Now. I need at least three more days."

Killian shook his head. "My sensors have been offline for over six days now, and we’re using valuable energy sending out constant patrols."

"It can’t be helped."

David listened and then nodded. "Just do it, Will. What about the warp core? Will our power crystals hold?"

Will looked beaten. "They’ll have to, now won’t they? I say that once we are underway, we detour to Emma’s secret stash and acquire my three SPC nodes."

"One," said Emma from the doorway.

"Two," said Will.

David gestured towards Emma to join them. "We’re stuck here for another three days to finish repairs, but we’ll need the coordinates from you to our next destination. Will said you had another SPC node that we can use to re-crystalize our core."

"I do, and it is yours. But, we need to find my next Gem first."

"Aww...! No, Emma. My node first, then your Honorable."
Emma just shook her head. "Sorry, Will. We can’t wait a moment more. I’ve finished translating the last manuscript. I’ve got the coordinates."

"Where?" David wanted to know. So far, their journey had been spread out to the far reaches of the universe.

"The Aesculapian system, a planet in the system called Bevroren."

"Why the hurry?" Regina asked, finally breaking her silence. Both she and Graham were suffering from the energy around Xanadu that made it a perfect hiding spot. It was disturbing their thoughts, enhancing them, and Regina was still out of sorts from her activities with Robin.

"As long as we’re here, Cora can’t track us. The positronic nexus takes care of that. The Dark One doesn’t invade this planet because he tried. All of his forces went down and never came back. If he explodes the planet, he’d be looking at a catastrophic event by igniting the positronic waves. Even he couldn’t get far enough away to out run the shockwaves." Emma looked at Regina. "But Cora tracked Mulan, and she can track the next Gem as well. The longer we delay, the more chance we give her to beat us to the Gem."

The men were silent, but Will couldn’t back down yet. "I still think we need to tend to the engines first. If we meet up with the Dark One, a full fight could fracture the crystal completely."

"I think I already made my wishes known, and I am the client." Emma didn’t wait for a response. She just turned on her heel and left.

Will just watched her, slack-jawed. It was the first time she had exerted her authority. "Bloody hell, she really is a princess."

~*~

"Why are you being such a hard-ass over this?" Emma said with irritation.

"I’m not."

"Yes, you are!" Emma just rolled her eyes and refused to comment any further. Killian took that as a sign of consent and he reached for the herb again.

"I said no!"

"What’s wrong with a little more arugula, love? It’s got a nice peppery taste."

"You’re ruining the meal." Emma tasted the pot again and grimaced. Too late! Will forgave her for demanding he wait for his SPC node, but he was taking it out on the crew with Killian’s sadistic help. Emma scrambled to save the meal, but it already looked like a hopeless battle.

"No, we’re not! You’re just upset because Will tossed seafood on your salad."

"No, I’m not! And it wasn’t seafood, Killian. He dumped chopped up swidula lining on my salad. That means, stomach lining of the foulest creature to inhabit..."

"He said it was seafood."

"He lied!"

"Hey, I can hear you. ‘He’ is standing right here." Will looked at the two and rolled his eyes. They were at it again.
Emma gave up. "Then at least taste this."

She held out a spoon of broth for Killian to try. His and Will’s method of cooking involved tossing everything into a pot, boiling the shit out of it, literally sometimes, and then trying to repair it by overcompensating with nasty, vile tasting greens.

Killian shrugged and tasted the broth as Will came up with his own spoon and tasted it as well. They both looked at each other and shrugged again. It tasted fine.

Emma looked at them unbelieving. It was vile. Worse. It had to improve to be classed as vile. It tasted like dirty socks in a pot of boiling moose lard, and she suspected she saw Will toss a few nuts and bolts covered in grease in there as well when he thought she wasn’t looking. She wasn’t even sure Killian hadn’t thrown in salted mackerel.

"Oh god! You’ve got no taste buds. That has to explain it!"

"My taste buds work just fine, thank you kindly!" Killian said indignantly. Graham swore those taste buds would come back better than before.

Will got in Emma’s face waving his finger at her. "Jealousy! You’re jealous." Emma just huffed at him. "I’ve tasted your cooking, and you’re trying to say ours is bad? That’s just spite and envy talking."

"In your dreams, Grease Boy. You suck!"

When David entered the cantina with a few others, Graham, Robin, and Regina were already there watching the display. Killian and Will’s cooking night had become a spectator event ever since Emma joined their cooking team. She stood there in between the two tall men, poking them in the chest with her wooden spoon to emphasize her point.

"Damn," said Graham. "Do they ever just shut up? It's always so loud."

"They are a bit boisterous." Robin was trying to be nice.

"Isn’t it enough they keep me up at all hours, or wake me in the middle of a nice sleep with their constant noise? Can’t we have a nice quiet dinner hour?" Regina grumbled.

"They are loud." David said agreeing with Regina. After all, he lived next door to them, and between his bond with Killian and all the moans, groans and banging on the walls, he couldn’t remember the last full night’s sleep he had had.

"I wasn’t talking about Emma, just him," Regina said gesturing towards Killian. Who’d have thought he was a screamer?

David just chuckled. It was a male Areenian thing. They liked to scream in battle, in rage, even in death and apparently, during sex. It seemed that Mary Margaret commented on his vocals as well, but personally, David couldn’t remember being very loud. Just normally so.

After the battle of dinner was over, Killian and the others were sitting around a table talking and laughing. Will brought out his latest batch of home brew and distributed it to the group.

Emma looked into her cup, skeptical and uncertain. "And you mixed and fermented this yourself?"

"Aye. It’s got a good head and quite the kick."
"I see." Emma looked over and caught Killian’s eyes. He had a twinkle in them, filled with mirth and a challenge. Emma just shrugged and took a drink; a big one. Suddenly, she slapped the table as she sputtered and coughed against the hot, burning liquid seared a path down her throat.

"Smooth, huh?" Will said with a touch of pride.

"Oh yeah, sure!" Emma squeaked trying to get her breath back. "If you don’t mind your throat being stripped. What the hell did you put in there?" Emma looked in her cup and shuddered. "Tastes like battery acid."

"Only for coloring," Will said quickly.

The rest were chuckling and having a good time when Emma reached over and whispered to Killian. "Any more of this, and no oral sex for at least a month while my throat mends."

Killian looked at her sharply, and took the cup from her. "Let me get you some of that hot chocolate you love."

~*~

"Captain, we’re approaching the Aesculapian system."

"Alert the Princess, and bring us in on one quarter impulse."

David kept working at his station, reading reports as they came in. They had finished all major repairs, but some sub-systems were still needing work. Nothing crucial, though.

Emma entered the Bridge and smiled at Killian before taking a place at the upper banister above David’s command chair, watching the new star system coming into view. Regina was manning her station at the science console, when she suddenly made a sound of distress.

"Regina?" David swiveled in his chair and looked at his friend.

"I cannot lock on Bevroren, or the two other planets within the system. I am getting venting gases and... David?" Regina looked over from her monitors. "The space is burning."

David remembered Regina’s Eminent gibberish back at Xanadu.

"Helm, increase speed. Let’s take a look."

Emma felt it too, an unsettling familiar feeling washed over her as she watched the view screen, so she was the first to respond. Her gasp of dismay drew the others to look. Killian swore under his breath and David simply stroked his scar as his jaw clenched.

The star field was brilliant in the dark as the three planets burned. The ones around them were showing damage as well. Emma slowly walked down the steps to stop before reaching the command deck, her hand holding the rail tightly to keep herself upright.

"Survivors?" she asked, her voice thick with emotion.

Archie scanned the planets quickly. "None on Bevroren. She’s a floating hull. The two surrounding planets are slowly dying. There are still life signs, but their upper atmospheres have lost their integrity, and are venting atmospheric gases."

David stood up and walked forward to stand behind his helmsman. "The other planets?"
"Still alive, Cap. But not for long. With three planets dead, two jumped their orbital paths. One will collide with another planet within this cycle, and the others have been pushed from their orbital paths. There’s already evidence of planet die-off."

David looked at the shell-shocked Emma. She stood silently looking over the field, and he was surprised to see her openly crying. Her hand holding the banister was deadly white.

"Princess, Bevroren is a dead planet. No survivors. Your Honorable..."

"Is gone. She who cuts the thread." Emma nodded as she stumbled down on the stairs, crumbling at the bottom. "This is the future of the universe now that I’ve failed."

Killian moved towards her. "Emma." But David forestalled him with a shake of his head. They had watched worlds burn before, but Emma was reliving the destruction of her own people.

"Call to general quarters, all hands! I want sensors on full alert in case the Dark One returns to watch his handywork. Instruct recovery teams to man all vessels." David paced angrily. "We’ve got survivors. Bring them aboard."

Billy nodded. "Aye, Cap."

David took his seat again, and hit the console to connect to Engineering. "Will, you seeing this?"

Will’s voice was subdued. "Hard to miss."

"Power up the closed sections and empty quarters. We’ve got survivors."

"Already done, David." Will disconnected.

"Alert Medical. We’ll need medics for evac, and full triage in all open bays. Deck Officer, open all port and aft bays. We need room for ships from the planets that can still fly."

"Aye, Captain."

"Get on it, boys. The more time we waste, the more lives are lost."

"David." David turned to look at the Eminent. Regina was gray looking, pale under her normal coloring. "My calculations suggest that if we take out Bevroren completely from the starfield it will help to bring the remaining planets to a more stable orbital path. They will still die, but this will give them more time to evacuate to a new home."

"Okay, make calculations - how much fire power we're talking about, and I’ll need full disbursement numbers and payload."

David went over to Emma, and crouched down in front of her. Taking her cold hands, he forced her to look at him.

"It’s done. There is nothing we can do but survive. I need you to go find Mary Margaret, and the others. I need them to help the teams in the mess, and in the general decking to prepare to take on survivors." Emma nodded. "This world has passed, and though the Dark One seems to have won the day, he will pay. I promise you, my Princess, on the blood of my ancestors. This will not go unpunished." David helped her up and pushed her towards the door. "Now go."

David watched her leave. Too late. They had been too late. Trapped on a pleasure planet while the Dark One took away their last hope.
"Killian, let’s take out a planet."

"All targeting computers are online, and full spread incinerator devices are packed and loaded. We’ve got guidance lock and are ready to deploy."

"Fire."

Killian followed his brother’s command, and then walked around his console down to the command deck to stand next to his brother.

"Helm, back off to a safe distance. Sound for impact."

"Sounding."

They watched as the weapons hit the planet directly in its burning core. In a brilliance of light, in the darkness of space, Bevroren exploded, incinerated, and then was no more.

"Enchanted, the Destroyer of Worlds," Regina said softly. David looked at her. Prophecy.

"Captain, we’ve got an increase in this system's sun. It just jumped by ten percent in luster."

David looked at Regina to explain the readings. "The sun is collecting the venting gases to its helicon layer. It is being reborn."

David frowned. The sun was new. He nodded. "Killian, full scans. Take our shields down, and deploy all recovery craft." David turned to his helmsman. "Archie, get me a long-distance marker and target a loading probe to set bounds for our outer perimeter. I don’t want anyone to sneak up on us while our shields are down. Full sweeping array with active location pinging."

"Aye, Cap."

Killian loaded the beacon buoy and locator beacons for firing after Archie calculated the distance area. "David, that will alert us to incoming vessels, but there’s nothing for anything already within our sensor nets."

"Understood." David looked at his brother. "Recommendation?"

"Fighter squadrons to run security detail with the recovery teams. They’ll cover our sixes."

"Done. Order the squadrons to the flight deck. Gold team takes lead."

"Aye." Killian quickly ordered his teams into a defensive position. "David, maybe I should..."

"Stay where you are. I need you at Tactical." David turned in his chair. "There’ll be other fights, Killian. I need you here."

Killian nodded and ordered his fighters into a defensive formation.

They continued taking on survivors for the next hour. That was until the beacon went off.

"Cap, I’ve got an active ping on our marker alpha-3; she’s dead to stick and not responding."

"Killian, push our sensors to full range. I need to know what’s out there."

Killian nodded and re-modulated the field ranges. "Fuck me! We’ve got a full strike team in our wake. They’re out past our perimeter and bearing down fast!" Killian reached over and alerted all
his fighter teams to full battle formation.

"How’d we miss them?"

"They hid in our sensor rebound shadow. We were reading our own ship’s mirror image."

"Billy, order all recovery craft to redirect to the surrounding planets. I need my shields back up."

"Acknowledged." Billy quickly passed on the command. "Captain, I’ve got a craft unable to divert. It’s the *Trinity*. She is reporting her communications down and systems are failing. Requesting immediate landing."

"Commander, order your fighter teams to take point. Full defensive spread. Send one team to escort the recovery vessels to the other planets." David linked to the port landing bays. "Clear port bay 3-B! We’ve got a damaged ship coming in! Someone have the Deck Officer batten down the landing bays. I don’t want anything that can burn."

"Cap, *Trinity* is a dead stick. She’s coming in hot."

"Damage crews report to port bay 3-B."

"David, I should take my ship out to..."

David turned to face Killian once more. "You should man your station, Commander!" David sighed. "Sorry, Killian. I know you hate to miss a fight, but I need you on Tactical. We’re going to engage the strike team with the *Enchanted*." Killian nodded accepting his orders.

"Helm, bring her about. Set course 1-7-0 mark 3." David looked at his console. "Correction, 1-7-6 mark 174. Open full starboard and port nacelles, and ahead three quarters impulse."

"Killian."

Killian responded to his hail from Emma. "Not now, Princess. We’re going to engage the enemy."

"Well then, where the hell are you? We’re engaging the enemy down here!"

Killian could hear blaster fire coming over the link, the sound of active fighting and screaming. David looked at Killian in horror. "Where is she?" he demanded.

"Emma, report your position and conditions."

"Port landing bay 3-B! *Trinity* came in packing, and lousy with Legions. Intruder status is... a fucking lot!"

Regina stood up and looked at David. "Cora. Cora boarded with them!"

"Son-of-a-bitch. Legions on my ship!" David swore and looked at his brother. "Cora is near your princess, what are you going to do about it?"

Killian took his gun, and smiled a not so nice smirk. "Leroy, take Tactical. Captain, request permission to leave the Bridge."

"Granted." Killian headed for the door with Regina hot on his heels. "Killian! Get them the hell off my ship!"

"Understood."
"Billy, sound red alert and order all non-essential personnel to secured quarters. I want those civilians out of harm's way. We’ve been boarded. I can’t guarantee their safety from friendly fire."

Billy nodded and began following his orders.

"Bitches came in through one of our recovery vessels. Order the security fighters escorting the other recovery vessels to check for Legions. Raise the shields and go to battle mode; I want running lights only."

"Captain, Legions reported on decks 6, 4 and 3, all to port. Correction. Decks 5 and sub-deck 4 are reporting firefights."

"Full armor. Ordinance Officer, alert all personnel to be armed with blasters and set to kill."

"Aye."

"Captain, we’ve engaged the enemy."

"Helm, take us in. Target their frontal tactical arrays. I want those deflector generators down."

~*~

By the time Killian made it to the upper deck, Legions had already spread through the forward port areas and were using cross hatch access tubes to spread to other decks. He worked his way through them, cutting a swath with Regina at his shoulder.

"Emma, where are you?" Killian swore when she didn’t respond.

"You can pinpoint her, Killian. Just concentrate." Regina’s voice was harsh in his ear but Killian nodded and, after another second, led the way to the fourth deck area and across into the subdeck. She was heading for the field generator controls.

"They’re falling back to the field generator control. The Legions are breaking the line, and Belle took a plasma hit to her leg," he said as they moved.

"How do you know?" asked Regina as she took out a few more Legions.

"She told me. And her orders are to get my lazy ass down there."

Regina laughed as they continued on. After a few paces, Regina commented, "Did it ever occur to you that our lives were a lot more peaceful before she came into them?"

Killian covered Regina as they took the next access tube across, dropping in behind the generator control room.

"Aye. I was bored off my arse, too," Killian grinned as he removed a panel. Going through first, they came out in the control room behind Emma and a group of security officers and repair crew. They were holding the Legions out of the room.

"I should’ve known that if there was a fight you’d be in the middle of it, Darling."

"Shut up. This isn’t my fault." Emma looked at him and smiled. Yeah, back in the trenches.

"Emma, Cora is on board," Regina stated. "I can feel her." Regina was furious, her insides were trembling and unsteady, building with energy fueled by hate.
"Then she can feel you, too," Emma returned, her features showing her apprehension.

"She’s on the other side of that door."

Emma nodded. "I can open a distortion field on the other side to the secondary hull and suck her and her Legion thugs into space."

Killian made an agreeing noise in his throat. "Marvelous. Do it."

"Wait!" Regina stopped them from being impulsive. "That will wreck the Enchanted’s warp field. She is engaging in battle."

"Why can it never be easy," Killian said. "Guess we do it the hard way."

~*~

"Cap, attack squadrons have engaged a wave of fighters."

"Acknowledged. Helm, bring us in between those support craft aft of the battlecruiser," David instructed and watched as they moved through, their shields holding. "Bear off, hard to port...Now!"

The Bridge crew watched as they came up between the two small vessels and veered away. The vessels couldn’t avoid a collision with each other. They hit hard and then continued on to hit the larger cruiser, the Interceptor.

"Bring us around for a strafing run on that cruiser. Hold her steady and in trim. Let’s take out those deflectors."

"Aye, Cap. Steady as she goes."

"What’s the condition of our fighters?"

Billy looked over. "They’re giving them a real pasting, Cap. The new shields and weaponry is making it hard for the other ships to get a firing lock. We’ve got some stragglers who took damage."

"Understood. Call in reformation coordinates. We’ll swing by and pick them up on the next run. All fighters still combat ready, follow us in. We’re taking out this cruiser."

They ran hard and fast along the strike cruiser, Interceptor, avoiding her ordinates and secondary gunnery as heavy artillery and laser blasting weakened her shield. Enchanted hit her hard. And once the deflectors were down, the smaller ships came in to clean up as Enchanted turned towards the battle and started taking out the smaller support vessels of the strike force in a hellstorm of a firefight.

"Cap, the cruiser’s radiation emissions just spiked. She’s in a full breach."

"Order all deployed craft to leave the containment area to a safe distance; pull us back." David checked his console. "Engineering, I’m reading spikes from the reactor core."

"Affirmative, Cap. I’m losing containment! You need to get us out of this! I need to do an emergency shutdown. The crystals are fracturing under the stress."

"Just hold them together, Will."
Will swore, and David could hear fighting. "Easier said than done. I’ve got Legions targeting my coolant modules, half my staff is holding them off, and the other half is trying to keep up on the damage. Bloody hell, David. They took out my Honorable!"

"Understood. I’ll redirect more support to your position." David looked at Billy. "Report on Killian’s teams?"

"They swabbed the deck on six, five, and three, but four is still a mess. Commander is in deadlock holding the field generator and his remaining teams are moving fast towards Engineering."

"Order them to do double time. Is that it for the remaining pockets of action?"

"Aye, Cap. But casualty reports are coming in. A few of the non-essential personnel took hits on the upper decks before containment, them and a few of the survivors."

"Get them to Medical."

"Acknowledged, Cap."

"Contact the Commander. Tell him he’s pissing me off! I gave him a direct order and I expect it to be followed to the letter."

"Transmitting now, Cap." David could hear his brother’s heartfelt cursing response, and he smiled.

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"Dammit, Emma. I told you to stay down!" Killian pushed her behind the barrier next to him.

"How many more?" Emma looked to her right at the wounded Belle. She was losing blood from the wound in her leg, despite the pressure bandage Emma had put over it. "We need to get Belle to Medical."

"Working on it, Princess. Regina, I’ve got seven and your mother."

"That’s my count," Regina answered.

Killian took out two more. "Make that five."

Killian’s laser rifle lost its charge, and his firearm was dead. Emma pulled the weapon strapped low to his leg, and passed it up to him.

"Thanks, love," he smiled to her before giving her another shove to further put her safely behind the barrier. "Stay there."

"Killian."

"Just for once would you do as I ask?" Killian looked down quickly, and Emma nodded her head in consent.

"Three and Cora, Killian."

"I see that." Killian watched as Emma took off her top and wadded it up to add to the blood-soaked compress on Belle’s leg. She had on a midriff lace camisole that left little to the imagination. Bloody hell. He swallowed quickly as his tongue suddenly was dry in his mouth.

"Killian, I could circle around and..."
"You could stay there and be quiet." Killian squatted next to her, as he took out another Legion. "You realize that with your Honorable gone, this great Destiny of yours is no more? That means I get to keep you, and I’m damned if I’m losing you in a fight with the Legions. I’m sick of being noble!" Killian continued shooting to emphasize his point. "I... don’t... do... noble!"

Regina took out the second Legion leaving only one and Cora.

Surrender.

Suddenly the firing stopped, and Cora and her remaining guard came into view with their hands held high. Killian stood up and calmly killed the Legion, but kept his weapon trained on Cora.

Cora’s eyes were black and deep, and she concentrated on Regina, her only living daughter. That was until Emma stood up and faced her. Cora’s eyes widened in surprise. "The Gaian."

Emma ignored her and handed Belle over to other crew members who quickly escorted her to Medical.

"She is," Regina confirmed.

Cora laughed bitterly. "Leave it to you, Regina, to find the last remaining Gaian."

"You would be wrong. Zelena found her, and it was her last wish I find her and help her on her quest."

"Zelena’s dead?" Cora asked

"I don’t know."

Regina waved her hand in a broad, sweeping motion, purple light emanating from her palm as she moved the fabric of the matrix around Cora. She flew, hard, across the room, up against a bulkhead. Regina held her there, pinned like the cockroach she was, as the woman sputtered and struggled to breathe.

She held her there for a moment, remembering all the evil her mother had done, to her, to Zelena, to Elurra, and to the universe, all in the name of wanting more for her daughter. Regina released her and watched as Cora slid to the ground in a heap. Not so Eminent any more.

Cora gasped, her hand around her neck, rubbing.

Emma stood watching as Regina reached down and placed her hands around Cora’s face. She leaned in and with a closed mouth she kissed her mother. Emma walked forward to place a hand on Regina’s shoulder, giving Regina a power boost so she could withstand absorbing Cora’s power - her essence - and contain it within her. Regina’s power was overwhelming, and Emma could feel it coursing through the Eminent’s body, could see it pulsing in waves of purple around her. The smoky tendrils reached out like fingers, snaking toward her, probing her as if searching for something, and Emma, in dismay, watched the essence enter her own body.

Then she was flying backwards through the air, her mind clouded with visions of herself, high above masses of people, all kneeling before her in veneration. She wore a gown of white that shimmered in the bright sunlight, a crown of gold circled her head and her blonde hair was curled and streaming down her back. She was looking at the crowds beneath her with benevolence and love, but her eyes were a stormy green in delight.

She landed hard against Killian and they both crumbled to the floor, as Regina pushed away from
Cora. Regina stood over her, magnificent and frightening. Without further regard, she turned and rushed to Killian and Emma as Cora’s body ignited into flames.

“Are you okay?” Regina rushed out, her hand reached out for Emma.

“I’m fine,” Emma mumbled as she struggled to stand.

“What the bloody hell was that?” Killian demanded, his hands probing over Emma’s body to check for injuries.

“Save it for the bedroom, Pirate,” Emma said glibly, though her voice was unsettled. Killian could feel the unease in her and turned her head to look at him.

“Did I do that?” Regina asked, as Killian and Emma silently communicated.

_You’re not alright, love._

_We’ll talk about it later._

“I think it was a combination of the both of us,” Emma explained. “I shouldn’t have touched you. I was only trying to help, lend you some of my energy to do what you needed to do.”

“Sorry,” Regina offered before she stumbled slightly under the new convergence of power within her.

They turned and watched the horror as Cora’s body withered in pain under the flames and the shrieks rose. Emma buried her face in Killian’s chest, as all the spectators in the room watched the only other remaining Eminent burn to death. When the screams stopped, Killian led Emma and Regina away. He needed to get Emma somewhere she would rest. He could feel the panic within her and knew, in that moment she’d flown through the air, something within her had changed. And he still had Legions on the ship.

"Someone piss on that to put it out. Take the remains and toss them off this ship."

~*~

With Killian supporting Emma, they made the Bridge. Emma had refused to go to Medical, or their rooms, needing to be on the Bridge to survey the damage done. David was standing and watching the remaining ships in the Dark One’s strike force burning. The Dark One may have the Dagr’du, but his individual ships were no match for the _Enchanted_, and with her new weaponry and shields, she truly was a Destroyer, and the Dark One’s nemesis.

"Cora?"

"Regina took care of her. There will be no repercussions of tearing in the space time continuum. We now have the most powerful Eminent alive,” Killian reported. He slid his gaze to Emma, who was being uncharacteristic quiet. He had a feeling even though Regina was indeed the most powerful Eminent alive, Emma was something entirely different, something more than what she had been this morning.

David nodded, standing on his Bridge with his hands clasped behind his back watching the destruction of a star system and the retribution paid for the destruction on the offenders.

"My ship clean of Legion scum?"
"All Legions have been contained," Killian confirmed. "We took a few prisoners for questioning. I want to know what the Dark One wanted to prove by killing these worlds. He has an agenda."

"He does." David sighed and turned looking at them. "What's next, Princess?"

Emma gazed at the battlefield and the destruction. Where to start? She shook her head, willing away the visions plaguing her mind.

"These worlds are dead. All of them. Even the planets that were untouched. The natural balance has been ruined. They need new worlds. All of them, not just the survivors," she answered softly.

"What are you suggesting?"

Emma walked to the viewer and watched the space burn around the hull of destroyed ships.

"We save them."

~*~
The Path Diverges

Chapter Notes

Update time - I can’t believe this journey is nearly over.

Thanks for all your comments and Kudos, its the best payment out there!

@ultraluckycatnd thanks for all your continuing hard work and for the support you always give me. You’re a star!

Chapter 24 - The Path Diverges.

Save them? David looked at Killian. That would be a huge undertaking. They couldn't possibly transport an entire world of inhabitants and their belongings to another.

"Emma, that would be impossible to do."

"I don’t care. I can’t..." Emma swallowed hard. "I won’t watch them die or leave them to their fate. He punished them because of us...because of me."

Killian looked at her. She suddenly looked small and tired. Vulnerable. Emma always carried herself with confidence, nobility, and charisma that was larger than her physical body, but suddenly, she looked breakable.

David stopped him from going to her. One touch and she would crumble. They still needed her with them...strong.

"I ask you again, Princess. What are your intentions?"

"Give them new homes."

"That undertaking will be impossible! The Enchanted can’t transport them all."

"She can if I give you Gaian technology to allow you to move through space at faster rates."

Killian was suddenly interested. The Bug had a special drive very much like a slip stream, but something else. Emma said it was like the Dagr’du, a smaller version, but the same principle. They could transport faster and more efficiently. It would make the Enchanted invincible.

"With great power, comes great responsibility, David. Are you and your band of rebels willing to take on the task? You can no longer be champions of your own cause, but will be elevated to the position of Saviors. Be sure you want this. It is the same duty and responsibility that befell my people, and the one that set the path of my life."

"And now that your mission is lost?"

Emma shrugged. "I'll find another way. The Dagr’du must be either taken from the Dark One or destroyed. Too much power. It represents the imbalance of this universe, and that balance must be
restored, no matter the cost."

"And how do we find another world for these people? A world they can live on and colonize that isn’t otherwise occupied?" David asked.

Emma walked up to them and settled next to Killian. Reaching up she stroked his face, the pads of her fingers grazing through his scruff, before turning back to David.

"I’ve already got them a star system ready to be inhabited. Contact the leaders of the remaining worlds and alert them that I need a joint council. We leave for Arion as soon as the remaining survivors are either placed on neighboring planets, or aboard."

Killian looked at her. Arion, the closest thing she had to a home now that her native planet was gone.

"The Temple?"

Emma shook her head no as she tapped on the console beside David’s chair. "Arion is not open for colonization. That space needs to be preserved to keep the fabric of the past stable. It has to be protected, and the world belongs to me." Emma showed David the coordinates. He whistled at the length of the journey even in slip stream. "The other planets are renewed and uninhabited. There, they can find a new world. A new chance.

"How long did it take the Bug to travel to Arion with her special drive?" David asked, intrigued.

Emma was tired, and she needed to check on Belle. "A day."

Killian and David stood in silence. What would take them a week to ten days, she had traveled in a day! Emma kissed Killian gently and stood up to leave. "Once on Arion, I’ll get you another SPC node, repair the Bug, and give Will the specs for the new transport drive. But I need some time alone when we get there. You must make repairs because the next battle will be with the Dark One."

"Princess, what are you going to do?"

Emma stopped at the door. "Work on something powerful enough to blow the Dark One and the Dagr’du straight to oblivion."

~*~

Emma stumbled slightly when she entered the Medical bay but luckily, everyone was too busy to notice. She composed herself before asking, "Graham, how is Belle?"

"I repaired her leg. She’ll be up and slaving over Will’s engines in no time," Graham smiled and gestured towards a bed where Will was sitting next to Belle and talking.

But before Emma could go to Belle, Graham stopped her. "It’s Mulan."

Emma closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. "What about her?"

Graham took Emma with him to a back room filled with patients who’d taken direct hits from the Legion attack. Mulan was in a bed with Ruby sitting next to her, holding her hand.

"How bad?"

Graham just shook his head. "She took a hit to the head. I don’t think she’ll make it through the
next few days. She could linger for a while, but I doubt she’ll ever regain consciousness.”

Emma felt the weight of her office. Two Honorables lost. She had taken them from their protected Temples and murdered them. They were never meant to be sacrificed.

"Her crystal?"

"It’s in a box at her bedside. I didn’t want to remove it from her."

Emma nodded. "Let me know, especially if she regains consciousness. I don’t want her to die alone."

"Ruby is watching over her. They’ve became close in a short span of time."

“I’ll check back again."

Emma stood watching Will and Belle talking.

"So I’m thinking that you need to rethink the power relays in the aft fuel pumps. They’re sticking," Will was saying.

"That’s because you wired them wrong originally and ran the fluid conduit on top of the system that was already defective."

"Why didn’t ya tell me?"

"I did! You ignored me, and went on about me needing to learn to play poker and spit."

"The spitting is essential. I practiced aiming at Killian. He makes a nice big target. All good engineers learn to gamble, drink, curse, and spit. It’s a requirement."

"Says you! I need recommendations from others before I believe."

"Would I lie?"

"Yes."

Emma smiled when Belle laughed. Suddenly Will and Belle realized that she was there.

"Princess," Belle rushed out, struggling to sit up in the bed.

Emma sat on the edge of the bed. "Try Emma. The title Princess hardly seems appropriate now that you are no longer an Honorable."

Belle went still. "No longer? But I didn’t perform my duty!"

"The third Honorable was lost on Bevroren, and Mulan isn’t expected to survive. She took an injury to the head. No one can replace them, and even if we had the third Gem..."

Belle looked at Will, worried.

"I asked the Captain to give you new quarters. Something not so large, and more in keeping with your position on the Enchanted."

"My position?"

"Assistant engineer. Will’s second in command. That would make you an Officer, I believe."
Emma looked at Will and shrugged. "That is if the Lieutenant will promote you above others, and you wish to accept the position."

From both Will and Belle’s smiles, she took that as a done deal. Will finally had a playmate, someone that loved engines as much as he did, and who replaced the void left in his life when his twin died. And Belle suddenly had a life that was her own, one of her own choosing.

"I just need some help from both of you."

"Anything." Will said. "That is, if you give me my SPC node. My crystals are in third stage fracturing. If we don’t convert them soon, it will be past the point where we can re-crystalize."

"We will be leaving for Arion soon. There, you will get your SPC node and more."

"More?" Will became even more attentive. "How much more?"

"We’re going to transport these worlds’ populations to the Arion system."

"That would take years! We’d need more ships, and..."

"Not if the Enchanted is equipped with Gaian transport drive."

Will stood up, and even Belle became more attentive. "We’d be able to literally travel in a wink."

"Something like that." Emma sighed. "It comes with problems though. Your people can’t shift, so that forces us to build a protective static warp field around the ship so the inhabitants don’t suffer from the shifting."

Will shook his head. "A ship this size? I’m not sure we can create anything big enough or even stable enough to compensate."

"I can," Belle said quietly.

Will looked at his newest assistant with raised eyebrows. "When do we start?"

"Once we arrive on Arion," Emma shifted on her feet. "I also need another favor of you. Both of you."

"Anything." Will would kiss her feet, marry her, or be a nanny to her offspring at this point.

Emma handed over a work-pad with information already stored. "This is a working list of all the resources I have available to me. I need a weapon of destruction, large enough to destroy the Dagr’du and blow the Dark One’s ship, Baelfire, straight to hell."

Will looked at the list and the specs she was suggesting. Belle gasped and looked at it as well.

"Princess, what you propose...it will decimate an over one hundred light year radius in all directions from the point of implosion."

"I realize that."

Will looked at the woman. She scared him. For once in his life, he was afraid. "The person who sets the device couldn’t make it to a safe zone before the explosion."

"I know."
Will rocked on his heels. "The *Enchanted* couldn’t either."

"I know." Emma looked at him with pain in her eyes. She was risking more than just herself now. "That is why I’m giving her trans-warp drive, and the ability to wink across space to safety. It’ll be close. Very close."

"Emma? What about the worlds and inhabitants within that radius?" Belle asked quietly.

Emma just looked at them, shook her head and left. This was for the greater good, and it was killing her. All the blood on her hands was killing her.

Literally.

~*~

Emma looked at the small crowd in the special conference room that David set up. She frowned. Politics, she hated it. It was beyond her.

Wearing the official white robes of her world and her office, she entered the room. It was Killian’s reaction that she noticed first. He’d never seen her in anything except leather, one of his shirts, a body stocking or nothing.

The gown was long and close-fitting with an attached robe from emblems at the shoulders. Her hair was fixed and nestled within was her tiara, and she wore the Swan amulet of her people for all to see. With all that white gliding and glittering around, she really looked like a swan; graceful, beautiful, and noble.

The crowd stood when she entered, recognizing her importance.

"Please sit. I’m the Alarch de Prin’c, of the House Alarch of Gaianosis." Emma sat and waited as the room quieted. They had already met the Eminent One, and then to meet the last Gaian was beyond them.

"Princess, if I may?" one man asked. Emma nodded. "We thank you for your assistance, yours and these generous people, and for protecting us from the Dark One when he returned, but what is it that you need of us?"

Emma stood up. "Nothing. I came to Bevroren to visit the Temple of the Honorable and found the destruction."

"We know of the Temple even on our world. It was a protected Temple." Emma stood up. "Nothing. I came to Bevroren to visit the Temple of the Honorable and found the destruction."

"We know of the Temple even on our world. It was a protected Temple."

"Not anymore," Emma sighed, the sadness in her voice evident to all. "It is not you who owe me a debt or allegiance. But I who owe you my protection, for surely the horror and violence done to your worlds was done as a warning to me from the Dark One. For that, there can be no redemption for the debt I owe you and your people."

The man shook his head no. "This was the Dark One. The burden is his."

"The burden is mine. I accept it for what it is. I cannot bring back your lives, your dead, or even your worlds. That is beyond my station and my powers. Her Holy Eminence offers you transport on her ship, the *Enchanted*, to a new star system. A new home."

Emma passed out information pads to each of them. Contained within was all the necessary information regarding the worlds and their environments.
"These are?"

"All the vital statistics you’ll need to determine what world is best suited to your needs. I suggest picking one that is like your old one, to make it easier for your people to adjust."

"We must leave?"

Emma shook her head. "No. It is your decision. You may try to make it here on your home planets, or make a home at a new one. It must be your choice. Many of the survivors of the lost worlds have requested we take them with us and give them a new home. I’ve already marked the planets they have chosen that best meet their needs."

"How long do we have to decide?"

"As long as you need. It is not an easy decision to give up a civilization or a world. You might need to live through a cycle to make the choice. But either way, discuss it among yourselves. Decide that if you were to come, which world you would make yours and I will protect it for you should the need arise. Stay or go. It must be your decision."

Emma nodded at the men and turned to leave.

"Princess." Emma stopped to look at the one man who asked all the questions. Obviously, their leader. "When will you return to hear our answer?"

Emma looked out the view screen, into the expanse of space where a planet once was, her voice heavy and tired. "I have things I must complete, but I will return within the next few months to hear your decision and the captain will provide you with information on how to contact the Enchanted. I can promise you one thing. I will not forsake or forget you. If I am unable to return myself, one of these men will."

Recognizing their audience with her was over, they stood up and watched her leave the room. The council discussed matters after she had gone, but Killian followed on her heels.

"Whoa, slow down." He hooked an arm around her center and pulled her back against him. "What’s going on with you?"

"Nothing."

Killian looked around the corridor, and then forcefully dragged her off to their quarters with Emma protesting his strong grip under her arm.

"Hey, stop with all the pushing."

"I could say the same." Killian saw her look of confusion. "You’re pushing me away. I’ve tried to read you, but nothing. You’ve closed the door."

"Have not."

"Emma."

Emma just wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned into him. His arms came up around her holding her tight. His head went to rest in the nook of her neck, rubbing into her.

"Just talk to me. You talk constantly, and now you’re silent." Picking her up, he took her to the bedroom. "Emma."
"You wouldn’t understand."

"Try me."

Emma looked at him and searched his face. He’d take it as a betrayal. "The Dagr’du was the easy choice. I was prepared to die."

He looked at her like she was insane. She didn’t have to die any longer! There was no third Gem, and Mulan was almost gone as well. Emma’s destiny to blink out of existence was ended.

"You wanted to die, is that it? What? When you weren’t going to be forced to live with me for a lifetime you could handle it, but now?"

"No. That’s not it. I’d live with you happily for all eternity." Emma grabbed his head. "You, I love."

Killian was startled. She’d said it. No one had ever said that to him. His voice was thick and low, almost reluctant to ask. "You love me? Umm," Killian scratched his ear, "do you know what that means?" He had to make sure that she understood the concept, since he had just recently learned it himself.

Emma just laughed at him and pulled him down on the bed with her. He always seemed to find a way to break her bad mood. Kissing him hard, she pushed him over on his back and ran her hand down his cheek and then neck.

"Of course I love you! I eat your cooking when no one else will."

Killian looked at her seriously. "Then why aren’t you happier about not having to sacrifice yourself with the Dagr’du? Why aren’t you happier about getting a possible future with me?"

"It’s not that. Not you." Emma sat up and knelt on the bed next to him, pushing at the skirt of her dress. Her hand took his larger one and she played with his fingers and stroked across the silver rings he wore. Leaning down she kissed the side of his neck and tongued the small ring in his ear murmuring, "I love you. Nothing will change that. But now I’ve got to destroy the Dagr’du by other means. Before the loss of Mulan and the third gem, when it would’ve blinked out of existence, there was only me that would have been lost...but now? It’s uncertain. The power I may need to assure its destruction will annihilate everything in a 100 light year radius. There is no way I can predict where we will find the Dark One to evacuate that area and warn ships away."

"How do you plan to get away?" Killian asked quietly.

"I don’t. The charges will need to be set, and I need to make sure it will not be disturbed. If the Dark One could disarm the explosive, he would have in his possession enough raw material to devastate the universe in addition to what he already has with the Dagr’du."

"So you still die?"

"Yes." Emma lay down next to his body, her hand moving along him. "I’m not happy, because the outcome is the same, except this time I take so many innocents with me." Emma looked down at her hands. "That blood is on my hands," and looking up to meet his eyes, "Your blood is on my hands."

"Mine?"

"Yes. The entire ship. I need the Enchanted to take me to the Dark One’s ship. Once I board,
Enchanted will need to leave me to get to safe distance, but chances are..."

"That we don’t make it." Emma nodded her head. "That’s why you’re outfitting us with Gaian technology. So we have a chance?"

"Yes. You..." Emma kissed him, "...you I want to survive." She sat up again. "I’d take the Bug, but she is too small to carry the payload I need and even if I could, there is no way I could carry it by myself. I’ll need help to get it on board."

"I’m your man."

Emma shook her head no. "No, Killian. Not you."

Killian sat up. "Me or no one, Emma. If there is a stinking chance we can set the explosives and make it back to Enchanted and get the hell out of there, then I need to be with you!"

"I can’t..."

"Watch me die? But I’m supposed to send you off to your death?"

"I’m sorry."

Killian grabbed her hard and shook her. "You bloody well piss me off, Princess. There are times when I feel the need to really spank you."

"Then do it! If it makes you feel better, do it."

"I would if I didn’t think you’d like seeing me lose that much control." Killian laughed bitterly. "I can’t keep walking roads that all lead to you leaving me - of me losing you. There must be another way. And you and I are going to create the plan that gives us a chance. I have no intention of letting you walk away. Not if I don’t have to."

"Killian," Emma plucked at his shirt front quickly untying it and pushing it off his shoulders. "Do you love me?"

Killian moaned when her mouth found his collarbone and she sucked hard. His hand came up to grasp her hair.

"Against my will and my better judgment, yessss.....," his voicing forced from him in a hiss. “I love you.”

"Hmm, good. Then come with me down to Arion. Come with me to the Temple."

Killian looked at her, and smiled. She was taking him to see her home. "Aye, but no family dinners."

"I promise. Just lots of Monks."

~*~

Arion was a brilliant planet in a star system of thirteen. Of the thirteen systems, six were inhabitable. They settled their survivors on the planet of their choice, with supplies and a small crew to protect them and help them to build.

"Killian, how long will you be on Arion?" David asked as he watched his brother rifle through his old drawer in their room.
Killian shrugged at his brother. "No clue. Emma already gave Will all the specs he needs. Her instructions are for him to check a special cave where her ship was built. That all the supplies he needs will be there shortly. We’ll leave the Bug there for repairs."

"So, you just walk through this time portal to a past era on the planet?" David asked, his brow furrowed in question.

"I guess. Hey, you told me to take Emma somewhere we could be alone, right? Well, I’m positive that for once you can’t interrupt by calling me."

David just smiled wickedly. "Well, there is that, brother. But what are you going to do about all the screaming and moaning? Pretty embarrassing you yelling your head off with all those monks around."

"What yelling?"

David just laughed. "Okay, so we check the special place and everything we’ll need will be there? Gaians, even with just one of them left, are still so fucking unbelievable!"

"Killian," Emma called from the door. "You ready?"

Killian laughed and retrieved a few more things he had left in his old room. "Yeah, David was just lecturing me on not screaming down the house with all the monks around."

Emma rolled her eyes. "Yeah, fat chance." Emma walked over and kissed David’s cheek. "We’ll be back, Captain."

"I have no doubt about it." He watched them walk away and a chill of foreboding made him wonder if he’d ever see them and hear their banter again.

~*~

The Bug was a rough ride. Only partial repairs had been made to her outer hull. Will and a group of his engineers followed them down with Belle. Emma smiled at the young woman’s wonder, as she stared at the ruins of the once great Temple. The world of Arion was green and lush, and the very silence of the air held a perfume. High on the Temple outcrop was an inland sea.

"You like it?"

Belle nodded. "I’ve never dreamed of a place so beautiful."

"Good. I decided to make it our world. Our home world for the people on the Enchanted that have no world to go home to. Here we can come and rest."

"Me, too?"

Emma smiled. "Yes. If you wish." It was her legacy to those who survived. If they survived.

"So exactly what do we do?" Will asked.

"You wait in the cavern. All the supplies will appear." Emma took Killian’s hand to lead him up the stone stairs to the Temple.

"Princess!" Emma turned to look at Gus. "Take care."

"Thank you, August. While I’m gone, you should look around and find a place you’d like to call
Killian walked up the stairs admiring the green lands, lush landscape, and fragrant air. "Good hunting here?"

"Yes. Lots of wicked creatures that are hard to trap that you and Will could kill and force feed to the crew."

"Epic! We’ll have to spend a little time doing that." They reached the top and Emma led him towards the Gateway. "So we just walk through and we’re there?" His tone was skeptical.

"No. If it were that easy, anyone could do it and the Temple of Knowledge would’ve been discovered long ago. No. You need me to access the gate to Arion."

She moved closer to a stone sculpture; a swan in flight, rising out of the crest of a wave. On its head sat a small crown that Killian thought looked like the one she wore when she greeted the Council of the lost worlds. She pulled a small dagger from her waist and quickly slashed the blade across her palm. She barely winced as she pressed her palm against the breast of the bird.

When she stepped back, Killian lifted her hand to his lips, kissing it gently. “You didn’t say you had to mutilate yourself to gain entrance.”

She smiled as she pulled him through the stone arch and suddenly the Temple was young again, alive with occupants who nodded to Emma as she walked toward a large ornate stone building.

Killian marveled as he looked again at her palm and the wound was gone.

"Wait." Killian stopped her from entering the building. "Is it okay that I’m with you?"

Emma patted him kindly. "I would almost promise you that you are expected."

They entered the quiet temple and Emma led him down the hall to her old bedroom. He walked around for a moment, taking in everything he saw. It was an exquisite room, almost what he’d expect for a princess, but not something he could envision Emma living in for days on end. He stopped at the wide window, observing the world of Arion. It was so peaceful, so alive that it was hard to believe that it had passed from existence over a thousand years ago.

"What are you thinking?" Emma asked as she came up behind him, wrapping her arms around his body and laying her head against his shoulder.

"That this is a perfect place." Emma just smiled. "I guess we need to go?"

Emma laughed. "Yes. Will is waiting a thousand years in the future. Come."

They walked through the Temple to a small room with two doors, the one they’d entered through and one on the opposite wall. The door led to a cave that dropped along a staircase to a large stone cathedral. Killian stared at all the technology, the stockpiled raw material, as Emma quickly gathered what was needed from her list.

Killian stopped beside a large display of SPC nodes. "Oh damn. If we brought Will here, he’d fall to the ground where I’m standing in a withering orgasm from all these nodes! It’d be embarrassing."

"I promised him two. You want to give him a good time?"
Killian just laughed and gathered what he needed.

It took them over an hour to assemble all the materials and drag them into a pile.

"Stand back." Emma went to a console built into the stone, and suddenly the *Zephyr Bug* was in the cavern.

"How did you do that?"

"Her engines have the same technology as the Dagr’du, and the same technology we used to step through the time portal. I built her here, so here’s where we should repair her. I basically just called her home." Emma did a few other operations, and the supplies disappeared.

Killian frowned. "There is so much about you I don’t know or even understand, isn’t there?"

Emma patted his cheek. "You do fine. Let’s go get some food." Emma raced Killian back up the stone stairs. "Hey, you think Will found our present?"

~*~

Will stood in shock as the *Bug* winked out. One moment it was there, and suddenly...

"What the hell?" Gus called to him when suddenly their supplies appeared. "That’s our Princess, full of surprises. Let’s get it loaded!" Will quickly searched the packages and supplies for his SPC nodes.

Belle watched him as he talked to himself.

"Belle, Belle, check those over there. She couldn’t have forgotten my nodes."

"I can’t see how. It was practically every other item on the list, and you slipped a reminder note in her pocket."

Will stopped his searching. "What are you trying to say?"

Belle gasped and then smiled. Straightening she looked at Will. "I’m saying that I found them."

Will rushed over, and rocked on his feet as he peered down at five silver nodes. His hand came to his chest as he felt a hint of moisture behind his eyes.

"God, I love her!"

Belle just rolled her eyes and made eye contact at Gus who was snickering under his breath. "Why I thought Areenians were unemotional is beyond me."

"Hey, I’m not emotional! I just got something in my eye." Will grabbed his babies and held them protectively as he ordered the supplies moved to the transport.

~*~

Killian ate and watched her from under his lashes. Emma was picking through her food, frowning at some of it, and stealing other things off his plate.

"So, how long can we stay here?" he asked.

Emma shrugged. "Depends."
Killian smiled slightly. "Okay, on what?"

"Well, it’ll take Will and Belle at least two weeks to recrystallize the warp crystals, to build the explosive, and to install the new transport drive. They’ve got a lot of work. We can repair the Bug in about three days. She needs new hull plating that can only be found here. So after it’s done, we can return and help them."

"What if we didn’t?" Killian asked casually.

Emma’s eyes narrowed as she watched him eat. "What do you have in mind, Commander?"

"That we stay here for a few weeks, alone."

Killian stood up and pushed his plate back, taking her hand he pulled her with him back to her room. The temple halls were airy and cool with a nice breeze. The sun was brilliant even as it was setting for the day, and Killian could hear the birds outside with the sounds of trickling water. Finding an open terrace, he went outside into a garden with Emma.

Sitting her down on a low stone wall that circled a fountain, he watched as she dropped lotus flowers in the water, and then sprayed small droplets of water on them.

"Is it to make up for the time we didn’t get to spend together on Xanadu?" Emma asked.

"No. This is something different."

"Okay? So what is it?"

Killian suddenly looked uncomfortable. He moved about on his feet, pushing his hands into his pockets and then out again. She watched him check to see if he had his weapon twice, as if he expected to be attacked.

"Killian?"

"I was thinking of a sort of vacation."

"Vacation? Here?" Okay. He was confusing. A vacation wasn’t a reason for concern.

"I can still feel David even all this distance in time away." Killian frowned at that. "Is that normal? I mean technically he hasn't been born."

Emma laughed. "You really want an explanation? Quantum mechanics and string theory?"

"Forget it. I’ll just accept that I still feel him." Killian sat down next to her and took her hands in his. "Anyway, he’ll let me know if he needs us. We can fix the Bug, and maybe explore this world in this time," Killian’s voice dropped to a husky whisper, "or each other."

"We could," she said gently. "So you want a vacation?"

"Actually..." Killian scratched his ear. "I was thinking more of a honeymoon."

Emma went still. "Umm?" she paused, and tried again. "Umm..."

"Umm? Emma, I’m asking..."

"Married? You want to get married?"
Killian didn’t appreciate the high squeak of her voice, tinged with hysteria.

"What?" Killian let his irritation get to him as his voice rose.

"I mean...you, and... you and me? I mean, I’m not...um...Killian?"

"You don’t want to marry me?! What? I’m only good to fuck?"

Emma took offense to his loud voice. "Of course I want to marry you!"

"Well, so do I!" Killian paused and his voice quieted. "You do?"

Emma nodded. "Yes." Tears gathered in her eyes. "But I might still die. Won’t this be harder to deal with?"

"Aye," he said with a flat tone sounding soulless. "But I’ve wanted to be bonded all my life, and I found you. I wanted to be part of something special, to have a wife, and...and if you won’t marry me, then I’ll never marry."

Emma smiled slightly as her finger came up to stroke the scar on his cheek, and tears ran freely down her face. "Okay.

Killian grabbed her and kissed her hard. He rested his forehead against hers. "That was harder than I thought it would be."

"I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to sound like I didn’t want to marry you. It’s just I’ve never thought about it. I just always assumed that I would never...that I wouldn't be around long enough to marry."

"We’re changing that. We’ll think of a plan together. One that includes you surviving to be a thorn in my arse for a nice long time."

Emma sighed. "It wasn’t that, Killian. I just didn’t want to survive if I have to murder all those people to destroy the Dagr’du. Why should they die and I live?"

Killian shook her gently. "Stop it. We’ll figure it out. I’ve got a plan."

"You do?" Emma smiled slightly. "Why does that worry me?"

"We’ll work on it." Killian kissed her again. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a small box. Opening it, he took out a small silver ring matching the ones he wore. "It’s not much. I’ve kept it for years, sort of a reminder of the wife I’d never have. I stopped to pick it up from David’s room before we left."

Emma watched him push it on her finger and she closed her hand tight to look at it. "I love it!" Kissing him. "It’s perfect! You’re perfect!"

"Bloody hell, Emma, no damn mushy shit! You’ll have me all weepy like Will." Emma giggled at that.

He was just so sexy - all shy and sputtering! Emma pulled him close again and sucked his lower lip into her mouth, hard. "I could totally fuck you right now! You’re just too sexy for words."

Killian was on his feet pulling her after him. "Let's go!"

"Princess."
Killian swore under his breath. Damn, even in the past he was still being interrupted. He turned with Emma to see a man in a long robe patiently and quietly standing there.

Emma smiled. "N’al!"

Killian just looked at the man who didn’t seem to move or even breathe. He couldn’t read him or his body movements. As a hunter, he was aware of every living creature giving off signals. This man did not.

"My Princess." He bowed to Killian as well. "Your robes are set out."

Emma frowned. "Robes?"

"Yes. For the ceremony. I set the Prince’s robes out as well."

"The Prince?" Killian’s voice rose. What the bloody hell! Emma didn’t mention any bloody Prince in her life.

Emma put a hand on his stomach to calm him. "I think he means you, Killian."

"He better be! Or I’ll be needing to meet this damn prince."

"Shhh. N’al, explain."

"The bow does not bend when it is a tree."

"Oh bloody hell! Not another one!" Killian just shook his head and took himself back a few feet.

"N’al..."

"Because it is so clear, it takes a long time to realize. If you immediately knew that the candlelight was fire, the meal was cooked long ago."

"You’ve said that before. That I understand. It takes a long time to understand love, but if you knew it immediately..."

"A destiny is the journey walked, but the path knows many shoes."

"And the outcome?"

"The strength is knowing in the mind what the heart has always known. You are stronger when you are not alone."

"You knew he existed? That I would find him?"

"Mistake not. Time is as it is, but the journey was the path that was traveled before you were born. Paths that converge in the wood never know what it is to travel alone. They are, as they have always been. One."

"So the robes are for?"

"Your union of heart and soul. Bonded to that which could not be bound. The twig grows stronger in the bundle, and does not remember weakness."

"Okay? Umm, Killian? I think they’re offering to marry us?"
"Finally! Something I can understand." Killian rejoined them. "What do we do?"

"We go change and then go the main Temple of Talla’se. N’al will meet us there."

N’al bowed and as fast as he appeared, he was gone.

"Let’s get this show on the road." Killian suddenly paused. "Um, Emma? There’s not anything I should know about this ceremony, right?"

Emma made a gesture of helplessness. "I can’t say. I’ve never known them to marry anyone in all the ten years I lived here."

Killian straightened his back. Couldn’t be as bad as his people’s joining ceremony on his home planet of Areenia. "Okay, then just tell me there is a honeymoon afterwards."

Emma pulled him very close and her eyes darkened. She stared at his mouth with a growing hunger. "Oh yes. You’re going to get very, very lucky afterwards."

Killian growled under his breath. "Bloody hell, stop yakking, lass! They might change their minds."

They dressed, with Emma looking regal in full gowns of the most brilliant of green brocade, tight but flowing robes, and her crown in place made of sparkling jewels. Around her neck was her swan amulet, worn long and down the front of her bodice. She took an identical amulet that came with Killian’s clothes and put it around his neck so it hung down his chest.

"My Prince!" Emma said all gushy and breathless, and then she ruined the effect by giggling.

Killian made a face. "What? Don’t I look okay?"

"You look wonderful. A real Prince."

"Aye, I do," he grinned, looking down and admiring his new duds. “Dashingly handsome as usual.”

The pants were a soft, tight black leather, hand tooled with symbols, totally kickass boots with a knife sheath, and the shirt was a soft, black silk that tucked into the pants with a red vest worn open with fastening silver chains. From his shoulders hung a robe that flowed behind him as he walked. He practiced in it by walking around the room, chuckling. He especially liked the knife at the waist and the long sword with a wicked sharp edge. The robe had an inner lining of pure brocade silver with emblems of a panther. Emma’s robe had a swan in flight.

"Cool duds!"

"Here, this is the last of it." Emma reached to place the circlet of silver on his head

Killian knocked it away. "No, lass. Get that away from me. It ruins the look."

"It’s part of it."

"I don’t want it." Killian looked at the brilliant silver crown, thin, with etchings of panthers around the band.

"Killian, just through the ceremony and then you can toss it."

He grumbled, but complied. She stood back and gazed at him. He looked magnificent, but in truth,
it was that stubborn, dark, brooding look that made the complete look uttering captivating. She smiled dazzlingly at him as she took his hand and led him from their rooms towards the main temple. Killian was shocked when she led him outside, finding the path they walked was lined with monks holding torches. They walked towards an open Temple with a large ornate gateway that was lit in the night sky.

The open Temple was flanked by a long colonnade, leading to a front altar. Emma’s Seer and mentor, N’al, waited as they walked together towards him. On either side of him were two large cauldrons of hot coals, burning red and fiery.

When they made it to the front of the altar, a gong sounded in the night along with the loud high ringing of small bells. N’al gestured for them to kneel.

Killian had a problem with his long sword, and N’al reached down and removed it, placing it on the floor in front of them.

"The Great Path has merged. That which was unbonded is found."

Killian looked at Emma discreetly as N’al continued.

"Bound by heart and soul, by blood and fire...what is forged cannot be broken. It is written." He made a gesture above their heads. He turned back to the altar, lifted an object from it, and held it high above his head, whispering words only he could hear. He tilted his head forward slightly, as if in a bow, and then turned back to the kneeling couple.

He held the object between them, and Killian saw that it was a dagger; a hilt so bejeweled it hurt Killian’s eyes as light danced off the gems, projecting colorful patterns around them. The blade was etched with intricate patterns that twisted and interwove with each other with smaller, smooth gems clustered near the hilt. N’al gestured for Killian to wrap his hand around the blade. Emma did the same above his hand, closer to the hilt. N’al pulled the sword away, slicing their hands. Both hissed in pain.

"Every birth is of pain and violence."

He took their hands and joined the cuts, binding them with a long cloth of gold and silver.

"She that is the swan -life, balance, champion, and pure of spirit - is bound to the panther - hunter, protector, commander, and fierce with passion. Together bound, they are The One."

He held their bound, bleeding hands up as the blood dripped from their clapsed hands into a goblet of liquid. After a few drops, he held the mixture of wine and blood up for Emma to drink, followed by Killian.

"Drink of the other, and there will never be thirst. Together, you are unquenched, and sated only in each other."

A red-hot brand was brought from the coals and pressed into the flesh of their joined forearms. Emma cried out, but Killian swallowed his yell.

Heart and soul. Blood and fire.

Killian felt pain in his hand, on his arm, but the most intense feeling was the fire in his loins. Looking at his mate, they moved together as one as his head spun from sounds and smells, and all he could see was her - her in an endless field of stars exploding in brilliance and the feeling of creation.
Their bodies mated. Her hands were on him everywhere at once, and he couldn’t get enough of the taste of her in his mouth as he licked and bit her skin, drank her blood, all while her teeth nipped his skin. They were in the Temple naked, and then they were in their room, in their bed with the silky slide of the sheets wrapping them together. The terrace doors were wide open as the gauze white curtains billowed and Killian pinned their bound hands above their heads as he lost sense of his own body and where they were.

He flipped himself over, dragging her with him. She straddled his body and smiled down at him in nothing but her dazzling crown and the amulet still around her neck, as was his. Sliding down his body, her skin kissed his as she took him inside her. Killian’s eyes closed as he moaned, tossing back his head and giving her the open flesh at his neck. His body felt like it was floating, lost between here and there, as they moved against each other, together in unity. The world around them melted away like rolling clouds at high speed. Time and dimension melded, receded and proceeded too fast for the normal eye as time shifted, and they with it.

It aroused her to see Killian so lost in the moment, so infused with need that he became the essence of pure, driving desire. A low, desperate whine began to vibrate in her throat. The friction was almost brutal, but it was so precise. Loud, staccato slapping noises of flesh on flesh blended with Killian’s grunts of pleasure.

“Harder,” she whispered between pants. Her eyes popped wide when he growled menacingly and complied. She hadn’t really thought he could be any more forceful in his possession.

They moved against each other not once, but time and time again. It was more than sex, more than feeding their need for each other, it was reaffirming their connection. Killian needed to feel every inch of her skin on his; touch all of her and test her skin with his teeth. Everything about her was driving him insane. It started with the taste of her skin and the way her sweat mixed with his to make a scent unique to them. It had to be the hormones loaded in her blood that was drawing him in, anchoring him to her in this primitive bonding. She drained him, and it was like a siren song in his veins wanting more; wanting her to take it all. She was like a succubus pulling all the energy from his body, and taking it into hers.

Emma grasped the back of Killian’s neck and pulled him into a kiss so fiery that his heart shuddered and then ignited into a galloping canter, his body jerking forward to press onto as much of Emma’s skin as possible. He moved her, lifting her leg from where it pressed against his thigh and turned her. It wasn’t sex. It wasn’t fucking. It was more. It was everything and nothing at the same time, and in a flash it became something raw and intense as his mouth found the skin of her back; the firmness of her muscles and the attractiveness of her blood called to him as he bit into her. He left whisker burns on the soft, tender skin of her back as he penetrated her deep from behind in one full thrust.

The large bed moved with them as they jerked back and forth. Their bodies glided in the sweat that coated their skin and eased the pace Killian had set. He hit a place inside that shot liquid fire through her entire body. She cried out in a hissing cry for more, for him to do it harder.

Killian's own voice had ceased to function, only grunts and pants snuffing hard from his hot face pressed into Emma’s neck as his mouth continued to lick and bite at her skin. The rhythm they had started, slow then fast thrusts, was long lost as their blood and energy swelled and broke in waves. His movements became more erratic and frenzied. Deeper and harder, as fast as he could manage it. The force of his thrusts with all of his muscles engaged was straining Emma's own strength, and she could feel her own muscles begin to quiver under the onslaught as the first rushes of his essence hit her in a blinding passion, followed quickly by his semen.
Suddenly, Emma achieved her release, again, unsure of how many she’d reached so far. Her whole body tightened, back arching, mouth open, eyes shut, muscles clenching hard, splashing warmth over his cock. Killian grunted as Emma’s internal muscles grabbed him. He thrust twice against the pressure and cried out as he spasmed inside her, again. She felt him twitching deep inside her. She clamped her eyes shut, overwhelmed with the intensity of the moment. Her fear of how fleeting, how impermanent the feeling was, made her relish it… made her cling to it with a wild desperation.

Emma felt herself melt into the bed, slipping into a dreamy state with a long, sweet sigh. His head fell onto her shoulder and his big body snuggled over her, chin at the joint of Emma's neck and shoulder. Killian's nose moved along the skin of her neck and up into Emma's sweaty hair lying damp against her skin. A low "I... love you...." was huffed in a warm breath into her ear. Unable to speak, Emma grasped the long arm that came around her waist, turning herself into him as he flopped over onto his back. She pressed her head and body back against Killian's shoulder and body, and moaned her answer. “I love you.”

Killian woke to sense himself lying across the bed, sprawled out in abandon on his stomach with Emma sleeping on his back, her head pillowed on his shoulder and her arms around him. The warm breeze of the terrace brought the scent of flowers and a sea breeze into their room. Emma’s mouth moved along the back of his neck, as she wound her fingers into his hair.

"How long?" Killian was surprised he could talk. It felt like a very long time since he made a sound that wasn’t a moan or a scream of pleasure.

Emma was equally thick throated and her voice slightly slurred with sleep. "Three days, I think."

Killian turned over and pushed the sheets from them, running his hand up the silky skin of her back. "That leaves us eleven days."

"Uh huh." She was kissing his neck.

Killian looked down at his hand and arm. The cut was healed and the brand mark no longer pained. It looked like it had been there since birth. Now, it was a red tattoo, a swan wrapped with a panther, mated where their bodies merged from two into one.

Killian picked up Emma’s arm and looked. It was the same. Placing his mouth on the now marred, tattooed skin, he kissed it deeply, with reverence, his eyes closing as the flood of her emotion rushed over him, overwhelming him. Opening his eyes, he looked at her. Her lids had dropped over her eyes, leaving only a slit of soft green watching him with fire and greed. Killian’s heart raced out of control as he felt a need, a thirst and hunger that knew only one relief. Emma, his wife.

"More." He pulled her to him.

"Hungry?" she asked, gently laughing as he moved over her and pushed her back in the sheets.

"Starved. Feed me." They never noticed their bodies shimmering and shifting.

~*~
Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday!

I can't believe this space ride is nearly over. Only two more chapters left.

Ultraluckycat - I can't begin to say thanks for all the help you have given me with this fic, always being on tap to help out when I need it.

Thanks for the continuing awesome comments and kudos you guys are showering me. I feel so honored that you feel so strongly about this story.

I'm just gonna go and quietly hide behind a bulkhead while you read this chapter...

Chapter 25 - The One

"Will, report."

Will was surprised to see David in Engineering. The man was usually tied to his captain’s chair and his personal domain of the Bridge.

"Stranger in a strange land, Cap," Will teased as he passed Belle the latest specs. "We’ve installed the new transport drive, but we need to run a few tests on it before taking a real long trip. Emma was going to bring us back a special component that stores and records star charts into a holographic matrix with a navigational command. We’ll need to install an astrometric lab with special computers that compensate for astro-drift."

"And we’re getting these computers from where?"

"Emma. She has all the components, but she’ll need to build them. Also, Belle is still working on the static warp field to protect the ship and its personnel from shifting. We set up a mock lab and have already tried three diagnostic models."

"And?"

"They failed. But we’re getting close. Emma might be able to help when she gets back. Belle understands engineering and has creative innovative thought, but Emma is light years ahead of us with the knowledge of the Ancients."

"How much she feels she can give us, I’m uncertain. The Gaians were helpful with those around them, but towards the end, they became less willing to share with the Dark One and his abuses. I think they were afraid of helping our universe advance beyond our means to the point of destruction, much like their native home."

Will tried to not appear too interested. "So, when do they get back?"
David looked around conspiratorially, and nodded for Will to come closer. "When they get here."

Will made a face as David walked away. David just chuckled on his way to Medical. He needed to talk to Graham and check on Mulan.

"Graham? How is she?"

Graham just shook his head. "She's still with us, but barely. Her autonomic systems are closing down."

David looked over at the bed and the young woman that in life was a fighter, and now suddenly was strangely still. Ruby sat at her bedside still talking to her. David went with Graham into his office.

"Did you hear, Graham?"

"About the other Honorable?" David nodded. "Yeah, I heard last night in the officer’s mess. The Dark One has Emma’s last Gem."

"I should’ve known he would’ve found her and taken her. It took too long for that captured Legion to talk."

Graham just continued to check his console. Looking up at David, he couldn’t see how it would make a difference. Mulan would never be able to perform her duties as an Honorable. He didn’t expect her to ever regain consciousness.

"Mulan is all but gone, and she was the only one who could handle that crystal. It’s hardly a moot point now trying to decide what to do."

David sat down. "I know. I want this, Graham. I want this to be the end of Emma’s pre-destined suicide run. For Killian’s sake." David picked up objects off Graham’s desk and put them down again. "He married her."

Graham went quiet. Thoughtful. "You’re certain?"

"I feel her. I’ve felt Killian since the bonding ceremony Regina performed, possibly even before that; tentacles intertwined in my thoughts. But now, whenever I feel Killian, I feel Emma, too. I had an inkling of her before, but now... something has changed."

"David..."

"Last night I attended a marriage ceremony in my dreams. It was in a huge Temple with Killian and Emma dressed in Royal gowns. Their hands were cut and bound, they drank a mixture of their combined blood, and then they were branded. It was...disturbing. It was blood, passion, and some of the damnest incredible sex I’ve ever seen. Graham, they were there, and then they shifted."

Graham couldn’t believe it. "That’s just a dream, David."

"Really? Then explain this." David held up his right arm and palm. Across the palm was a red line like a cut and on his inner forearm was the red outline of a swan and a panther mating into one creature, slowly fading. "I felt it, Graham. I felt everything."

"Oh shit! I thought it was just a dream." Graham couldn’t take it. Eminents, Princesses, and Honorables. It was too much.
"You, too?" David asked quietly as Graham nodded.

"What the hell is going on?" Graham was worried that they were moving too fast.

"The universe is evolving." Both David and Graham looked up at Regina at the door. "I was at the ceremony as well. Emma is right. Our universe has had a burst in the use of mental powers. It is changing us, evolving us into something more."

David nodded for Regina to take a seat. "How much more evolved are you now, My Lady?" Taking on Cora’s power had to have affected her.

Regina just stared and then smiled. "I can see things so clearly. I can see the future, the present, and the past as they unfold in a web of continuity. They are forever present and changing, and yet they are the same. I could almost reach out and touch..."

Regina reached her hand forward and the very sense of space around them altered, shifted, and changed, almost as if drawn to her hand, and then it bent back to its original shape.

"Oh shit!" Graham stood up and backed away, but David watched fascinated.

"Is that what Emma did? How she pushed Cora and her men?"

"Yes. It is so simple. Child’s play really. All things emanate an aura, an energy field that is pure and resonates. The trick is to emulate it and pull it forward, or push it apart or away. It is how the distortion corridors are formed. Space is not bent, it is merely pushed aside, and distance and time are not constant. It is a fluidity of energy and thought."

"A doorway."

Regina smiled and looked at David. "Yes. That was how they traveled, and what you are building on the ship. A way to open those doorways, and step through. A way to transverse time and space. It is so simple. I do not know why I never thought of it before."

"The Dark One would kill for this knowledge."

Regina nodded. "The Dark One has killed for this knowledge. It was why he made the Eminents. He wanted to hold all the understanding and secrets of the Gaians’ Ancients. But he failed. His failure was in making too many. Our power was depleted and we were only partially evolved."

"So why didn’t all of you remaining Eminent Ones become even stronger as he killed you? I mean more so than you did?" Graham asked.

"He made a mistake. He did not redirect the essences, the power. Instead, it was released in a huge burst, ripping apart time and space, creating spatial anomalies and tears. Zelena was the first to suspect that her power was hers to control, to give, or to take."

David looked at his friend and partner. "Like you took Cora’s?"

Regina nodded. "Yes.

"And this connection I have with Killian and Emma?"

"And Elurra," Regina added softly.

David nodded. Something they had yet to talk about. Mary Margaret. "Yes, and Elurra."
"You feel Will?"

David thought about it for a moment. "Yes. Not in the same way, or even as strongly, but yes. I feel him."

Graham looked at the two, his concern growing. "So what happens now?"

"I do not know that anything can be done. If David is feeling Emma within the connection to Killian, then they have completed their bond."

"But it was not just mental, Regina! It was physical. It’s becoming physical to David as well!" Graham walked around agitated. "What happens to Killian if Emma dies? If she blinks out of existence?"

Both David and Regina went silent. Even though Emma could no longer use the Dagr’du as she had planned, she still had a strategy, a terrible idea that was going to blow up a huge area of space in the attempt to rid the universe of the Dagr’du. They both knew that she wasn’t planning on surviving the explosion.

David decided. "We come up with our own plan. Blowing up hundreds of light years of space is not acceptable. We either use Emma’s original plan, which with Mulan almost gone is no longer feasible, or we kill the Dark One and take the Dagr’du by default. I must admit, Emma’s was the best plan. It did the job and cost the least amount of life.

"So we go to war?" Graham asked quietly.

David nodded. "I can’t lose my brother, and I can’t lose Emma. He needs her. So, we go to war."

~*~

"Captain, the Zephyr Bug is requesting permission to board."

"Welcome her home, Billy." David turned around in his chair and looked at Leroy manning Killian’s security and tactical station. "Looks like your evil taskmaster has returned."

Leroy actually growled. He quickly checked and rechecked his consoles to be certain that everything was in working order.

"Archie, take Conn."

"Aye, Cap." David went to find his brother and new sister.

He found them in their quarters, settling back in after over two weeks on Arion.

"Aw, come on, Emma. Don’t just toss your bags down wherever you are! Bloody hell, did we really leave this place looking this much like a disaster?"

"Are you trying to say I’m a messy person, because I’m sure you’re not!"

"Messy? This is more than just messy." Killian looked around the place. Emma had obviously searched for something before they left and she’d tossed the place, leaving disorder in her wake.

"Okay, you’re right. I admit it. The place is a little messy." Emma frowned at the disaster. "Maybe we’ve been robbed?"

"Emma!" Killian was getting use to her brand of cleaning denial.
After seeing where she lived for ten years of her life, and how the invisible hands of monks cleaned up and straightened after her, he wasn’t surprised she was a walking disaster. On Areenia, they were trained in military quarters at an early age to be neat and orderly. Emma was an assault to that training.

Emma picked up some clothing and noticed a partial sandwich she had left sitting for over two weeks. She discreetly pushed it under a chair before Killian spied it.

"Maybe we could just request new quarters. Clean ones?"

Killian looked around at the disaster Emma had left during her translation session to find Bevroren. There were manuscripts and materials on every surface, along with discarded clothing and uneaten meals.

"Or we could clean this one?"

"Clean?"

Killian laughed at her expression. He pulled her closer to him by the front of the shirt she borrowed from him. She hooked an arm around his neck as he deftly unbuttoned the shirt and was ready to push it off her shoulders to the floor.

"So if this shirt ends up on the floor in here with everything else, I suppose later that will also be my fault?"

"Aye, love. Definitely. No one should look this good in one of my shirts," Killian said huskily against her neck as his mouth moved towards to her ear.

"You do," she said moaning against him as his hand went up her back under the shirt. Two weeks hadn’t been enough.

"Am I interrupting?" David asked from the door.

"No!" Emma said quickly, the same time Killian said yes.

"David. Now I know we’re back," Killian scowled, gently pushing Emma towards the bedroom to change, but handed her a bag to take with her.

David laughed as Killian wandered around the room collecting all Emma’s manuscripts and papers into a pile. He then gathered up all the clothes tossed around the place. David picked up a trash receptacle and started tossing out the trash and uneaten food; basically anything that looked like it was growing.

"Interesting wedding," David said casually.

Killian looked up sharply. "You know about that?"

"Well, I didn’t clue in when you came to pick up the ring, but the dream I had a few weeks back was...interesting." David showed Killian his forearm which still had a light red outline.

"Oh damn!" Killian quickly looked at the door to see if Emma was still in the bedroom. He took David’s arm and led him away to talk to him in a low voice. "What’s going on with us, David?"

"I don’t know. Not really. But I can feel Emma almost as strongly as I can feel you now. The wedding, it was..."
"Intense."

"Yeah. Made an Areenian joining ceremony look like a social."

"We’ve got to do something, David. I can’t let her go to the Dark One’s ship and blow herself and a huge chunk of space to oblivion."

David squeezed his brother’s arm. "Working on it."

"Someone should have told us," Killian said softly.

"What?"

"That there was more to life than honor, duty, and being a warrior. They should have told us that we could be happy."

David smiled at that. From Killian’s mouth to the gods’ ears. Killian never believed in anything except that if life could fuck with a person, it did. Easy and simple as that. Perhaps that still applied.

"I’ve got news, and you’re not going to like it."

"Not like what?" Emma came back in the room and frowned at the two low-speaking brothers. "Keeping secrets, boys? Hmm, well as long as it doesn’t involve you both drinking Will’s home brew, I think I can cope."

They looked uncomfortable and guilty. Emma’s eyes narrowed in speculation and thought.

"What?"

David sighed and looked at Killian apologetically. "It’s your missing Gem."

"Missing?"


Killian swore under his breath and looked away.

"The Dark One has her. One of the captured Legion guards talked after you left," David told them.

Emma looked at Killian, and closed her eyes briefly. "I see. Then we have to take her back."

"There is Mulan to consider as well."

Emma nodded. "I know. Graham told me she wouldn’t survive." She looked at the brothers. "I need to go to Medical." Emma went to leave, but Killian stopped her.

"Emma...what will you do?"

Emma stared at the door with her back to her husband. "What I must." She left.

Killian kicked the piece of furniture closest to him. Tossing himself into a chair, he rubbed his eyes. David sat down on the arm of his brother’s chair.

"Sorry. I had to tell her."

"I know. I just was hoping that..."
"That things would change now that you’re married?"

Killian laughed slightly bitterly. "Aye. Stupid, I know, because if the situations were reversed, I would expect her to support me, my mission, and my oath. I can’t feel that, or even want to do that. I’m selfish, and I just want her."

"Love," David said suddenly.


David just shook his head. "It really sucks." Killian didn’t respond, but he had to agree.

Emma entered the war room off of the Bridge. She had spent time in Medical with Mulan and Ruby, and Mulan looked to be gone by the end of the day. Graham promised to call her if she suddenly took a turn for the worse. Emma couldn’t imagine her getting any worse.

Ruby had been the surprise. She was genuinely upset and angry. It was as if she were the only person who cared that Mulan was dying. And it was made worse knowing that it was Cora, someone she once admired, who was responsible for Mulan being hurt. She and Mulan had been caught in a crossfire when the Legions boarded the Enchanted. They had been ordered to quarters, but neither of them wanted to follow orders. So they didn’t. It made Ruby’s guilt two-fold.

"I’m here as requested."

David smiled at his new sister-in-law. She might not care about the title of princess, but it was apparent from her tone that she didn’t care to be summoned.

"Emma, take a seat."

As she sat, Will came over and squeezed her shoulder, setting a cup of coffee in front of her. He whispered to her, "It was really a lovely wedding ceremony." Emma looked at him sharply. Damn voyeur.

Emma looked at the cup suspiciously, and then at Will. "Did you make this?"

Will feigned hurt at her accusation. "No, Gus did." Emma looked over at the tall, handsome man who bowed his head slightly in her direction.

"Thank goodness." Will looked indignant, but decided not to let it bother him since he decided that Emma was his favorite person in the entire universe. Especially after she sent him five SPC nodes, and Killian had informed him she had even more than that. She was a goddess.

"Emma, I was reviewing your plan for the destruction of the Dagr’du," David started. Emma stopped sipping her coffee, but said nothing. "I can't allow it."

"Can’t allow...?" Emma stood up and faced the others. "I don’t think you’re in a position to allow or disallow me anything."

"Yes, I am. I’m the Captain."

"You’re hired muscle. My contract with you is to..."

"For the recovery of three Gems, and transport to your final destination, the Dark One’s ship. That will be done. There was no mention of letting you blow a good portion of space into nothing with
Emma wearily sat back down. Weary of this talk, weary of this life, and weary of the thought of hurting Killian. Needing to avoid his eyes, she shut hers and shook her head.

"We’ve talked amongst ourselves. It is unanimously decided that you are too valuable to us, to the universe, and to Killian, to be lost along with countless lives. If your original plan could be implemented, we’d have to be quiet, because it was the best, most expedient plan with the least loss of life. But this new plan is unconscionable."

"So, if I were still able to implement the original plan, that would be okay. Because I was the safety mechanism created by my people to protect the universe from the abusive use of the Dagr’du? But now my job is being taken from me due to the loss of one Gem, and the death of another. Basically, I failed, so I am now incompetent to complete a simple task?"

David’s eyes narrowed. Brat. She didn’t want them to save her life? Too fucking bad. "I am saying there are other options that don’t involve murdering millions of innocents, the very innocents it was your mission to originally protect."

"Tell me your damn plan!" She knew she was being unreasonable, but she was tired of it all.

"First, we build explosives to be deployed at key junctions within the Dark One’s ship, and we destroy his engine’s warp core. I’ve got six assault teams that need to be prepared to defend themselves against full Legion guards. We get in, plant the devices, recover your missing Gem, and leave."

"And after having lost to the Dark One before, how is it you plan to board his ship without him seeing you or destroying you?"

David looked at the others, and sat down facing Emma. "Because of you. The technology you gave us allows us to not be scanned or detected unless physically seen. We’ll come up to the Dark One’s blind side and attach to one of his outer hulls. Then you and Regina together, will open a corridor between the ships which will wreck the Dark One’s warp field. He won’t know we’re there until it’s too late."

Killian took up the plan that was his. "My teams will move in full deployment, moving quietly and quickly through the Dark One’s ship, not alerting them to our presence. You and I will locate your last Gem and liberate her. Then, we will find the chamber where the Dagr’du resides. Together, with Regina’s help, we’d like you to try to transport the Dagr’du to the Enchanted."

"And if we can’t?"

"Then we wait until the explosions have weakened the Dark One’s ship. We go in, finish him, and take the Dagr’du."

Emma nodded. They had thought of their own plan. It had a margin of feasibility, minus the mass destruction of her backup plan. She had never considered a full assault plan because that meant her needing to involve their lives and deaths in her mission, something she couldn’t consider, given her connections to them.

"And if we get the Dagr’du on the Enchanted? What then?" No matter where they took it or tried to destroy it, it would be a massive charge and destruction. The Dagr’du was too powerful to be left unattended.

"We go back to Arion. You and Killian take it to the cavern, and there you transport it back in time.
and hide it where it will never be found."

"It’s a good plan," she conceded with a nod. "Complicated. So many aspects could go wrong."

Killian came to kneel next to her chair. "I know, my Princess. But it's a chance. It's a fight that we want. Your plan has no outlets, except destruction and death. This plan is what we’d sacrifice in war with the Dark One, and there will be a war with the Dark One. The difference is that you’ve given us an advantage we didn’t have before."

Emma searched his face, her eyes softening as she reached out to stroke his chin. "Because I have no option with my Gems gone, we do it your way. But if ever a chance presents itself, understand..."

"I do," Killian said simply, because with Mulan gone, there was no chance.

David interrupted them. "Emma can you transport things with just your will?"

Emma nodded at her coffee cup, and it suddenly blinked and reappeared next to Robin and the coffee pot. Regina smiled and reached over, poured her another cup and in a small wave of her hand, it disappeared and reappeared next to Emma.

Will watched in amazement. "How?"

"It’s as simple as opening a spot, and pushing the fabric around the object. It naturally moves into the empty area." Emma shrugged. "It something we learn at our mother’s knee." Looking at Regina, she smiled. "You’ve come a long way in a short time."

Regina smiled back. She wasn’t up to her Emma’s speed, but once the simple principle was understood, the rest was becoming obvious.

They all stood around the table as Will fiddled with his work-pad and the plans to the Dark One’s ships appeared in holo-form an inch above the table’s surface. Marking the hull of entry which was closest to the outer hull of the main Bridge and marking the routes of each team, they designed the plans for what systems needed to be destroyed.

"How do you plan to wreck their core crystals?" Emma asked Will. He smiled and pulled out a SPC node.

That was smart. It was capable of recrystallizing fractured crystals, but when introduced within a stable crystal matrix, it restructured until the crystals broke down to nothing but shattered glass.

"Okay, Killian, your team will find the last Gem, liberate her, and with Emma and Regina, find the Dagr’du. My team will target the stabilizer core and ballast. After we set the charges, we will find you or meet you back at the point of entry. Three teams will take out the navigational array, deflector control and the plasma venting relays. That leaves Will and his team to take care of the warp core crystal chamber," David instructed.

Will’s hand moved in the blueprints. "It’s important that the explosives be set in these areas." He marked them. "I’ve rigged them to explode in two alternating sequences. The initial charges will take out these primary areas, and after a five minute delay, the next set of charges will blow. After the primaries go, we’ve got five minutes to clear the ship before her ballast is blown and altitude control is lost."

"Understood," David said as they poured over the plan once again.
"Captain." David hit his com link.

"Go ahead, Graham."

"Send Emma. It’s time." Emma’s eyes met David’s and she nodded. "She’s on her way." Both David and Killian went with her. Mulan was on her last breath. Will rushed to catch up with them.

"Mulan?" he asked. They all just nodded, but remained silent.

When they entered the Medical bay, the air was silent except for the sound of weeping. Ruby stood beside the bed crying, with her sister next to her trying to comfort her for the loss of her friend. Meeting David’s eyes, Mary Margaret shook her head no. Mulan had passed.

"She just went."

Emma looked sadly at the young woman who had so much life to live, and so much to live for. Her duty as an Honorable was coming to an end, but suddenly in a swift twist of fate, even that was lost. If she could’ve survived, there had been hope of removing the threat of the Dagr’du for all time, but now...

"Then it is truly over," Killian said, not even feeling bad for his relief.

Graham nodded to the box at the bedside holding the crystal that once only Mulan could yield. "What do you want to do with her crystal?"

But before Emma could answer, Ruby snatched up the box and held it against herself. "It’s mine! Mulan would’ve wanted me to have it!"

Emma sighed. "Ruby, I’m sorry for the loss of Mulan. But that crystal is too dangerous to be touched. Only Mulan could touch it. Only she was born to resonate with it. If you touch it, you will be annihilated. It was why she had to remain untouched, a virgin and pure, so her body would not realign to a lover."

"That’s not true! You were only saying that to keep her trapped in a life she hated. She never was given a choice."

"I promise you, it’s true. Mulan was born with a special destiny." And before anyone could stop her, Ruby opened the box and took the crystal in hand. "Ruby, no!"

They all stood stunned as nothing happened. Ruby held the crystal in her hand and she was just fine.

"That’s impossible!" Emma said, too stunned to say anything else.

Ruby shrugged. "Mulan let me touch it before. You’re wrong. All of you. I can touch it and nothing happens. And Mulan was no damn virgin!"

Emma stepped even closer. "She had a lover? Someone on the Pleasure Planet?"

Ruby nodded. And looking at the others, she suddenly became defiant. "Not someone. Me."

Even Mary Margaret was taken aback. She hadn’t realized. Ruby had kept her out of the loop and closed the connection between them. Ruby and Mulan had been lovers?

Regina, who had joined them and remained silent through it all, suddenly came forward. Looking at Ruby, she kissed her forehead and gathered her into her arms.
“Emma, if Mulan was not to be touched because it would change her chemistry, is it possible that instead of her changing to Ruby, it was Ruby that changed to Mulan?” Regina asked.

Emma looked at the young woman in Regina’s arms. Ruby was from a race of people who were capable of genomic imprinting, an ability to alter encoded DNA to those who they connected with on a deep, emotional level. It was the extra chromosomes she possessed that made it possible to attenuate and alter her genome. She was imprintable.

“Yes. So little is really known, just that those who mated could no longer wield their crystals, so it became taboo.” Emma looked at David. "This changes everything. I’ve got my three Honorables again."

Killian swore, hating Ruby in that instant. "You don’t know that the Dark One hasn’t killed your other Honorable."

"True. We follow the plan to the letter as we discussed. You still take out the Dark One's ship, we retrieve the third Gem, and if possible I’ll remove the Dagr’du from the equation for all eternity. If something goes wrong, we follow the transporting of the Dagr’du from the Dark One’s ship."

Killian grabbed his wife’s hand. "Why not just follow the plan and forget this stupid suicide mission?"

Emma looked at him sadly, understanding what he wanted, what he wanted from her...that which she could not give.

"My primary goal has been, and will always be, the removal of the Dagr’du from existence so it can no longer be used to harm. That was what I was born to do, and if it is impossible because my third Gem is dead, then we do it your way. The outcome is still uncertain, but one truth, one fate, is that the Dagr’du must be contained. For all our sakes."

"Emma..."

Emma turned and looked at Ruby. "Come, Ruby. I will explain your duty as the new Honorable."

Ruby looked at the crystal in her hand, and then at Emma. "What if I don’t want this?"

Killian closed his eyes and prayed, his jaw muscles flinching as he clenched his teeth hard.

"I can’t force you. It is your decision. But Mulan’s entire short life would have no purpose. The sacrifice she lived with will pass into obscurity with no real reward. She’d have spent all those years in Temple for no reason but to die. This could be a testament to her, a completion of the mission she was born to, the mission that would have set her free."

Ruby looked at her lover, her friend, one who seemed to truly understand her. Reaching over, she gently pushed the dark hair from Mulan's face. All she had wanted was to have it over, so she could finally be allowed to live. Ruby felt the tears as they moved down her face. Turning, she looked at Emma.

"You’ve got your Honorable."

Killian swore, and turned his back to the young woman. He should have been left on his home planet long ago and sold into slavery. He refused to watch as his wife led her new Honorable away and planned once again to face her imminent death.

David squeezed his shoulder. "I’m sorry."
"Killian..."

"So we're not going to discuss this?"

Emma put away her things then spent some time shifting through her belongings and preparing for whatever was going to happen.

Sitting down on the edge of the chair, she looked up at him. Then, just shaking her head, she got up and walked away. Shutting the door to the bedroom behind her, she went to sit on the side of the bed.

Killian slowly followed her and stood looking at her from the door. "I’m sorry. I knew..."

Emma just nodded. Killian just put his head back on the wall and closing his eyes he pushed the air from his lungs.

"Please don’t ask me to not do what I must. Don’t ask me not to be who I am."

Killian came to sit on the bed next to her. "I know. Part of me was prepared, ready for the possibility, but when Mulan was dying and it looked like..."

"You became hopeful?"

"Aye." Killian looked away. He felt...dead.

"We don’t know how it’ll go down."

"Can’t you just transport the Dagr’du as planned, and later we can look at how to destroy it." Killian was searching, reaching for any solution that didn’t mean her blinking into nothing. "I’m a part of you now, and you’re a part of me. How do I survive without you? How can I?"

Emma looked at him. She had made a mistake, a huge tactical mistake. She fell in love and in a way, it made her weak. Rubbing a tear from his cheek he didn’t even know was there, she kissed him.

"I’ll do what I must, when I must. You’ll be all right. There will be a void, a feeling of your body no longer being coalesced, but that will fade. I don’t know where I’ll go or if I’ll survive, but I swear to you, if I do, I will try with everything I am to come home again. I will never stop trying to find my way back to you."

Emma reached into her pocket and took out a medallion, much like the larger amulets they wore at their wedding.

"This is essentially the key to the Bug. It activates the special trans-warp drive. It will take you from one end of the galaxy to the other in a wink of an eye, and beyond." Emma closed his hand around it. "I want you to have her, to keep her for me until I can come home. There will be a war after this, and I want to know you’ll be safe."

"Emma..." Killian didn’t know what to say, or how to ask or even beg. Duty. It stuck in his throat. He was raised to it, as was she. There was no question that if she could remove the Dagr’du quickly and with no harm to others, she would, because it was what her people did. Who they were. He understood that. This didn’t make him hate the situation any less.
She met his eyes, hers begging him not to make it harder than it was, not to spend all the time they had left trying to bend her to a will that she could not bend to.

"What was the pleasure?"

Emma was confused. "What?"

"The pleasure that trapped you on Xanadu. What was it?"

"Oh damn!" Emma turned red, and swore under her breath. She had hoped that he would forget and never ask.

"Come on. Tell me. I know it wasn’t sex."

"Worse." Emma peeked up at him from below her lashes and sighed. "Video arcade."

"What?"

"It was a video arcade, a place on their planet that had interactive games. I found one that had a warrior trapped in a mythical kingdom required to fight off all sorts of demons to rescue a Princess."

"You became addicted to a simple child’s game that taught eye-hand skill?"

"Hey! It took more than that. A fleetness of foot and wit."

Killian laughed. "Sure it did." He looked at her red face, and her embarrassment. "How long?"

Emma sighed. "Eight days." Killian laughed harder, imagining her playing this game over and over. "I held all the high scores!" She hit him when he pushed her back on the bed. "Stop laughing. You should’ve seen my poor crippled hand."

Killian rested above her, suddenly silent as he searched her face, and picked up her hand to kiss the palm.

"Kiss me. Make me forget, for just a while."

~*~

"Cap, we’ve found the Dark One’s ship, Baelfire."

"Take us into her blind spot." Killian turned to his Com officer. "Inform the teams to prepare to board. The Princess and the Eminent are to meet them in the upper cargo bay. I will be there shortly, once the Enchanted is aligned to the Baelfire’s hull."

David entered the forward cargo bay, and found all the teams assembled. Regina, Ruby, and Belle were with Killian and Emma. They stood apart as Regina and Emma came forward, both concentrating on the area they wanted to open, waiting until they couldn’t feel any presence on the other side. Once cleared, they raised their hands. Tendrils of power emanated from them, purple for Regina, white for Emma, dancing forward, opening the distortion rift.

The teams walked through quickly, and Will paused to give Belle a small wink. As they quickly entered the Baelfire, they moved toward their set objectives.

Emma and Regina were the last to walk through. Emma concentrated. They were the only team that had no set route. Emma paused and tried to locate her lost Gem.
"Lower level, to aft. She is in a holding cell in the main Brig."

"How many guards?" Regina asked.

"Not too many. They were torturing her, but finally stopped when they were afraid of killing her or changing her chemistry. She is weak, but still alive."

Killian pushed Ruby and Belle behind him against the wall. "Let’s go then, but stay close, do not wander, and do not talk!’" He specifically looked at Ruby.

Emma moved quickly at his side, in tandem, searching the side corridors and clearing them as they went. Regina held the rear, and made sure that they did not lose anyone, protecting their backs.

Killian paused when he came to the Brig. There were six guards, all rotating to check on prisoners, and to move along their watch. He gestured to Emma that he had the three to his left if she could take the three to his right.

Emma nodded, and on a count of three, she dropped down to the ground and took aim on her three. They quickly took out the guards and slowly advanced in the crossway. Emma read the invoice and found the room occupied, but unmarked. Her Honorable.

Handing Killian some charges to explode the Brig console, she moved down the corridor as Regina checked the guards for any survivors.

"Killian, these battlecruisers have internal monitors that can detect weapons fire;" she said.

"Emma? You hear that?" Killian watched the access corridors. "We need to be quick. Company's coming."

"Yes, dear." Emma stopped at the door, and pushed it with her mind. It moved easily.

The young woman was lying on a bed, curled in a defensive manner. Emma touched her shoulder softly. The woman flinched, but did not turn.

"It is time to cut the thread."

The woman turned suddenly at Emma’s voice, and sat up. Emma winced at the bruises and cuts on her face, but she appeared to be no worse for wear.

"Princess."

"Yes. Come. It’s time to work." The woman stumbled as she tried to walk. "Are you all right?"

She laughed bitterly. "Just a few broken legs. He had them broken, reset them, then mend them so he could have them broken again. He enjoyed hearing me scream, and the sound of my cracking bones. They are tender and sore."

"He needs to die. Violently."

Elsa nodded. "He will. I swear it!"

"Emma!" Killian called down the hall. He could hear approaching Legions.

"Here."

"Can you open a corridor? We’re cut off."
"Yes." Emma concentrated after she handed Elsa over to Ruby and Belle.

The corridor opened three subdecks above them. They walked through, and Killian quickly checked both ways.

"Now what?"

Regina and Emma both pointed in the same direction. They could feel the power of the Dagr’du emanating.

Killian rounded the corner, and he swore. Okay, wrong way. They ran into a patrol of Legions. Both he and Emma hugged the wall, both holding them off as Regina took the Honorables another way. They followed them through a door, and Emma and Killian both exchanged fire as they slowly crept along the corridor, following Regina along another route.

Emma counted as she moved and suddenly stood in the middle of the corridor to return fire. Killian quickly grabbed her and pulled back under cover.

"What the bloody hell are you doing, love?"

"They shot their rounds."

"Dammit, Emma. They’re using full laser cannons. They don’t lose their load for hours."

"You sure?"

Killian just shook his head. "No, I’m lying. Come on. We’ve got to move."

They ran down the corridor catching up with Regina and the others.

"Regina, how much further?"

Regina pointed to a closed door with guards gathering as the full ship alert finally sounded.

"Guess the cat is out of the bag. The Dark One is aware we are here."

Killian looked at the lights and sound, and just grimaced, pulling Emma closer to him. “You think?” he asked. "Emma, can you toss those guards aside?” Emma nodded and pushed the matrix, the fabric of space pushed outward, crushing the guards.

The group of them quickly entered the Dagr’du chamber as David and his team rounded a corner. He followed his link to Killian and Emma. Both Emma and Killian had rounded and stood facing David with weapons drawn.

“Don’t sneak up like that, mate,” Killian admonished as they all lowered their weapons. "You ready, Dave?"

"Yeah. Who alerted the Legions?"

Killian shrugged. Yeah, like he was going to admit to it. They entered the room.

He didn’t know what he expected but it certainly wasn’t this. He’d imaged a large, domineering weapon, foreboding and sinister. Instead, in the middle of the room, stood a pedestal with an elaborate twisting of vine-like branches framing what the plinth held. He stepped closer, morbidly eager to see what was going to take his wife away from him.
“That’s the Dagr’du?” he asked in surprise, pointing to the blade that lay ceremonially on the dais. It was almost completely black with a leather hilt, and silver intricate designs engraved on the blade, with its edge wavey along its length.

“What did you expect?” David asked, watching as the three Honorables surrounded the pedestal.

Killian didn’t want to watch to couldn’t look away either.

Belle, Ruby, and Elsa each held their crystals in their cupped hands as Emma joined their circle, her blade in her hand. The same blade used at their wedding ceremony, Killian realized. With a quick movement, she slashed at her palm, the pain radiating to Killian and David, and they all hissed together. Offering a weak smile in apology, she fist her hand, maneuvering it into the twig-like dome, and squeezed.

The moment her blood landed on the black dagger, the three crystals pulsed with a light that grew in intensity with each beat. The chamber became too bright, and all outside the inner circle were forced to cover their eyes.

Killian blinked once the room was dull again, his eyes struggling to become accustomed to the regular light once more. Finally, they focused, and Emma now held the blade. The crystals in the Honorable’s hands were dull, their shine gone.

"David, you can escort them to the entry point. Their job is done," Emma said, her voice surreal, almost dream-like.

Killian made a face. "That’s it? That is all they had to do?"

"Yes."

Killian couldn’t believe it. "Did your people ever think of maybe just getting a damn key?"

"What, you want more? Maybe have them chant or dance naked around a large flame?"

"You don’t think translating manuscripts almost lost on an ocean’s floor, searching for three Gems and endless dangers wasn’t complicated?"

"Well, it’s not anymore. It’s time."

"Time?"

Emma nodded. She grabbed him and kissed him hard and passionately. Moving away from him, she mouthed that she loved him and extending her hand that held the blade into the air. Black tendrils erupted from the blade, swirling and twisting in the air above. They reached out, seemingly seeking something, someone, fingers of black smoke hovering over everyone. They grew wilder, whipping in every direction. One minute they seemed to concentrate around Regina, the next they moved on to Killian, dividing themselves between the brothers as though undecided.

Suddenly, they drew back, converging above Emma again, growing stronger, thicker, and gathering momentum as they whirléd around her. Her eyes caught Killian’s, lingering, showing every inch of her soul, every emotion, every feeling, and then she was gone. The clanging of the blade as it fell to the floor echoed around the chamber.

"Bloody hell! Wait!" Killian yelled. Just like that? David was equally shocked by how fast she left. It was as if she couldn’t afford a long goodbye.
Killian looked at the blade, and then at his brother. Taking the amulet from his neck, he reached over and dropped it over David’s head. "Take care of this for me."

David grabbed him as he started to move away. "Killian, what the hell are you planning?"

Killian gestured to where Emma disappeared. "What if she ends up on the other side of the universe, or just somewhere else? You know what trouble she gets into with her grabby hands."

"You’re not going!"

Killian gently removed his brother’s restraining hand. "I’m already gone. If she doesn’t survive, what makes you think I will? With her, there's a chance, even though it’s a slim one, that we'll survive together in some form. I love her. I’ve never loved anything in my life, but I love her."

David nodded and stepped away. Killian quickly picked up the blade, his eyes focusing on Emma’s name etched onto the blade, he was sure it hadn’t been there before. He mimicked her actions and thrust the dagger into the air.

The same tendrils erupted, but this time they immediately engulfed Killian.

Mere moments later, there was a flash of bright light and a flooding concentric field extending outward. The force of the generated wave knocked all of them from their feet. The Dagr’du winked out of existence, and they were gone.

Regina stood up, her eyes on the empty space. "The One."

~*~
"Regina! I can’t feel him any longer! I can’t feel them!" David was beyond panicked.

"Let him go, David. It was what he wanted. Killian and Emma together were The One. This was the bending of the matrix I saw so long ago, the way it was always meant to be."

"Fuck that!" He moved to where they had once been, as if he could search the nothingness there.

A small hand touched his arm and he looked down at the young woman with white blonde hair and startling blue eyes. She looked ready to collapse.

"We must go. The Princess and her mate gave us time and this universe. Don’t waste it."

David nodded, but not in his newfound heart. It was broken. "What do I call you?"

"Elsa. We’ve got to go."

"Quickly, David," Regina urged. “I’ll open a corridor back to the Enchanted."

They exited the room and found the main corridors. They needed to find a primary access area close to the main hull, at the entry point where they first boarded. The Dark One’s Legions were on all sides, and Regina rushed, helping Belle with Elsa, while David followed with Ruby’s hand in his.

The alert was sounded as David’s men fought the Legions on the Baelfire. Will and his group joined up with them just outside the entrance to the main Bridge where the other team, led by Robin, were waiting. The Baelfire was trying to re-establish the power grid that had been taken out with the loss of the power of the Dagr’du. Pushed and angry, David left the group and entered the war Bridge on the Dark One's ship. Regina and Will called to him, but he didn’t listen. He couldn’t.

"Dark One!" he called out.

The man turned and looked at David, disgust and hatred lining his face. An Areenian. Elsa
followed David and stood slightly behind him off his right shoulder, the defiance apparent on her face.

"You took my Honorable!" the Dark One stated.

"I took more than that." David looked back at the young woman who had suffered torture at The Dark One’s hands. "This Honorable belongs to no one but herself."

The rest joined David, standing behind him.

"And the Gaian? Where is the Princess?" the Dark One demanded.

David swallowed an angry lump in his throat. Will showed him the countdown timer. It was getting close. The Dark One’s Legions were surrounding them, however the Dark One motioned them to stand down, but remain on alert.

"She took back what was hers, and removed it from your destructive grasp. The Dagr’du is gone, no longer a weapon for your use! There is a war coming to this universe, and this time, it will be fought on even ground."

The Dark One bristled at the knowledge that the Dagr’du was gone. Standing angrily, he faced David down from the lower level Command deck. Elsa smirked at him. The thread of his life was cut and drawing to an end.

"You think to fight me? I command an army of the best warriors in the known universe. Your own people. You fight me, you fight them."

David looked around the room. The Dark One had surrounded himself with Areenians. David walked the upper deck.

"I’ll fight whoever it takes, wherever it takes me, and no matter how long! I’d gladly meet my ancestors in the hall of Valhalla than live under the yoke of a dictator! Times are changing, Dark One. And you in your sickness have missed an awakening. I’d rather die fighting for my freedom, the freedom of my people and the freedom of this universe, than live another day under your sickening reign."

David looked at his people, those forced into service against their will and pledged to the Dark One through blood oaths.

"I’m freeing Areenia and all of her holdings. If you would be free, then rise up against the tyrant holding your restraints. It is a new world, brothers! One that has cost me dearly, and I will not watch that sacrifice go for nothing."

The Dark One laughed. "You hope to pull them from centuries of blood oaths, to revolt against me?"

"It matters not! My world will be freed, her children returned to a of way learning, of knowledge, and you, Dark One, will be the bug I squash beneath my feet!" David looked at his native people. "If you would be free, then join me! Join the Royals! The Dark One is merely the thug of the day - toothless without his Dagr’du! My band of rebels has destroyed two of his strike fleet, and I hold the strongest Eminent One. There is no surrender! It is victory, or it is death."

The explosive charges that Will and his team had set went off at that moment. They started in the lower reactor core and moved upward. The control panels on the Bridge exploded in a display of fire and smoke. The Bridge’s few remaining lights went out as the backup lights came on and
smoke rolled through the ship.

"David, we have to go! There is less than five minutes before the secondary explosives blow!"

David nodded, "Regina, do it!"

Regina opened the corridor back to the *Enchanted* and Will, the Honorables, and his men walked through. The Dark One stood stunned.

"That is a Gaian trick."

"The last Gaian worked with me," David said. "She helped my Eminent One extend her powers. We hold the knowledge of how to blink. My people have sacrificed themselves to bring forth your destruction, along with my brother and his wife giving up their own existence for my people enslaved for generations."

"I'll eat you! I will destroy your worlds, take your Eminent One. I will possess the Gaian, and then I'll take your life!"

David just laughed, smiling a smile of genuine humor. "The Gaian is beyond your reach. Let it be a fight between us!"

"David!"

David nodded and started to join Regina through the corridor when he felt him. No. Felt Them!

"Regina, wait! I feel Killian again. I feel him and Emma. We must go back."

Regina closed the distortion. "David, there’s no time."

David ignored her and rushed against Legion guards who stood unknowing what to do. Regina followed him.

The Dark One watched David and Regina leave his Bridge, and no one stopped them.

"Stop him! Get me that Eminent. Find the Gaian." No one moved. The Dark One circled his Bridge and screamed. "I said seize them!"

He grabbed the nearest Areenian warrior and shook him. The man knocked off his hands, and pushed him back. In an act of defiance, he turned his back to his onetime Master, as did the other Areenians on the Bridge. They would not raise a hand against him, nor would they raise a hand to fight for him. Not ever again.

David rushed into the room that once housed the Dagr’du. Pausing for a moment, astounded, as he gaze landed on them. They were on the ground in a heap where the pedestal for the Dagr’du still stood. They were entwined, Killian holding Emma to him tightly, their hands holding the blade between them. They must have blinked back.

"Killian!"

Regina followed David into the room and saw them. Looking over her shoulder she was surprised that no one had followed them. She went with David to where Killian and Emma lay.

"David, we are running out of time."

"Can you open a corridor from here?"
Regina shook her head. "I don’t know. There are so many decks and hulls, and the distance is great."

A hand came up and grabbed her arm. It was Killian. Regina gazed into his blue eyes, sensing his silent message. Regina nodded, laid her hands on Emma, and concentrated.

The corridor opened from the _Baelfire_ to the _Enchanted’s_ Bridge. Regina quickly moved to help support Killian, helping him walk with an arm over her shoulder and supporting him under his shoulder. David picked up the unconscious Emma whose body was almost translucent, and they stepped through just as the decks behind them exploded.

~*~

When they emerged from the corridor, _Enchanted’s_ entire Bridge was standing with arms drawn, waiting for whomever was coming through.

"Captain!"

Regina quickly set Killian on his feet, gently, making sure he had some balance. David still held Emma, who was looking almost ready to blink out again.

"Put them together quickly, David. He’s her anchor. Someone call Medical!" David complied to Regina’s request, setting Emma next to where Killian rested against the railing above the Captain’s chair, while he gave orders to his crew. "Helmsman, plot us a stream out of here, now! That ship has troubles."

"Aye, Cap. Main power just came back online. A plotted course back to Arion is already laid in."

"Cap, we’ve got Legion battleships and prowlers closing fast." Leroy informed David.

"Archie, get us out of here." David's last view of the _Baelfire_ before they entered the transport corridor was of her burning in space, her ballast gone as she veered off to port. He’d see her again, though. Of that he was sure.

~*~

"David, I need you down in Medical." Graham’s voice came over the com.

"What is it Graham?"

"Just get down here."

David nodded for Archie to take Conn and he raced to find out what was wrong now.

"Graham, is it Killian and Emma?"

"Yes. I can’t stabilize them. They’re blinking all over the place. As fast as they come back, they wink out again. Dammit, David! I can't get through to them!"

David stood beside the medical bed which held them both. He watched as they blinked out and then back again, like a radio signal struggling to stabilize.

"Will they reset like Emma and Regina did last time?"

"I don’t know. Regina opened two corridors in a row just now with no ill effects except fatigue. The extra power she gained from Cora must have helped. This time it’s different. It’s like they’re
here, and then they’re not, and then they are. Almost as if they’re searching for something."

"David." Regina came forward. "I believe they are searching for David."

"Me? I don’t understand."

Regina stood beside David and nodded towards the couple. "Killian was Emma’s anchor. He gave her enough structure to survive, but he needed something that anchored him as well. You, David. You are his anchor. I thought they together were the One, but I was wrong. It is you, Killian, and Emma. The brother’s bond you share has grown over the past few months, evolving much like the maturation of their bond. It was meant to be, as was their mating. Killian came back and brought Emma too, because your bond with him gave him a physical place."

David frowned. "What do I need to do?"

Graham looked at Regina and shrugged. "Touch them. Touch Killian and call him home?"

"He was here once."

"Yes, but we lost him again once we brought him to Medical and separated him from you."

David nodded. Taking a chair, he grasped his brother’s hand and waited. Whatever it took.

"Come on, Jones. Don’t be such a pansy. I’ve got work to do. Worlds to move and a war to fight. The word is already spreading. Nations are rising in revolt and contacting us for a rendezvous for the assembling of a Royal Rebel fleet. The Dark One’s days are numbered. He’ll not forget the beating we gave him today." He reached over and gentle pushed Emma’s hair from her face and then grabbed her hand as well.

“Princess, please, I can’t lose him. We can’t lose you. Show him the path home, even if you can’t travel it, show him and he will bring you home to us. Emma, we can’t survive without you.”

David didn’t even know what he was saying, he just knew the we he talked about was him and Killian.

David sat and talked to Killian and Emma for what felt like hours. Until a pair of hands touched his tired shoulders.

"Any luck?"

David looked up at Mary Margaret and shook his head. None. They were still silent. Mary Margaret’s hands stroked through his hair in comfort and he closed his eyes. The touch of kindness, of comfort - it was strange to him yet he craved it.

"He’ll come back. They both will." Mary Margaret looked at the two on the bed. Their bodies were tangible again and not blinking in and out. To her, they looked asleep, wrapped around each other. Strange, she could feel them almost like a whisper in her mind. What she felt from them was a sense of peace and a serenity. “She’s our hope. And he will always find her.”

"I hope so. I’m sick of talking. I can’t remember ever talking this much." David reached up and took one of her hands, and pulled her around to him. "What are you doing here? I thought you were scheduled for galley duty tonight, I was looking forward to eating in the officer’s mess."

"I am scheduled, but I had an appointment with Graham."
"You okay?"

Mary Margaret paused and thought of a better circumstance to tell him. But in truth, between them, nothing was ever just normal.

"I’m pregnant."

David forgot to breathe. He stood up and then sat down again, until he noticed he had left her standing. He quickly stood up and pushed her into his vacated chair. Mary Margaret chuckled softly to herself. He was totally at a loss.

"Pregnant?" His high-pitched voice made her soft laughter increase into real humor.

"You knew it was a possibility. And since we’ve been back from Xanadu, we haven't even tried to be careful."

That was true. David had to admit it. Since she came to talk to him that day, three days after Xanadu, she had practically lived in his rooms with him and in his bed. They never used protection in any form. He wanted to be a father. He never thought he ever would.

Regina was right. Things were changing. He was changing, as was Killian, who was born changed. They both had found an emotion called love, and they both were mating outside their species. His child would never be accepted on Areenia, nor would any child of Killian and Emma’s. He didn’t care. His children wouldn’t be sent to live in a military camp so young. He, Killian, and Will would teach them everything they needed to know. And he would hug his child. He was going to be a father.

He kneeled beside her and reached out tentatively to rest his hand on her still flat stomach, marveling at what was nestled inside her. His arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her closer and he rested his head against her.

"Marry me," he said softly in her stomach.

"No."

David drew in his breath sharply and looked up at her. She gently smiled and framed his face with her hand, stroking his scar. Shaking her head, she said no again.

"Why? Don’t you want to marry me?"

"Yes. But when you're ready," David started to protest. "Shh, it's all right. This baby is ours, and there is no question that you're the father. I’d marry you in a heartbeat because I love you. But you need it to be what you really want. Killian knew he wanted Emma, and he asked her because it was all he could think about. I want you to feel that sure, that real, and not have it just be about the baby."

"Mary Margaret..."

"It’s all right! You ask me again when the time is right for you."

"You’ll say yes?"

Mary Margaret laughed again. "Maybe." David’s eyes narrowed and Mary Margaret smiled as she leaned forward and kissed him. "You get to tell Regina though. I think she was planning on having a talk with you about your intentions towards me, so telling her I’m knocked up should be even
more interesting."

David just groaned against her. Great. Fucking glorious. Regina would use her voodoo super Eminent powers and pin him to the wall like a bug. David smiled at the thought. Killian was right. He didn’t know that a person was supposed to feel happy and loved, or that it was even possible to feel anything other than loyalty, honor and duty.

David turned back to the couple on the med-bed. "Hear that, brother? I’m going to be a father," David said to his silent brother.

So when Killian spoke without opening his eyes it was shocking. "Hard to miss, mate," he said softly. "Maybe you could take her somewhere and celebrate in private so I can get some damn sleep instead of listening to you yakking my ears off."

"Killian!" David stood and grabbed his brother’s head.

Killian slowly opened his eyes as if they were too heavy to hold open. "I swear, Dave, if you kiss me, we’ll be having words."

"Graham!" David called to the doctor and kissed his brother on the forehead anyway. Finally! He was free to leave and get back to work - or other things.

Graham came in and saw that Killian was awake. Scanning him quickly, he nodded at David. Their bodies had finally stopped fluctuating. "They’re both fine. They just need some rest."

Killian just snorted bitterly, closed his eyes, snuggled up close to Emma, and went back to sleep. Fat chance of that happening on this fucking crate. No one ever left you alone!

David grabbed Mary Margaret’s hand and thanked Graham quickly. "Come on. Let's go talk about this pregnancy thing."

Mary Margaret held back a little, suspicious of his motives. "Talk?"

"We’ll talk...well...eventually." His arm went around her waist and his hand rested on her slim hip, pulling her body close to his. A father. Who’d have thought?

~*~

Six months later…

David turned in his Captain’s chair when Killian and Emma returned to the Bridge, arguing furiously.

"I told you to stay put!" Killian was saying.

Emma shrugged. "I did. For a few moments. You didn’t say how long."

"Emma, I swear..."

"That’s all you do! I wasn’t in danger, and we got the job done."

"Is it?" David asked interrupting their usual Killian possessiveness/Emma recklessness discussion. They were a couple made to produce ulcers. They fought almost as hard as they made love. But not quite.

Killian nodded. "We successfully planted the explosives and blew up the Legion stronghold. The
new colonial government sends their regards. The rebel forces are now taking over control of their planet. They'll be sending representatives to the new Royal Federation."

"Cap, three of our recovery ships have just requested a rendezvous in the Arion system. They have completed the final relocation of the Aesculapian system."

All the battered worlds in that war-torn system had voted unanimously to relocate to the Arion system. It didn’t hurt their decision when they discovered Arion was going to serve as the home world and command base for the Royal Alliance, as well as the seat of the new Royal Federation.

"Inform our ships we’ll be there to pick them up once we complete our rendezvous with the Royal Alliance in the Escalari system. They’ve found another Legion stronghold. Order them to Arion for regular maintenance and shore leave."

"Aye, Cap."

Six months. It had been a long six months since they took the Dagr’du and the war started again. Six months of fighting the Dark One at every turn. Some battles they lost, but many they won. Once the word of the Dark One’s loss of the Dagr’du spread, worlds held under oppression rose up in rebellion and joined the Royal cause.

The Dark One was further weakened by a flood of mutiny within his ranks as Areenians deserted their posts in droves and returned home to free their world and join the rebels. Some worlds were liberated easily, but many were places of open guerilla warfare, with battles in space that left both the Royals and the Legions searching for power sources.

"Inform the fleet of our arrival in the Escalari system."

"Aye, Captain."

The *Enchanted* was the flagship of the Royal Alliance, and David held full command. But it was Regina and Emma who were the leaders of the Resistance. With her position of Eminence, Regina planned the attacks, and she and Emma met the Dark One on many battlefronts.

"Any word from Regina and Robin?" David asked.

"No, Cap. They’re still aboard the *Baltar*. They will reboard the *Enchanted* when we meet them at the rendezvous."

"Good." David didn’t like having Regina off their ship. Mary Margaret worried and was in no condition to be worrying about anything as she was nearing her seventh month of pregnancy. Mary Margaret was suffering separation anxiety having Ruby on Arion and Regina gone, and she wasn’t happy about not being able to see her feet. David just smiled at her waddling form.

David sat back and listened to Killian and Emma’s banter. Emma and Mary Margaret had become fast friends, drawn together by the connection between the four, as well as their similarities. Mary Margaret would chatter on about her worries about being a mother, and Emma would graciously listen, agreeing when she was expected to, and vehemently sided with Mary Margaret when she was told something David had done, or hadn’t done, which was more the case. In truth, Emma was petrified about her friend’s pregnancy and the thought of babies sent the strong, unique woman into panic attacks.

As well as being a leader of the rebellion, a princess of a dead race, a wife, sister-in-law, and aunt-in-waiting, David had her in a position equal in rank to his highest officers. She was his new astrometric officer. The new lab needed an expert, and there was no one more qualified, who knew
and understood space and spatial anomalies more than Emma. But he let them fight it out.

"I don’t know why I can’t work in security. I can take you down."

Killian just snorted. Emma and explosive rounds? Wasn’t going to happen, not on his watch.

"Helm? I’m a great pilot with an excellent sense of navigation."

"Like the Torsaian Nebula you took us through last week?"

Emma made a face. Bitch, bitch, bitch. "It was fascinating, and it only damaged a few of the forward shields. I recorded some real interesting stuff. Wait until I finish my analysis."

"David isn’t going to let you pilot the Enchanted."

"David..."

David didn’t even bother to look up from his reports. "Keep me out of it."

"Getting David to take your side is useless. He knows better..."

"To step in the middle of one of your squabbles." David finished. "Emma, I’ve got a report about your lab being left open. Did you leave it that way before you left on the last mission?"

"No." Emma frowned. "Damn it! It must have been Will again. Bastard! He keeps scavenging my components for his damn engines!" Emma headed off to go survey the damage and to kill Will. Pointing a finger at her husband she said, "we’re not through with this yet."

David turned and watched her stomp off in search of a certain hapless engineer. David smirked and looked at his brother’s stormy face.

"Happy?"

Killian just growled. "Fucking ecstatic."

But in truth, he was. Life with the biggest pain in the ass Gaian was nothing if not unpredictable and interesting. And when he felt himself getting all weepy, weak-kneed, and ready to spout poetry, she always did something to piss him off, letting him recover from his moment of weakness.

David just chuckled and went back to work. Surprisingly, Killian was quiet and thoughtful at his station as they prepared to engage the Dark One for what might be the last battle of the war.

"So, Dave..." David just made a sound in his throat without even bothering to look over at his brother. "This pregnancy thing with a non-Areenia, how does it work?"

"What, you want a diagram on how to do it?"

Killian made a face. "I think I’ve got the logistics. I just mean, is it different from a normal pregnancy?"

David just laughed and shook his head. "It’s not going to work, Jones."

"What?" Killian tried his most innocent of looks, which only came off as being sly and devious.

"Getting her pregnant isn’t going to magically get her to settle down and do the housewife thing."
David snickered under his breath. "Women don’t get pregnant and suddenly know how to cook, clean, and want to stay home where it’s safe."

Killian just swore under his breath. He supposed not, but who said David was an expert on women? The idea of Emma pregnant didn’t bug him in the least, but the thought of her and her pregnant body down on a planet in the middle of firefight made his blood run cold.

"She still wouldn’t settle with being left behind," Killian said in a burst of insight, swearing under his breath.

"Doubt it. Her title and position of Princess taught her more than just how to be regal. I notice she's still able to toss your ass around the gym on a regular basis."

"She cheats."

"Uh huh. That’s what Will said the other night when she took half his winnings in poker."

Killian just laughed. "He’s right, she does cheat. She used her Gaian tricks and switched cards with me!"

David was laughed. "You didn’t tell Will?"

Killian snorted. "No way in hell! Emma gets all excited and raunchy when she wins. It makes for great sex."

"You’re a sick man."

"Aye, I am."

~*~

"Dammit, Emma! Just tell me where you sent them." Emma just ignored the red-faced engineer and went to leave with her stolen components in hand.

"Nope. I told you to stop scavenging in my lab! This is retribution."

"An entire box of isolinear chips is not retribution. It is malicious and sadistic. I’ll have to waste valuable manpower to search the ship to discover where you pushed that damn box."

Belle was working at a console, trying desperately to keep a smile off her face, but a small chuckle escaped.

"Traitor, Belle. I damn well swear you better not be laughing at me!"

"No boss, not at all." Belle pretended to be looking at a watch she didn’t have. "Oh, look at the time. Appears my shift is up." She put her hands behind her back and left, whistling lightly under her breath. No way she was going to spend the evening crawling through dusty ducts looking for Will’s blasted chips that Emma transported away.

"Belle, oh come on! Don’t desert me."

"Sorry, I’ve got reports I need to write."

Will cussed under his breath as she left Engineering. "Dammit, Emma, give me back my chips."

"If you promise to not steal from my lab again."
"I don’t steal. I creatively acquire."

Emma just snorted and went to leave.

"Okay, okay. Bloody hell! No more acquiring from you unless I ask first." Will ran a hand over his neck as suddenly, the box reappeared. Damn Gaian. All these women running around the ship was giving him indigestion. In the good old days, he used to fantasize about having women on the crew. Now? Now they seemed to control the ship. They were like a plague.

"So how long have you had a thing for Belle?"

Will just snorted, while at the same time he blushed. "I don’t."

"I think it’s sweet," she said, completely ignoring his denial.

"You would," he muttered under his breath. He didn’t know quite when it had happened, but that love bug thing Killian and David had caught had infected him, too.

"I think she’ll be fine with you," Emma reasoned. "You’re a kind, big-hearted man. You just tend to hide those emotions from everyone. But I see right through you, Will Scarlett."

Will just snorted again, though he smiled broadly. "Hey, what’s the story with your other Honorable?"

"Ruby?"

"No, the cute blonde with killer blue eyes! I tried to sweet talk her into taking my cooking shift the other day, and I swear she saw right through me. Tell me, Princess...am I losing my deadly charm?"

Emma just shook her head. "You, my slick-tongued friend, are as charming and as attractive as the day I first met you." Emma quickly decided it was time to leave.

Will smiled in pride until it occurred to him that she never said just how attractive that was. "Emma? Hey? That’s good. right? I mean you found me the most attractive of men, right? Emma?"

Will looked around and noticed himself alone, again. Oh well. Smiling, he knew she was really in love with him. Who wouldn’t be?

~*~

"Princess."

Emma looked up from her work inside a console. Her main router and holographic modulator were on the fritz. More than likely due to a certain dark-haired engineer’s removing of three major components.

"Elsa, call me Emma, please. You’re no longer an Honorable."

Elsa smiled. "Emma." She stopped smiling. "We reached the Escalari system. The Royal Alliances are hiding in a gravitation field behind the nebula, regrouping and doing battle plans."

"I heard. My intentions are to be in one of the first waves." Emma looked up at Elsa. "Of course, I’m sure my grumpier half will have other plans for me." The woman wasn’t smiling. "Is there something else?"
Elsa picked up a tool, and set it down.

"I need a favor."

Emma nodded. Elsa never asked for anything. She was very quiet while learning everything she could, but she kept herself apart for everyone. The only person who seemed to touch her, or get any response from her, was Graham.

"If I can."

"I need a small fighter craft. The fleet is regrouping and will attack in the next four days. But before the battle, there is something I need to do."

"Don’t do it, Elsa." Emma said quietly, her understanding of what Elsa needed to do too great.

"I have to. You know that." Emma closed her eyes and shook her head. "No, Princess. You know it is what I need to do. It’s very much like you walking away from the love of your life, your husband, to risk death to destroy the Dagr’du. It was the right thing to do."

"You wish to die?"

"I wish for resolution...a respite...some peace for my people who never had a chance."

Emma understood that. She acknowledged that she and Elsa were in many ways the same. “I understand that, I really do. But I can’t let you go alone into the belly of the beast with nothing but revenge in your heart.”

“I’ll have my people with me,” Elsa returned with defiance.

“And will they have your back? Will they protect you from being hurt?"

“If I die, I can reunite with my family, my world.”

Emma sighed. She remembered that feeling, that need to do right by her people. “I can’t let you go alone, but I can go with you.”

"You don’t have to do that," Elsa said, surprised Emma would willingly put herself at risk to help her get retribution for her world. But weren’t they just the same. Both living a life without those who matter, without their home, because someone thought they could take it from them.

“Thank you, my Princess.” She turned to leave.

"Elsa!” The woman stopped but did not turn. "May the journey’s end find you peace."

Emma watched the young woman leave, and sitting on the edge of the console, she buried her face in her hands and cried for all that had been lost, and all they could still lose.

~*~

"Graham."

Graham was working at his desk when Elsa entered. Smiling at her, he quickly went somber. No.

"Elsa..."

"I’ve come to say goodbye." She sat on his lap, and ran her hand over his face.
"Don’t go. Stay. Mend. Heal with me."

Elsa kissed him. She had slept in his bed for almost six months. They were two wounded birds finding a comfort in each other.

"You have two hearts to my frozen one. I can’t. But I thank you for all the nights that you loaned me one of your hearts, so I could feel you."

Graham just grabbed her face and searched it. Her pain was too great. The hatred in her soul and the unreleased anger were too much. For a time, she seemed to be at peace, usually in the early mornings when they would lie in bed and she would tell him all the things she learned while studying history and events. She made him laugh with stories too wild to believe. But when the day finally came, she changed.

"Promise me something?" she asked as she kissed him.

"What?"

"Take a break. Find some place where there is only you and rest. You’ve grown much stronger living on a ship with all these mentally active people. I think so much has changed in you, and you haven’t noticed."

"Perhaps." She was right. He was able to block out so many of the crew now, and perhaps those blocks went both way. Graham rubbed his face into her neck and held her tight. "Elsa, I don’t want to lose you."

"Nor I you. But you’ve given me a lot of peace, especially at night when I was feeling alone. That is always why I’ll love you forever. But this thing in me, it needs to be fed - to find an end to the journey."

Graham pleaded with her, "Please, just let it go!"

"I can’t. You know that. Think of me from time to time." Elsa kissed him one last time and then quickly left.

Graham sat there stunned, powerless. Finally, he left his medical bay to find Emma. She was still sitting on the console, no longer crying. But when Graham entered she looked up, and he saw the tracks of her dried tears.

“I tried to stop her,” she said quickly, knowing why he was here. “I tried to steer her away from her path of vengeance, but I can’t.”

“She is stubborn,” Graham offered with a sad smile.

“I can’t leave this to her, I have to go with her, and I’m… afraid. More afraid than ever before.”

“Why?” Graham quizzed.

“I’m afraid we won’t survive this; this need for vengeance we both have. I have controlled mine for years, learned to live with it. But Elsa can’t and with her need for justice, I seek my own. But I fear we won’t return.”

~*~
Happy Sunday.

So, this is it, the finally chapter of What it means to be a Savior. It’s been an awesome ride to take with you and I’m beyond speechless at how you have embraced this story and taking it into your lives, or your reading list, which I know for some, is their lives. Thanks to everyone who has commented and left kudos on every chapter. Your love for this story made the year of writing it almost justified. I am currently working on its sequel, but since I’m also working on my story for CSBB it may take a while before it hits your dash.

I have a couple of thank you’s to hand out so please be patient with me.
First, ultraluckycat - thanks for your never-ending cheerleading for this story. I’m so thankful we connected over this story and hope to work on many more with you.
You’re fantastic!
Second, katie-dub - the very fact you created a picset for something I wrote will never end to amaze me. That, to me, is the greatest praise a writer could have, to inspire others to make something based on their work. You’re awesome!
Lastly, ilovemesomekillianjones I connected with you to beta something I wrote, I can’t even remember what, and you expressed your dislike of sci-fi fics and made introduced me to Cathy. You later regretted that decision and expressed your love, many times over, for my sci-fi adventure. I love that I have shown you a glimpse of another genre, and look forward to working with you on the various fic concepts we have discussed. You’re mag, chica!

And so...on to the last chapter of What it means to be a Savior.

Chapter 27 -  ... And Beyond.

Killian didn’t like it, not one bit. When would Emma learn that putting herself straight in the line of fire was seriously damaging his outlook on a happy live.

“Why does it have to you?” he complained for the hundredth time.

“Because it has to be,” was her simple response.

“What is it with you and suicide missions? Are you tired of being married to me?”

She stopped shrugging into her red leather vest, and took a step closer to him. She tenderly lifted a hand to caress his cheek. “I will never tire of you, Killian.”

“Then stay here with me.”

“For infinity and beyond,” she said with a smile. “I just have to do this first. This has to finish, Killian. For us to have a future, for David and Mary Margaret and their child, for Regina and Robin, for Will.”
Killian understood every word she said, knew the truth of it. But still, she was putting herself in danger, again, putting others before her own happiness.

“Let me go with you.”

“No, you need to stay on the Enchanted; lead the charge from here with David. I need you here to give me the strength to return to you.”

“Bloody hell, Emma, you’re making it really hard to argue with you.”

She smirked. “I know.” She inched forward to take his lips with hers, manipulating them to move how she wanted them to. He let her lead, loving the sensation that coursed through his body at the feel of her body pressed against his, her hands in his hair. She pulled back, as if to break the kiss, but then surged forward again, as if unable to stop there. In truth, he never wanted her to stop.

“Emma, the Baelfire is just outside of our sensors,” Regina’s voice echoed through the room.

She did pull back then, her forehead resting against his. “Thanks, Regina,” she said in response to the hail.

“Come back to me,” he whispered against her.

“Always,” she agreed, hoping she would.

~*~

Emma easily flew the Zephyr Bug, stealth mode engaged, right into a lower docking bay of the Baelfire. She and Elsa moved like liquid through the decks, Elsa leading the way. The white blonde was single-minded in her pursuit of the Dark One. The torture he visited on her was like an aphrodisiac to her hatred of him. In the final hours of the oncoming battle, she wanted to watch his pain and feel his death as her own. They passed almost silently into the Dark One’s personal rooms, Emma only needing to use her powers once, to disable the Dark One’s private guards.

The Dark One stood at their entrance into the rooms, a wide smile spreading across his vile face. His eyes flicked from Elsa to Emma.

"So it seems after all these months, you are finally mine, Gaian."

“In your dreams, Dark One,” Emma scoffed, unsettled at being so close to so much evil. It seemed to coil around him in waves of power, dark and menacing.

“Are you here to return my Dagr’du?” he asked in a sickly-sweet voice.

“Not yours, Dark One. It’s mine and it looks really good on my dresser.”

“You’re lying,” he smirked. “I can feel the blade’s power from here.”

Emma cocked her head slightly, and mirrored his smirk, but refuse to answer him.

“So you’re here to offer yourself to me,” he reasoned. “Maybe in return of not killing every being you know. And you brought my Honorable.”

Elsa looked at the man in pure hatred. "Nothing Honorable about me any longer. My job was over before I left this ship the last time; the day I helped the rebels take the Dagr’du from your evil grip."
The Dark One backhanded her with a closed fist. Elsa lay on the ground laughing. Looking up at him, she wiped the blood from her mouth.

"I would think you could do better than that, you evil fuck."

The Dark One picked her up by her throat. "I can and I will. I want to hear you beg! I will wreck you until you can scream no more. Then I will take your precious Princess, take every genome from her, and use her to make a perfect being. And they will be perfect, with Gaian knowledge and beauty. We will rule this universe for eons."

"My Lord," a captain interrupted him, his voice quivering slightly with nerves. "Intelligence informs us of an imminent attack by the rebel fleet. Our location has been compromised. I suggest…"

"I suggest you hold your position and defeat whatever comes within our domain. I have the Gaian. They wouldn’t dare fire upon the Baelfire while she’s aboard. Now leave us. I’ve some entertaining to do."

Emma shuddered at the evil smile on his face.

~*~

It was the sound of full alert that pulled The Dark One from his enjoyment. He had beaten the Honorable until she was crumpled in a corner, bleeding and dying.

He smiled up at Emma, his eyes brilliant and wicked. "Never suspected that she would last that long." He gloated to Emma, who was bound by a strong, invisible force where she stood, only her eyes free to move, and watch, horrified, as Elsa struggled to breath. Why hadn’t she talked Elsa out of this, or at least used her own powers against her to keep her far from danger.

"Do you hear that, Dark One?" Elsa panted out

He just shrugged. "They will not save you or the Princess. My forces will take out your little rebel friends easily."

"Your overconfidence has always been your greatest weakness. But you’ll never see the end of this war. My people demand revenge," Elsa said.

“I am she who cuts the thread,” Emma added, finally releasing herself from the Dark One’s unseen grasp.

Emma shot out her hand, concentrating with every fiber of her being. White energy surged from her, powerful and magnificent. The Dark One look surprised from one moment, then he was flying, his arms flailing before he hit the far wall in the room.

Emma moved quickly, darting over to the space where Elsa lay. “I’m sorry, Elsa I should have known he’d use some trick.”

“Don’t be, I’m where I want to be,” Elsa whispered. She motioned for Emma to help her to her feet and together, they stumbled to where the Dark One lay.

Emma leaned Elsa against the wall and crouched down to sit the Dark One up slightly, slapping him across his face to bring him back to consciousness. Elsa looked down at him, at the sudden scared look in his eyes and she smirked, wearily.
"You didn’t think I’d let you live did you?" she said softly. “You killed everyone I knew, everyone I loved; an entire population.”

“Twice,” Emma added, pulling the Dagr’du from the waist of her leather pants. “Death is too good for you,” she continued conversationally, “but I’m feeling small and petty, and I need my revenge as much as Elsa, for everyone in this universe you have tortured, enslaved, or murdered. They need retribution, justice, and we are going to give them that.”

She reached for Elsa’s hand and placed it over her own holding the hilt of the dagger. “I am the last Gaian, the Alarch d’Princ, wife to the unbounded Areenian. I do this and welcome my destiny, to become Un’tywyll. For my people, and for Elsa’s people.”

She moved before she could talk herself out of it, plunging the dagger into the Dark One’s chest. Channeling every ounce of her power into the blade, she pushed the blade into his body, knowing this is what was needed to finally end this war.

The Dark One screamed, a harrowing sound that filled the room. Elsa and Emma screamed along with him; Emma from the power coursing through her, and Elsa from the pain in her own ears at the sound. A burst of dark light sprang from where the blade was embedded in the Dark One, and Emma and Elsa were pushed back with its force. Elsa slumped to the floor unconscious but Emma watched as the Dark One twitched, his body releasing its essence as he crumbled into dust until there was nothing left.

Emma cried as that energy surged into her, hoping she was powerful enough to hold it.

~*~

Mary Margaret was lying in bed against David, his hand rubbing her pregnant stomach, smiling when the child under his hand moved.

"They’re active today."

Mary Margaret just made a snorting noise. "They’re active every day. You just don’t notice since it’s not your bladder they’re dancing on."

David laughed, and played with a few strands of her hair. "Not much longer." An earlier scan had shown Mary Margaret was carrying twins, and while that thought had shocked her, David seemed beyond pleased.

Mary Margaret moved her hand over her stomach as well, feeling both small bodies growing inside her, and interlacing her fingers with his. Picking up the letter, she continued to read. "Ruby has sent us yet another long list of names she thinks would be good for the baby."

"Did she get passed the ‘H’s’ in the alphabet? The letters full of ‘B’ names were worrying me. But I really can’t even imagine naming the baby Horus."

"No. She up to the ‘J’s’ now. Though I can honestly say that ‘Jezebel’ is not an option."

David just laughed. A few months back, they left Ruby on Arion. She and a few members of the crew were slowly creating a site for a new capital city below the ruins of Arion and the protected Temple that belonged exclusively to Emma and Killian. The planners of the new city were busy preparing for the Royal government to take control, now that the Dark One was defeated and the war was ended. All that was left was a few Legion holdouts, but it was all but over.

Killian, David, and Will had gone home to Areenia for a freedom ceremony, and all of them were
uncertain how their home world would handle both Killian’s marriage to Emma and David with a very pregnant Mary Margaret. To disarm them, Killian and Emma wore full regal attire and David even dressed up with Mary Margaret on his arm, herself royalty on her own planet. Regina attended in full Eminent dress, with Robin in an outfit of green. They looked impressive. Will? Well, he looked like he had slept in his warp core, but it didn’t matter since he didn’t make it all the way to the ceremony. He was distracted by young ladies that greeted them, and stopped to tell them of his many adventures as the Savior of the Universe.

They had needed to stop at the local jail on their way back to the Enchanted to pick up Will, who had been detained for drunk and disorderly conduct as well as fixing a game. His mother had visited her son in jail, sitting in her usual chair.

"We got a letter from Killian’s mother today,” Mary Margaret said.

David just moaned. "Make Killian and Emma read it first. It’s their turn." Mary Margaret just laughed. Killian’s mother, in the absence of her natural born son, Liam, had accepted David in his place, firmly telling him he was part of her family now. David was still trying to adjust to being metaphorically embraced by Killian’s mother. She was certainly a formidable woman. It took Killian pointing out that this situation made their mother also notorious. She spent her days bragging about how her sons were coming home with their alien mates.

The Enchanted had returned Areenia’s treasures from the Olympus, and despite mating and breeding outside their species, Killian and David found themselves welcomed back to their world. Breeding with the nobility of Misthaven, and marrying the only remaining Gaian Princess, made them nothing if not more notorious, especially when added with their roles in the liberation of their people.

"Is she still trying to harass us into marriage?" David asked.

Mary Margaret quickly scanned the letter. "Actually, she’s getting better. She only mentioned it sixteen times in this one. There is the usual bastard children and stuff to make her point."

David picked up her hand and kissed it, sucking a finger into his mouth. She wore his ring, but they had yet to settle on marriage. "You want to get married?"

Mary Margaret smiled. He was ready to get married. The war was over and with it went Kathryn and a lot of baggage he had carried, but now it was Mary Margaret who wasn’t in any hurry. Their relationship was just fine as it was, and she figured that one day it would happen in a spontaneous, romantic gesture.

"David, I met your mother. Both of them," she grinned.

"Dammit, I knew it! Killian warned me. He said that if I didn’t marry you before you met his mother, you’d never marry me."

Mary Margaret laughed.

David continued. "We’re scheduled for some off time on Arion. How about we get married in front of our friends and family, and we force Emma to take us to the Temple so we can honeymoon in the past?"

"I’ll think about it. But I was thinking more along the lines of waiting until the babies is born. Then, when she’s keeping us up at all hours of the night, we suddenly get married and force Killian and Emma to babysit while we go on our honeymoon for a few weeks. Then, I’ll be able to
see my feet again - and no interruptions."

David made a thoughtful face. Her plan had merit. "I like it. Just the thought of Killian trying to figure out how to change diapers fills me with extreme happiness." David smiled at the sound of Mary Margaret’s laughter.

“And Emma goes into panic attacks whenever I mention Aunt Emma taking care of the little ones.”

~*~

Regina lay down on the bed next to Robin, their hands joined together between them.

“I think it’s time to tell them about us,” Regina said quietly. Robin looked at her in surprise.

“What?!” she asked, her brows furrowing in question.

“How do you really think they don’t know that I’ve been in your bed every night for the past six months?!” he asked seriously.

“Well, we’ve not been exactly forthcoming with our relationship,” Regina reasoned, turning on her side to look him in the eyes.

“Aye, that’s true,” he agreed. “But Emma’s a Gaian, who knows what she knows. And if she does know, then Killian knows, and if Killian knows, David will as well. And if David knows…”

“Okay, I get it,” Regina said in frustrated. “If Emma is aware of what we have, and she most likely is, then every other senior crew member will know because of the weird connection thing she has with the Areenians.”

They lay in silence for a few minutes with Regina running her fingers along Robin’s. “Do you think we should say anything?”

“No,” Robin said with a smile, pulling her closer, his lips an inch from hers. “I think we just continue. They know, let’s not make it a big deal.”

“Okay,” she agreed, before mating her lips to his.

~*~

"I don’t know why we have to take all of these people to our special place," Killian grumbled as he tried to locate his belt, but it wasn’t anywhere to be found. "What did you do with my belt?"

"Nothing. It’s exactly where you left it."

"Emma..." She pointed to the belt still attached to their bed. Killian smiled wickedly. "Oh yeah!"

Emma just ignored his smoldering look. They were already late.

"It’s a celebration, one that is being echoed throughout the known universe. The war is over, the evil Dark One defeated. Hosting this shindig in our special place is beneficial to us," she reasoned.

“How is it beneficial to us, love? It seems more like sacrilege to me.”

“It benefits us because we don’t have to make any food, N’al and his band of never-people will see to all that. We don’t have to mess with festive decorations, for the same reason as the food. We don’t need to think about clean-up, see the reasons already mentioned, which leaves us able to
sneak away when all the formalities are done and seclude ourselves on this private lagoon that only I know how to get to.”

“You sure know how to reason with a guy, don’t you? Play on his never diminishing need to ravish his wife.”

“Works every time,” she grinned.

Killian finished looping his belt and was cinching it. "Dave passed on Mother’s letter. It’s all talk about the babies and Dave stepping up and doing the right thing by, and I quote, ‘The Beautiful Lady Misthaven’".

“I can’t wait for the babies to arrive,” Emma said, distracting him from the thought of reading his mother’s letter. “Mary Margaret is a bundle of emotions and mixed up hormones. It makes conversation with her almost impossible.”

Killian had to agree with her. He’d made the mistake of saying Mary Margaret looked like she should have her own gravitational pull, and was surprised he still lived to tell the tale. Emma swore at him, hitting him on his arm, while Mary Margaret had burst into tears, completely inconsolable.

“I wouldn’t be too eager if I was you,” he warned with a sly smile.

“Why?” she asked curiously.

“You know very well we’re going to be roped into babysitting duties. And if they don’t get married before the kids comes, they’ll dump it on us while they go off and fuck like there’s no tomorrow on a honeymoon.

Emma sat down on the bed quickly, her face losing some color. "You don’t think?"

Killian smiled cruelly at her. "Aye, I do, love. They’ll be having all the sex and we’ll be stuck with wailing children and smelly diapers."

"Oh god! Killian, we need to relocate!" Emma didn’t mind babies, not really, as long as they were someone else’s. The idea of parenthood terrorized her. She was barely able to find her shoes, and in her wake was a swath of disorder. She’d probably lose any child in her care.

"I take it you don’t want a baby?" Killian asked casually, but carefully. Her answer was important to him.

"A baby? Any baby? No," was her quick reply.

Killian’s eyes darkened and his face closed down.

"But I do want your babies," Emma continued, moving closer to her husband and reached up to kiss him long and hard. "Just not today, or even tomorrow. Someday soon, when we’re ready and after I’ve enjoyed having you to myself. I have so many places to go with you, Commander. So many adventures. Time is a fluid thing. We have lifetimes of it to make all the babies you want."

Killian kissed her hard. He wanted time with her, too. The fear of losing her was still too close to the surface. At times, he woke in a panic and searched the bed beside him for her touch. They had blinked together across time and space, entering worlds that had died and worlds to come, all in a wink of an eye. In all the time they were flashing across the universe, it was only a day in real time, but thousands of years to him and Emma as they tried to find something...anything...to anchor
them. David. It was finally the amulet, his amulet he had given David, the one identical to the one that Emma wore, that kept them returning. It was his link to his brother that allowed them to finally stop blinking.

Had he not gone with Emma, he would have lost her for all eternity. So, he’d change a few blasted diapers for his brother. He owed him that much.

And then she had gone with Elsa to end the Dark One personally. He’d been terrified she would not return from that, and his first thought on entering the breached Baelfire was to find her. And find her he did, struggling to pull Elsa down the corridor to safety. She was weak, in shock, and had no control over her power as it seemed to crackle from her in wisps of gray smoke. Not the bright white he was used to when she used her powers, but now a gray. Like it was tainted with something dark. But his thoughts had been more concerned with them escaping, surviving, and finally living the life they both deserved.

They all climbed the stairs to the Temple of Talla’se and, after Emma had offered her blood, walked through the portal. The group gasped at the change in activity, the peace and beauty. Once again, the air was fragrant and sweet, the skies bright and blue, and monks lined the walkway leading to the Temple.

N’al was waiting for them, his smile serene and almost joyful. “My Princess, your presence makes my heart soar,” he said with a bow

Emma smiled. “It’s good to see you, too, N’al.”

Killian whispered to Regina. "Whatever you do, don’t hold a sword or let them brand you."

Regina laughed as N’al stepped closer to Killian. “My Prince, welcome home.”

Killian looked bewildered, while David and Will laughed out loud as the priest repeated his bow to Killian.

N’al gazed at the group before him. May Margaret stood with David. Ruby and Belle, with Will and Gus at their sides, were positioned slightly behind, and Graham was quietly standing with Elsa. All seemingly in a half-circle with Killian and Emma at the center.

"You hear the words that are spoken in silence?" N’al asked Emma.

“To forget one’s ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without root,” she returned.

“And so it seems the student has outgrown the master,” N’al said softly.

“Is it always like this,” Will asked in a loud whisper, as Emma and her priest conversed in their strange way.

“The trick is to just pretend you know what’s going on,” Graham answered, well aware of the fact that both Emma and Regina were following whatever the religious man was saying.

“To die is to stop living but to stop living is something entirely different than dying,” N’al was saying to Emma.

“See, lass,” Killian suddenly said, his voice booming with his glee. “That’s what I was saying; he just said it fancier.”

“You understand this?” David asked, moving a little close to Killian.
“I’m starting to,” he grinned.

They moved together, Emma and N’al in front with Killian, and the others following where they led.

“You are changed, My Princess,” N’al said with concern.

“Something to talk about later,” she evaded. “We are here for a celebration, life is returning to the universe.”

N’al bowed at that, taking it for her command and continued in silence.

“What was that?” Killian asked, slipping her hand into his as they entered the large hall they were married in. Tables were set up with food from every corner of the galaxies, and drink overflowed from fountains in each corner.

“Just that things are different now; I’m different now,” she answered, smiling as she watched Will zone in on the table laden down with various cooked meats. She turned back to see Killian’s concerned look. “It’s fine, Commander, I’m fine. Just a little different is all. We’ll talk about it later, okay?”

“Aye, Princess,” he smiled, understanding this wasn’t the time or the place for what she needed to say.

The day wore on into evening and candles were now illuminating the great hall where the friends celebrated as hundreds of millions across the universe did. They laughed, and dance, ate too much food, and drank too much wine. They talked about the things that were lost, and new things yet to be discovered.

“I still don’t get it,” Will mumbled, pulling the meat of a large cooked poultry leg with his teeth.

“What?” Belle asked, trying hard not to watch with fascination how he managed to eat and talk at the same time, without losing any food, and it not being completely gross.

“The people around here, the monks or whatever they are,” he explained his confusion. “Are they alive or not?”

“They are and yet they are not,” Regina answered cryptically.

“Well, thanks for that, O Eminent One. That certainly clears it up for me,” Will said sarcastically.

“These people represent the religion of my home planet,” Emma explained.

“So, they’re Gaian?” Robin probed.

“No, not exactly,” she smiled with mischief.

"Your people, Emma,” Belle butting in, feeling Will and Robin’s frustration at Emma and Regina as the two grinned at each other, clearly happy to string the two on for however long it took. “Did they ascend?”

"Some. Like N’al and those like him." Emma agreed.

“So, he’s not real?” Ruby asked, her eyes sliding to the side to take in the silent figures scattered around the room, seemingly enjoying the festive feel to the night.
Emma understood Ruby’s need to understand, but the concept was so much more than that.

"No. N’al is a specter. He is a remnant of his former self from over a thousand years ago. Time is overlapping. It co-exists with itself over and over again. If you could travel back into time as we did, you would meet the remnants of those who passed. It is like a fingerprint in time. N’al can interact because he is ascended, and his ascended self and his fingerprint co-exist within the same space, so he lives on."

“Can you do this? Ascend, I mean,” Mary Margaret asked, concern in her eyes as they flicked to Killian and then David. If Emma left them now, Killian would not survive it. And she doubted David would either.

“I don’t know, maybe,” Emma answered truthfully with a shrug.

"Princess. Your journey has many travels. I wish you a long walk,” N’al said from his position behind her.

“Me too,” Killian said with a scowl. All this talk about her leaving him, again, was bloody well pissing him off.

“It would take me great amount of power to be able to ascend,” Emma admitted.

“Power which you now have,” Elsa interrupted.

Emma sighed, not wanting this to be the moment she revealed this truth to the group.

“What power?” Killian demanded looking at the white-blond with eyes blazing.

“The power of the Dark One,” Elsa stated simply.

All eyes turned on Emma in wonder, with a skepticism involved as well.

“I knew the only way to rid this universe of the Dark One was to use the Dagr’du on him; the only weapon that could hurt him,” she explained softly, not liking the reaction she knew she’d get. “But to do that, the Dagr’du would release his power. Someone would need to absorb that power, and they would need the strength to contain it, to become the Un’tywyl. It was my destiny to not create an opening for another monster like the Dark One to rise.”

Killian had a vague recollection of her using that word before, but still didn’t know what it meant. But he had a good idea. “What is Un’tywyl, Emma? What have you become?”

Emma held his eyes, hoping he saw the light in them. “Un’tywyl loosely translate as Dark One.”

There was silence around them as they all absorbed what she had told them.

“So, you’re the new Dark One?” David eventually asked, feeling Killian’s uneasiness raise.

“Are you evil now?” Will added, looking at her sideways, skeptically, not believing the being of light that she is could be anything resembling the creature she had destroyed.

“No, I’m something else… something more,” she replied, cryptically. “Un’tywyl can also mean obscure, or…”

“Incomprehensive,” Regina offered, her eyes shining with this new knowledge.

“Yes,” Emma grinned back. “Unknown.”
“How much power do you hold?” Regina probed, eager to learn everything. Emma was even more of a fascination than she was before.

Emma flashed her a shy smile, along with a slow, one-shoulder shrug. She knew she contained immense power, power that could go either way. She remembered the vision she’d seen, while flying through the air after a blast from Cora, where she was being worshipped by millions, standing high above them in a billowing white dress, and knew how easily that could become a reality with her new power. But to what expense of her family, the people she loved? She didn’t know.

The conversation stalled as each member of their small group tried to come to terms with having a new Dark One. And to have that person be one of them, the last Gaian, Emma, and for her definition of the word to be something they couldn’t know.

"So,” Will said with a cough as he reached for more wine, “you could do this on any world? Go back in time and visit its past?"

Emma was so grateful of him in that moment, she almost promised him another set of SPC modes. He was trying, in his own way, of steering the conversation back to the Gaian she was, not focus on the Dark One she’d become. "If we had the technology, yes."

Will bobbed his head as he ate more meat. Tasty animal. He and Killian would have to go hunting. "Which you do. So, you could go back in time and tell yourself not to do things, or correct mistakes."

Emma laughed. "No. That is time traveling of a different kind. This is stepping back and seeing images, specters that have no real consistency. You can visit, but change is impossible. What has gone before, remains."

"But you take physical materials from the past and send them forward."

"True. But many of those things were from a future time, merely stored in the past. Physical materials do not alter over time, unless they are subject to decay. And even that can be overcome. But human flesh dies, and that is not so easily preserved like a piece of metal."

Belle swatted Will’s hand away from her plate as he tried to take more food from it. "So, can you visit your people? Those on Gaianosis?"

Emma became quiet, and then shook her head no. "A fingerprint in time needs a physical realm or reality that holds it. Arion has these Temples. Gaianosis lost her physical realm when she was pulled apart in the black hole. There is no recovery possible, so all she was is lost, save these Halls and Temples of Knowledge that once was that of the Ancients."

David warmed to the discussion. Emma was giving them a history lesson of her people, a people of mystery. For centuries, rumors and legends had risen about the Ancients and the Gaians who could walk across space in a wink.

"The Ancients, you once said, brought Gaianosis here using the Dagr’du."

Emma laughed as Killian tossed a bone at Will, happy for the moment that he wasn’t pushing the Dark One thing she had going on, but she answered David’s question. "They did. They transferred the entire world through the Great Barrier, and then closed the rift behind them. They thought this universe was a younger version of their old one, but after hundreds of generations, they lost solidity. Their choices were three. Ascend, mix with the native inhabitants of their new solar
system, or blink out of existence. They chose many paths, those who ascended like N’al, and those who mated with others of this solar system which resulted in a movement backwards from the evolutionary advancements of the Ancients."

David frowned. "So they purposely de-evolved."

"Essentially. Much of what the Ancients were was lost because the newer generations couldn't understand or comprehend the complexity of it all. So the leaders of my world quickly built these Temples and transferred all the remaining knowledge of the Ancients here before it was all forgotten. That included the information and knowledge of the Dagr’du."

"How could they settle for stepping backwards?" Mary Margaret asked.

"Their original home was polluted. Destroyed by them, due to lack of insight. They messed with their genetics, much like the Dark One did with the Eminents. They ripped apart the very fabric of their own universe until the movement of Gaianosis was their last hope of survival. It was a horrible shock to realize that they couldn’t return home, and they couldn’t survive here as they were. This universe selected against them, and they were fast becoming extinct. So they took a step back and de-evolved, basically did a huge cosmic ‘do over’; this time, letting nature slowly evolve them in a process that was more natural."

"Then it was good that your people, the Ancients, created the Dagr’du that saved them," Belle smiled.

Emma laughed. "Actually, they didn’t create the Dagr’du. It was brought to Gaianosis by a group of beings from an old universe. These beings stayed and melded into the Gaian cultures, becoming hybrid and melding their genetics with the indigenous people. It took centuries upon centuries for those we now call the Ancients to learn how to use the Dagr’du as a transport device. It has, in its history, always been abused, misused, and sought after. The Ancients, before they learned better, were a barbaric race full of hate, greed, lust, and almost anything you could imagine, as their war-like ways forced them to evolve to save themselves. They learned to let go of all of the most hideous of vices, and to expand themselves to a betterment of their worlds and those around them. Unfortunately, the damage was already done. They used the Dagr’du, and understood it would forever be a tool of misuse and a vessel for power. For that very reason, the office of the Alarch de Prin’c was created as a guardian, a failsafe."

"But they found a way to use it. To save themselves," Graham said softly.

"Yes, to become Saviors to all," Emma smiled.

Killian was tired and he wanted to go to bed, but only after they kicked everyone out of their place. It was time to send them off to their own rooms, which he hoped were far away from the state rooms he and Emma used.

David as usual, was the hardest to take a hint. He ignored his brother’s gestures to wrap it up and go away.

"So, what was Gaianosis, before?" David pushed.

Emma pinched her husband for his rudeness and laughed at his response. Leaning down, she kissed him and stroked his face. She was happy, here surrounded by images of her people’s history, with her friends and new family. With the man she loved more than she ever thought possible.

"Before," she smiled at Killian, her fingers in the scuff of his beard, "it was something else, once
upon a time.”

~THE END~

Or maybe just the beginning...

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