Once Upon a Parody

by The_Lark

Summary

The caffeine-induced play-by-play for those viewers who haven't been paying attention
A long time ago, in an Enchanted Forest far, far, away, there lived yet another whiny blond farmboy-turned-action-hero…oops, but we'll cover that in another episode.

In an enchanted forest far, far away, Prince Charming galloped furiously along on his horse. "Faster, Silver! There's got to be a bathroom around here someplace! Oh, and my true love, too."

But all he found was seven suspiciously tall dwarves standing around a glass case. "You're too late, homie, she's a goner."

Charming scowled at them. "Then why didn't you give her a proper burial instead of dumping her in a box in the woods? Don't you have any respect for the dead?"

"Cut us a break," said Grumpy, "we just dug-dug-dug-dug-dug-dug in our mines the whole day through. Our arms are too tired for an actual burial. We'll rent a backhoe and take care of it in the morning."

"All right," sobbed Charming. "In the meantime, open up the case so I can give my true love one last kiss."

Happy recoiled. "You…want to make out with your girlfriend's dead body? Creepy."

"It's not creepy, it's romantic!" Charming defended.

Doc stood protectively in front of the case. "As a respected, pickaxe-educated physician, may I go on record as saying I don't think this kind of behavior is healthy?"

"Just shut up and open the damn coffin!"

"Fine. Sicko."

Prince Charming looked upon his true love's face tenderly. "You're so cute when you're comatose. Smooches!" Suddenly, a shockwave exploded through the forest. Charming jumped. "Did the earth just move?"

Snow White sat up and blinked. "That's got to be the lamest pickup line I've ever heard."

Charming flung his arms around her. "Snow, you're back!"

"Yes, Jam—uh, I mean Charm-, uh, I mean Shep—uh, I mean, honeymuffin. You found me!"

The prince beamed. "Yeah, it was really cool! I had this epic swordfight against the Dark One, and then I broke into an enchanted castle, and then I hid a magical potion inside a dragon, and then Rumplestiltskin gave me a magical Action League secret decoder ring, and then…"

Snow clamped a hand over his mouth. "Woah, dude, I didn't ask for your life history."

"Sorry, I just assumed you'd want some answers about—"

"Not another word!"
"But we want to hear more about the dragon and the Dark One and the enchanted castle!" Happy protested.

"Yeah," said Grumpy. "It sounds a lot more exciting than all this mushy stuff we've been dealing with."

"Shut up, all of you!" snapped Snow White.

It wasn't long before the happy couple found themselves getting hitched in some vaguely Catholic-looking joint. The vaguely papal-looking guy conducting the ceremony turned to the prince. "Do you, Jam—uh, Charm—uh, Shep—uh…"

"Psst! Try "honey muffin," Snow White whispered.

"Oh, forget it! Just say 'I do', kid."

"I do," the prince repeated dutifully.

"Good boy. And do you, Snow, take the Nameless Wonder to be your husband?"

"I do"

"Then through the power vested in me by Aslan, the Great Lion, I now pronounce you—"

He was interrupted when a woman in a long black dress and far too much makeup barged in. "Not so fast, suckers!" she sneered.

The possible pope was outraged. "Hey, lady, keep your voice down! I'm pretty sure this is a church."

"It's the Queen!" screamed Doc.

"Er, yes, we all know that." Snow blinked.

Doc shuffled sheepishly. "Well, I just thought I'd remind—I mean, if somebody wasn't paying attention these past several years…"

Snow White ignored him and grabbed her husband's sword. "Beat it, Mom, or I'll menacingly wave this sword some more!"

Prince Charming looked a little queasy. "Honey, please stop ticking off the very powerful and very psychotic Queen. Remember how I ended up stuck in a dungeon last time that happened? And quit stealing my stuff!" He snatched his blade back.

Regina paced menacingly. "I will wreak a terrible and brutal revenge for whatever it is that you did to me, Snow White! On you, and your little prince, and your werewolf chum, and your preachy little cricket, and your oversized dwarves…"

Seven hours later…

"…And the village carpenter's estranged son, and my former tutor's long-lost girlfriend, and that headless guy who's supposed to be trapped in another dimension…" she continued hoarsely.

Prince Charming glanced tiredly at his watch, while Snow White snored quietly on his shoulder. "We get it, we get it, are you done now?"

Regina paused for a moment. "Yeah, I think that's everything. I want to thank you for being polite
and not shooting me in the back while I got all of that off my chest."

"Damn it, I knew I was forgetting something!" Prince Charming flung his sword at her head.

"Chivalry is so dead!" growled the Queen, vanishing into thin air.

On a Greyhound rolling through Boston, our hero and favorite cutie pie was sitting next to a random extra. "Hey, kid, aren't you a little young to be traveling across state lines without an adult?"

"Nonsense, I'm very mature!" he insisted. "Just look at my book full of cartoon characters! But I must be off, time waits for no cutie!" He ducked outside and approached a nearby cab. "Do you take obviously-stolen credit cards?"

Meanwhile, in some ritzy restaurant, a scantily-clad bounty hunter named Emma was sashaying out of an elevator. "Ah," she sighed contentedly, "there's nothing more practical than stiletto heels and an insanely tight skirt for the chase scene that's obviously going to ensue here."

Emma's latest victim leered. "Hey, baby, how's it going?"

"Well, I'm a lonely orphan with no friends who has been reduced to spending her birthday beating bail jumpers senseless, so...yeah, not good."

"Oh, that's too...wait, what was that last thing you said?"

"Emma smash!"

Later that night, after wiping all the blood off her shoes, Emma walked into her dark, depressing apartment and sprinkled some Zoloft on a cupcake. "I'm so lonely right now that even a pint-sized stalker would seem like good company."

As if on cue, the cute little identity thief barged in. "Hi, Emma! About time you showed up. I've been waiting across the street with my binoculars for hours!"

Emma stared. "That was uncanny. Who the hell are you?"

"My name's Henry. I'm your son."

"I don't have a son."

"Do too."

"Do not."

"Do too."

"Do not."

"Do too. You gave me up for adoption ten years ago, remember?"

"Oh, right, that. I guess the nine months of pregnancy, the agony of childbirth, the years of ensuing post-adoption grief, and the stretch marks I see in my mirror every day just slipped my mind."
"Well," said Henry, "now that that's settled, we'd better get back to Storybrooke so you can destroy the evil queen and break her curse."

"Huh? You're crazy."

Henry just shrugged. "Not my fault. It's your gene pool. Now come with me or I'll call the cops and tell them you kidnapped me."

"You can't tell lies about your own mother. You're one of the good guys," Emma reminded him.

"Oh yeah, that. Rats!"

"But I'll take you home anyway because your incessant cuteness is threatening my long-standing emotional walls."

Henry smirked victoriously.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In a window at Neuschwanstein Castle, a very pregnant Snow White frolicked halfheartedly with her bluebirds. "Come my little friends, as we all sing a happy little working song…” She broke off with a sigh. "You know what, guys, I'm just not feeling it right now. Can we break for the day and start fresh first thing in the morning?"

Prince Charming slipped into comfort mode. "Aw, Snow, just because a violent sociopath with dark magic and heavy black makeup swore vengeance on us, that's no reason to worry."

"Honeymuffin, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

"It's not stupid, it's optimistic!" he defended.

Snow White smiled sadly. "You're great in comfort mode, baby, but I'd still like to get some advice from Him."

"You mean Aslan?"

"No! The powerful sorcerer, disfigured by his own dark magic, whose name cannot be spoken out loud for safety reasons."

"Oh, you mean Lord Voldemort."

"No! The one with the tragic backstory and creepy high-pitched voice."

"Are you sure we're not talking about Voldemort?"

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

They made their way down to the sparkly, yet somehow still ominous prison cell of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. "Yo, Rumplestiltskin?" Snow White called out. "Come out, we need to talk. Come on, we know you're home; we saw your car in the driveway!"

Rumplestiltskin obediently crawled down from the ceiling.

"Gah!" yelped Prince Charming. "What were you doing up there?!

Rumplestiltskin smirked. "Trying to psych you out. Did it work?"
"Yes." Snow White cringed.

"Tee hee!" Rumplestiltskin was so badass he actually managed to make giggling scary.

"Look, let's cut to the chase," said Snow. "We've come to you because you can see the future."

"Woah, hold the phone!" Charming interrupted. "If he can predict the future, then screw the Queen! Why haven't we been asking him for the winning lotto numbers? And for that matter, why didn't he foresee that we were going to lock him up in here and prevent the whole thing?"

"Tee hee!" giggled Rumplestiltskin.

"Knock that off, it's creepy!" Snow White snapped. "Look, we're here because the queen threatened us, my werewolf chum, our preachy little cricket, our oversized dwarves…"

Seven hours later…

"…The village carpenter's estranged son, your long-lost girlfriend, and that headless guy who's supposed to be in another dimension," she finished hoarsely.

"And I suppose you want me to tell you exactly what's going on, and why, and how to stop it?" Rumplestiltskin sighed wearily.

Prince Charming nodded. "Yes, please, and make it snappy. We've got Lamaze class tonight."

"You people wouldn't last five minutes without me," the Dark One grumbled. "Fine, here's the scoop. The Queen is going to banish us all to a horrible new land where we will be stripped of our memories, our identities, and our loved ones. Also, there will only be one bar."

"NO!"

"You must get your unborn child to safety. On her twenty-eighth birthday, she'll return to you and break the curse. Well, eventually. I mean, she'll waste a lot of time rescuing kids from foster homes, flirting with doomed huntsmen, and putting me in jail, but she'll come through sooner or later." He reached out to pat Snow's stomach.

Prince Charming gave him a smack. "Take it off or I'll break it off."

"I really don't see why that's necessary. If I wanted something bad to happen to your wife or kid, why would I have warned you about the curse?"

"Shut up! Snow, you're not really going to take this guy at his word, are you? There's something about his face I don't trust."

Rumplestiltskin ran a scaly tongue over his blackened, rotting fangs. "Whatever do you mean?"

"That's it, I'm out of here!" muttered Charming, dragging his wife away.

"Hey, wait!" Rumplestiltskin yelled. "Before you go, I need to know your daughter's name so I can obsess over it. Oh, don't give me that look; it's a perfectly platonic obsession."

Prince Charming raised an eyebrow quizzically. "If you can see the future, why don't you know it already? Besides, our child is going to be a boy."

"Then why did you decorate the nursery with lacy dollies?" Rumplestiltskin asked.
"I really hate you."

"Enough, you two!" said Snow. "Her name's Emma."

Rumplestiltskin laughed. "Royalty with an actual name instead of a capitalized adjective? That's a first for this place."

A lone VW Beetle chugged through the streets of Storybrooke, Maine. Inside, Henry whacked his mother on the shoulder from the umpteenth time that night. "Slugbug!"

"Kid, knock that off and tell me where you live, so I can unload you on your parents. I'm eager to get back to my depressing apartment and Zoloft cupcake."

"No."

Emma gave her long-lost son a funny look. "So, what are you planning, then? Are we going to cruise around town until the wheels fall off this car? Or get out and wait for the cops to track us down?"

"I guess I didn't really think this whole thing through."

Emma got out of the car, somehow trusting her identity-thieving stalker not to abscond with it. "Because, for some reason, I have no clock in my car, on my cellphone, or a wristwatch, I need to use that rickety old clock tower to check the time."

"You can't, it's broken," said Henry. "Thirty years ago, some mad scientist used it in one of his time-travel experiments. It was struck by lightning and the clock hasn't worked since."

"Liar."

"Okay, the truth is that the Evil Queen from Snow White trapped a bunch of fairy tale characters here, froze time, and won't let anyone leave."

"Your first lie was much more believable."

"I'm not lying!"

"Oh, so you're crazy?"

"No!"

Dr. Archie Hopper chose this very inopportune moment to happen by. "Hi, I'm Henry's shrink. Because he's crazy."

"I am not!"

"Yeah, whatever," scoffed Hopper. "Just watch yourself or you'll end up sharing a cell with Belle."

Emma gave him a double-take. "Huh?"

"Oops, I've said too much. It's none of my business anyway. I've really got to be getting back to the Normandy. Later!" Hopper turned and ran for his life.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
In Fairytale Land's answer to the Pentagon, Prince Charming addressed his team of Cartoon All-Stars. "Why don't we just kill the Queen? You know, like we should have done in the first place?"

"Don't give in to the Dark Side, Your Highness, it never turns out well," Jiminy Cricket advised. "Trust me, my old friend Darth Revan tried it once and he just ended up with a head full of fake memories."

"Well, I'm sure nothing like that will ever happen to me," Charming insisted.

"Personally, I still think that trusting a guy named the Dark One is asking for trouble," Doc pointed out.

"He's right, we are so totally screwed!" Snow White moaned.

"Nonsense," said Prince Charming, going back into comfort mode. "We're the good guys, and this is a fantasy show. We can't possibly lose."

The Blue Fairy flew in, trailed by some movers who were lugging a magic tree. "Good news, Your Majesties. I've found wood to make a magical wardrobe that can stop the curse by tearing your family apart for three decades and sending you to a foreign and terrifying new land."

Snow White stared. "Um…check your dictionary, lady. That's horrible news."

"It's not horrible, it's bittersweet!" the fairy insisted.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At long last, Emma and Henry pulled up in front of that house from the Stepford Wives. Henry cringed. "Please don't take me home! My knees can't handle another jump out of the window!"

"Unless you've got some clothes and a toothbrush in that backpack, and not just a bunch of Apollo bars, you're going to have to go back eventually," Emma reminded him.

Henry hid his face in his hands. "I'm really bad at this whole "running away" thing. But cut me some slack! I just don't get along with my mom."

"A kid who doesn't get along with his mom? How very shocking and unique."

Henry's mother, Regina, burst out the front door in tears that somehow hadn't touched her heavy eye makeup. "Yay, my emotional crutch is home!"

"Screw you, Mom! I want to go live with this virtual stranger who is clearly creeped out by me!" With that, he ran off to his room to sulk and listen to Eminem.

Regina glanced at Emma. "So you're Emma…and you just happen to be Henry's birth mom. That's…kind of a huge coincidence."

"I beg your pardon?" said Emma.

"Oh, never mind. Why don't you come in and have some apple cider that's totally not poisoned?"

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Inside the Stepford House, Henry's two mommies squirmed awkwardly. "So…"

"So…this is awkward," said Regina.
"Incredibly," Emma agreed.

"Let's cut to the chase. Are you here to steal my son?"

"No thanks, he's creepy and delusional. You haven't noticed?"

"Actually, no."

Emma frowned. "Your only child thinks he lives in a town full of amnesiac cartoon characters and you haven't even noticed? You suck, but I don't really care. I'm getting out of this nuthouse just in case whatever he has is contagious." Without further ado, she bolted for the nearest door.

As she ran down the driveway, Henry watched her from the window with his high-powered binoculars. "Tee hee! You'll never get away from Henry! NEVER!"

"Note to self," said Emma, "get a restraining order first thing in the morning."

She didn't get far, however, before she noticed that Henry's Big Book of Deja-Vu was lying on her front seat. It was also humming suspiciously. "Oh no, is there a hidden camera in this thing?" Before she could check, her car slammed into a very ironic sign. With her last shreds of consciousness, she mumbled, "On second thought, maybe I should have pulled over and then looked at the book."

As she lay drooling all over the dashboard, a random wolf wandered by. "I'm not the Big Bad Wolf," he howled, "but you'd never believe me if I told you who is."

Geppetto hammered away in his workshop. "Almost done, Pinocchio! Then we'll go out for one last pizza before the curse hits."

Pinocchio looked up from the piece of wood he had been sanding. "Dad, if we're in such a hurry, why are we wasting time putting accents and embellishments on this thing?"

"Stop making me feel stupid or I'll wish for you to turn back into a puppet!" Geppetto threatened.

Pinocchio cowered. "I'll be good."

Geppetto smirked. "And when you wish upon a star, your dreams come true!"

In the hallowed halls of Neuschwanstein Castle, Snow White was royally freaking out. "I'm not going through with this! I would rather have us and everyone else trapped in an eternity of misery than be temporarily separated from my honeymuffin!"

Prince Charming raised his eyebrows. "If that's true, then you're really a terrible person."

"Cut me a break, it's probably mood swings," Snow White sniffled. "From the looks of me, I've got to be about twenty months pregnant."

Prince Charming slipped into comfort mode. "There's nothing to worry about, baby. The Satanic weirdo in the basement says we'll get back together."

"Yeah, after twenty-eight years stuck in disjointed timelines! Are you still going be into me when you're young and hot and I'm pushing sixty?"
"Ew, yuck! I mean, yeah, of course."

"Smooches!" But their smooches were rudely interrupted. "Ow! I hate to kill the mood, honeymuffin, but I think the baby's coming."

Grumpy appeared in the doorway. "I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but so's the curse. Or it might have just been a fast-moving raincloud. I wasn't a hundred percent sure."

Ominous organ music played in the background, and Grumpy got more confident. "Yeah, that clinches it, it's definitely the curse."

Emma woke up in Mayberry Jail next to Otis the Drunk's long-lost twin. "Where am I?"

"The slammer," he replied.

"Seriously?" Emma exclaimed. "After finding an accident victim lying unconscious in a mangled car, they took her to jail instead of the emergency room? That's it, somebody's gonna get sued!"

Marco, the janitor, began sweeping the floor wistfully. "I have nothing to do with this scene. I just thought I'd come in and randomly let you all know how old and lonely I am."

"Crybaby," growled the drunk.

"Settle down, Leroy, and give us a smile," ordered the sheriff.

Leroy bared his teeth in a twisted grimace.

"Gah!" Graham shuddered. "I'll let you out if you promise never to do that again"

Emma rattled the bars, worried the cameraman had forgotten about her. "Let me out of here or I'll sue!"

Graham was unworried. "Good luck with that. The only lawyer in town is a dude named Gold, and he's even creepier than your son."

Regina barged in, as usual. "Speaking of Henry, he's missing again."

"You lost your kid twice in less than twenty-four hours?" Emma rolled her eyes. "Let me just say one more time, you suck!"

"Shut up, you probably kidnapped him!"

"What, in here?"

Regina started grasping at straws. "You could have tunneled out, kidnapped him, stuffed him in the trunk of your car, and then tunneled back in to make my accusations look crazy!"

"I really don't think you need my help, lady. But if you'll let me out, I'll help you find Henry. I assume the little psycho will be needing his medication by now."

In Henry's room back at the Stepford House, Emma cheerfully cyberstalked her son. "I can't believe you never took Cybercrime 101, Sheriff. What the hell are they teaching in those European schools?"
"I'm starting to see where the kid gets it from," said the Sheriff.

"Oh no, Henry stole his teacher's credit card! I guess he must be Chaotic Good," Emma observed.

At the only school in town, Mary Margaret Blanchard was frolicking happily with her bluebird friends. "Come, my little friends, as we all sing a happy little working song!" Luckily, her students were too mesmerized by her radiance to fling spitwads at the bluebirds like normal children.

Regina barged in, as usual. "You! Sno—uh, Miss Blanchard! How dare you help my sad and troubled son to better understand his origins?"

Mary Margaret blinked. "Huh?"

"Instead of apologizing for my child's act of identity theft or offering to reimburse you, I'm going to blame all this on you!" Regina stormed off, steam pouring out of her ears.

Emma waved awkwardly. "Yo, I'm Emma, Henry's birthmother."

Mary Margaret studied her curiously. "Are you sure you're not my long-lost relative? Because we really look a lot alike."

"I choose not to notice that little detail," said Emma stiffly. "What's up with you and Regina?"

"She's just mad because I gave Henry his Big Book of Deja-Vu. Now he thinks I'm Snow White. Isn't that ridiculous?" Mary Margaret laughed. "A woman with hair as black as ebony, lips as red as blood, and skin white as snow, who likes to frolic with bluebirds, and happens to have a name that means "white"? I don't know where he gets these crazy ideas of his."

"I choose not to notice any of that, either."

In the hallowed halls of Neuschwanstein Castle, Prince Charming held his laboring wife's hand. "Darling, may I just say that for a woman in the advanced stages of labor, your hair and makeup look great!"

"AAAAAAAH!" Snow roared. "I want an epidural, and I want it now!"

"But dear, I thought we agreed that natural childbirth was the best option—"

"Oh SHUT UP! You did this to me! And to top it all off, now we'll have to send the baby through the wardrobe alone and she'll probably grow up to be some jaded cynic who chooses not to notice the curse."

"The wardrobe is almost finished. Can you hold it for a couple of hours? Geppetto's trying to find the perfect shade of varnish to give the wood that just-polished shine."

"AAAAAAAH!"

Geppetto knocked at the door. "The good news is, we're all finished. The bad news is, the materials went a little over than our pre-determined overhead rate, so I'm going to need a raise."

"Fine, whatever," grumbled Charming.
"And one for Pinocchio, too."

"Fine!"

"And that leftover pizza in the Royal Fridge."

"Get out!" Charming flung a vase at the door.

Snow White glanced out the window. "Uh oh, is that Hexxus coming over the horizon?"

Prince Charming squinted. "No, I think it's the Smoke Monster."

Regina's voice drifted through an open window. "It's the curse, you morons!"

"Oh," said Snow. "Well, honeymuffin, I guess you'd better take the baby to the wardrobe. It's almost commercial break; time to move this plot along."

"No! I would rather have us and everyone else trapped in an eternity of misery than be temporarily separated from my baby!" declared the prince.

"If that's true, then you're really a terrible person."

Charming sighed. "Fine, I'll be a selfless ruler and a good father by stuffing my newborn baby in a closet."

As he took the baby and ran, Snow White burst into tears. "I could really go for a Zoloft cupcake right about now."

All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men stormed the castle. "All right men, kill the sweet little baby! And kick any cute little puppies you should run across, if time permits!"

Prince Charming drew his sword dashingly. "Never fear, Papa Wolf is here!"

All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men laughed. "Ah, you don't scare us. You're just a legendary dragonslayer fighting for the life of his only child."

Prince Charming leveled a glare at them. "My name is Honeymuffin! You threatened my daughter! Prepare to die!"

"Yes, my daddy is the coolest, and no, he won't adopt you," said Baby Emma.

One epic swordfight later, Charming was bleeding profusely amidst a heap of human shishkebab. "So, uh, listen kid, I'm really sorry about this, but I've got to stuff you in this magic closet now."

"WAAAAAAH!" the baby howled.

The prince ignored her and slammed the door shut. "You'll understand someday when you have kids of your own." He began to sway drunkenly. "Whew, is that all my blood?" He hit the ground with a dull thud.

Snow White came limping in. "Oh, get over yourself. I just spent four whole minutes in labor and you don't hear me complaining."

Regina barged in, as usual. "Bwa hah hah! I've come to gloat!"
"What, again?" Snow groaned. "Can't it wait? We're a little busy at the moment."

"Suffer, you little gossip!" snarled Regina.

Snow White reached for her migraine medication. "Where are you taking us, anyway?"

"Somewhere horrible, with only one bar!" the Queen laughed evilly.

"If it's so horrible, then why are you coming with us? Why can't you just stay here where you'll be safe and your magic won't be useless?"

"I don't know, Rumplestiltskin wouldn't tell—I mean, mind your own business, brat!"

Their argument was cut short when the Smoke Monster billowed in. "Well, Regina, this has been fun, but I should really be getting back to the Island now. Hope you enjoy the Pine Tree State. CHOMP!"

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Emma found Henry staring wistfully from his Pretty-Pretty Princess Castle. "Yo, kid, your eerily regal teacher told me you'd be pouting here."

"I thought bringing you here would break the curse," Henry sighed. "I never stopped to consider how ridiculous that plan was. I mean, come on, you don't even know what I'm talking about!" Henry lamented. "But that's okay, I know you love me anyway. The Big Book of Deja-Vu told me so. Besides, I'm simply too cute for any mother to resist." He gave her his patented Little Orphan Henry smile.

Emma shielded her eyes. "Stop that! It's giving me an overpowering urge to stay in Storybrooke and buy you a pony."

"Aw, come on. Just stick around for a week and you'll see I'm right about the curse. If you thought Mary Margaret was eerie, just wait till you meet Jefferson!"

"Something tells me I'd rather not."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At the only hotel in town, the managers were locked in yet another catfight. "You're a skank, Ruby!" yelled Granny Lucas.

"How dare you?" shrieked her granddaughter Ruby. "I should move out of here...but I never will, because our little fights are just too entertaining to pass up."

Emma shuffled in awkwardly. "Hey, my kid flashed his patented Little Orphan Henry smile at me, and now I'm stuck here. Are any of your rooms vacant?"

"They're all vacant," said Granny. "Constantly. Which begs the question, where did I get this huge wad of money?"

A guy who somehow managed to look scruffy in Armani snatched said wad from her hand. "Yoink!" A smile broke out on his face when he noticed Emma. "Hey, it's my favorite little pawn. I mean, my favorite little savior. Uh, I mean, my favorite total stranger. Tee hee!"

Emma blinked. "Um, okay?"
Later that night, Henry stared wistfully out of his window back at the Stepford House. "The sun will come out, tomorrow. Bet your bottom dollar that…woah!" In the distance, the Hill Valley Clock Tower clicked back into action, and Henry grinned. "HELL yeah! Goodness takes a licking and it keeps on ticking!"
The Thing You Love Most

Regina obviously knew how the Big Book of Deja-Vu ended, but for some reason, she was reading it in a state of great suspense. "And the Evil Queen said, 'I will wreak a terrible and brutal revenge for whatever it is that you did to me, Snow White! On you, and your little prince, and your werewolf chum, and your preachy little cricket, and your oversized dwarves…' Wait, we already did this part. Henry!"

"Yes, Mom-slash-Great-Grandma?"

"For the last time, stop calling me that! Where are the missing pages of this book?"

"I dunno. Portobello Road?"

"Don't play dumb with me mister, or I'll poison…uh, I mean, ground you," Regina threatened.

"I'd like to see you try!"

Regina was wounded. "An emotional rift seems to be forming between us. Clearly, the best way to remedy that is to take away your most treasured possession, unjustly arrest your favorite person, and cruelly ridicule your beliefs."

Henry pointed over her shoulder. "Is that a hot stable boy behind you?"

"Where?!!" Regina spun around, popping a breath mint hopefully. "Wait. Henry, there's nothing back there but a ticking clock tower."

"Psych!" That was Henry's cue to run.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Later that morning, Regina went to see Emma over at the only hotel in town. "Here, take these apples that are totally not poisoned and go away."

"No," said Emma. "Have you ever heard that word before?"

"Well, not since my overbearing mother—heh, this isn't about me! Now shoo, I've got places to go and people to torture."

"The fact that you're trying to make me leave just makes me want to stay more. Maybe you should try using reverse-psychology on me. Seems like I might respond well to that," Emma hinted bluntly.
"I don't need your suggestions! Manipulation is my department, and so is Henry!"

"You're doing a bang-up job with both," sneered Emma. "That damn clock outside is ticking like a time bomb, and Henry's nuttier than a mental patient slathered in Skippy."

"Henry's going to be fine. I've got him in therapy, and if that doesn't work, there's always my secret padded basement. Now beat it, or I'll be forced to show you the awesome power of a small-town public official."

Emma gave her a funny look. "Lady, the whole Glare of Evil really isn't convincing me of your capacity for maternal love."

After a long, hard day of gloating, Regina energized into her Haunted Mansion. "Ah, lair, sweet lair."

Some Old Man cheerfully offered her a glass full of ugly black sludge. "Want a drink, cupcake? Despite appearances, I'm pretty sure it's not poisonous."

"Do I look like I need a drink?!"

"You look like you need a whole keg, followed by a bottle of horse tranquilizers, but I was trying to be tactful."

Regina threw the glass at his head. "Shut up, Da... I mean shut up, unnamed loving and indulgent older man."

Her magic mirror flickered on. "Boss, while I was at the palace today not stalking you, I couldn't help but notice you swearing revenge on everyone you've ever met and a bunch of people you haven't. So, uh, what's up with that?"

"I'm going to cast the Dark Curse."

"Uh, pumpkin?" ventured Some Old Man. "I don't know if you've noticed, but that spell's name contains the words 'dark' and 'curse'."

"Yeah," the mirror chimed in. "I find a certain amount of evil sexy, but let's not take it too far."

"Oh, go suck some Windex!" Regina snapped, picking up a remote and muting the troublesome gadget. "I have to go to the Forbidden Fortress."

Some Old Man winced. "Wouldn't you rather go to the Meadows of Joy or the Valley of Contentment?"

"Shut up, old man!"

At the unfortunately-named castle, Maleficent and Regina chatted happily about their school days back at dear old Shiz, then got down to business. "So, it's a shame about your latest evil scheme," sneered Maleficent. "Beaten by a necrophiliac quasi-prince, how pathetic is that?"

"Yeah, well, at least my hair doesn't look like a heap of poodle corpses," Regina fired back at her. "Now give me back my curse; I know you're keeping it in your Staff of the Magi +5."
"No way! Even I'm disturbed to think about what you'd do with it, and I'm a complete sicko!"

Regina sprang to her feet, conjuring fire in her hands. "Hand it over or I'll take all the pointy
weapons in this room and fire them at your precious unicorn-puppy!"

Maleficent groaned. "I knew it was a mistake to leave those lying around."

"Yeah, you really should have known better." Regina tied Maleficent up in a hunk of twisted metal
and laughed victoriously. "Or you could have just turned yourself into a dragon and eaten me."

"Damn, I forgot! Is it too late to try that?"

"Fraid so," said Regina, smashing the Staff of the Magi +5 and taking the curse. "So, same time next
Tuesday? I'll bring a quart of Haagen Daz and we can paint each other's toenails."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world, homegirl!"

Regina gathered her expendable minions and organized a villains' convention in the woods. "Roll
call! Blind Witch?"

"Here!" squawked an elderly white Rastafarian.

"Polyphemus the Cyclops?"

"εδό!" the one-eyed monster replied.

"Darth Vader?"

"…" breathed the Sith Lord.

"David the Gnome?" Regina scowled. "Hey, wait a minute, you're not evil!"

"Sorry." The gnome fidgeted guiltily. "I just heard there was going to be free food, and I—"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll deal with you later. Now, I've invited you all here today because, let's face it, being
a fairy-tale villain sucks. Sure, the costumes are great, but we always end up getting defeated by rag-
tag farm boys, teenaged wizards, spoony bards, and other idiots who shouldn't stand a chance against
our might."

"Amen, sister!"

"So, I've come up with a plan that will take us all to a new land. A morally grey realm, where tragic
villains and roguish anti-heroes like us are revered by legions of adoring fangirls. I just need you all
to give me a lock of your hair." She glanced around at the grimy tresses and matted beards of her
colleagues. "And please wash it first."

Dreadlocks, mustaches, and toupees were passed down the line to Regina, who donned latex gloves
to throw them into her cauldron. "All right, now for a pinch of salt, two teaspoons of baking soda,
and my childhood pet's still-beating heart."

Her colleagues crowded eagerly around the cauldron. "Yum!"

"Smells great!"
"Can I have a ventricle?"

Regina swatted their hands with a ladle. "Back off! This is for the Smoke Monster." She waved her hands over the cauldron, laughing maniacally. "Come on, Smokey! Trash this dump! That'll teach Snow White, her stupid sidekicks, and all those people from junior high who used to call me fat!"

But Smokey just peeked haggardly out of the cauldron. "Regina, is that you again? Look, I don't have time for this right now; I'm trying to take out Mr. Eko!" He billowed away in a huff.

David the Gnome burst out laughing. "You call that a curse? You people have got to be the sorriest Bad Guy Club For Villains that I've ever seen!"

"Freeze frame!" Regina growled, transforming him into a seriously creepy lawn statue.

"Are we there yet?" the Blind Witch whined.

"We'll get there when we get there!" Regina snapped.

In Storybrooke, Regina was out in front of the Stepford House gathering some non-poisonous apples, when a smirking admirer came strolling up to her. "Hey, baby, it's me! Your secret crush, Sidney Glass."

"Sidney, for the last time, I don't have a crush on you."

He sneaked an arm around her waist and wiggled his eyebrows playfully. "There's no need to play hard-to-get; you know you want me!"

"Er, no, actually, I'm sleeping with Graham."

"Are you trying to make me jealous? That's so cute!" The reporter chuckled. "So, aren't you going to ask me about my smirk?"

Regina rolled her eyes. "Fine, if it'll get rid of you. What's with the smirk, Sidney?"

Sidney proudly held up the front page of his newspaper. "Stranger destroys ironic sign; in other news, the president was assassinated last night."

"That'd be devastating news, if anybody ever went outside town to see that stupid sign!" Regina rolled up the paper and smacked him in the face with it.

"Oh yeah. I guess I forgot about that."

"Did you dig up any dirt on her?"

"Well, she once cut the tag off a mattress."

"You're the most useless paparazzo I've ever seen! And do you know what I do with things that have no use to me?"

"Put on skimpy lingerie and dance for them?" he guessed hopefully.

"Get out of here before I stab you in the throat with my hedge clippers!"

"Mmm, you're so masterful, my sweet!"
At the only diner in town, Ruby Lucas handed Emma a hot chocolate. The savior pushed it aside. "Thanks, but I ordered a tequila slammer."

"No, this is from your secret admirer."

Emma stormed over to the only attractive single guy in town. "Sheriff Humbert, this is an outrage! How dare you think you can hit on me? Just because you have rugged good looks, tight leather clothing, and a sexy Irish brogue... mmm, where was I going with this?"

Graham's hand hovered near his gun. "I don't know what you're talking about, and you're scaring me a little."

Henry, who had been watching the whole disaster from a neighboring table, coughed awkwardly. "Uh, Emma, I sent the chocolate. Maybe you should come walk me to school before this gentleman arrests you for sexual harassment?"

"You know, you guys could have said something, instead of just watching me make an idiot of myself." Emma glared at Henry, then Ruby.

Her son hauled her out the door. "I think we need a change of subject, before we both die of embarrassment. Let's talk about the curse."

"Okay," Emma agreed, biting into a perfectly red, perfectly symmetrical, possibly plastic apple. "Emma!" Henry yelped. "Did you get that from my mom?"

"Yeah, but don't worry, she specifically told me it's not poisoned."

The little prince buried his face in his hands. "It looks like I've got my work cut out for me. Emma, the first rule of fairy tales is, don't trust powerful women in dark eye makeup. The second is, princesses always need a prince to bail them out. That's where I come in. I've got a plan. I call it Operation Cobra."

"You mean the Allied invasion of western Normandy seven weeks after D-Day?"

"No, this is a different Operation Cobra; one that will cure everyone in town of their amnesia and transport us to a land of wonder and enchantment. Well, and trolls. And lycanthropy. And snails that used to be people. But mostly wonder and enchantment!"

"Wait, what's this about amnesia? Are you sure we're in a fairy tale and not a soap opera?"

"Positive. These pages from my Big Book of Deja-Vu prove it!" He thrust a bundle of paper into her hands. "Look, here's the part where your loving daddy stuffed you in a closet."

"Kid, the fact that this baby looks just like me and has the same name as me doesn't mean anything. There's nothing unusual about my origins. I simply appeared from a tree stump in the woods, carried by a mysterious child in a Pinocchio costume." Emma forced out a laugh.

Henry sighed and headed in to class. "Yeah, this is definitely going to take a while. But deep down, I know you must believe me, or why would you be here?"

"I already explained that! I'm staying because I know it annoys your mom!"

"Sure you are, honey." Mary Margaret approached her with a smile. "So, has the mayor tried to feed
"You one of her 'not poisoned' apples yet?"

"Yeah, what's up with that? Don't you people screen your elected officials for sociopathy?"

"Hm. You know, now that you mention it, I don't remember her ever actually being elected. Whenever anyone asks her about it, she just makes up some lame story about hanging chad in the ballot box. Besides, the only shrink in town is terrified of her."

"Only shrink in town, you say?" Emma headed for Archie Hopper's office.

"Hey, Emma," the good doctor greeted. "Here to work on your advanced case of denial, your abandonment issues, your paralyzing fear of commitment, your extreme sexual aggression, or your reputed alcoholism?"

Emma grimaced. "Poor little Henry. With my genes floating around in his brain, he was doomed to a life of insanity from Day One, wasn't he?"

"You shouldn't call him insane, Emma, even though he totally is. It's his mother's fault. She loves him to the extent that any career politician can feel love, but she's kind of…well…"

"Psychotic," Emma deadpanned.

"Yeah, that's pretty much it. And after that horrible incident when she found those wire hangers in his closet, it got even worse."

"Listen, I know I have no legal relationship to Henry, and that this is a gross violation of every ethical code and confidentiality law in existence, but do you mind if I snoop through his file?"

"A woman I just met wants me to risk jail time, public disgrace, and the destruction of my career for her misguided sense of curiosity?" Hopper shrugged. "Sure, I don't see the harm in that."

"What, seriously? This seems a little too easy." Emma noticed a suspicious lump under the good doctor's shirt. "Are you wearing a wire?"

"Er, no!" he squeaked, sweating profusely. "That's just, uh, my heart! It's grown three sizes because of the good deed I'm doing for you." He shoved the file into her hands. "Here, take it, just get away from me!"

"Wait, why is this file stuck to a giant bait hook?"

"Oh…no reason." He physically shoved her out the door. "Damn, I definitely gained some Dark Side Points for that."

Back at the only hotel in town, Emma sat down to with her easily-won prize. "Look at me, secretly snooping through my son's private thoughts. Maybe I am cut out for motherhood after all," she mused.

There was a knock at the door, and she found the sheriff standing on the other side. "Well, well, well, if it isn't the only attractive bachelor in town! What are you doing in my room? Have you come to do a strip search?" she asked hopefully.

"No, just the regular kind."
"Oh. Well, good," she said insincerely.

"I'm going over to your bed to get Henry's file. Don't try anything; I brought my safety whistle."

"You know this is a set-up, right?"

"Yes, but I'm going to play dumb for a little while because this episode needs to be at least forty-two minutes long."

He slapped a pair of handcuffs on her, and she gave him a look of weary resignation. "For the record, I could easily escape from you, but this is kind of hot, so I'll go along with it for now."

At the only school in town, Regina barged in, as usual. "Excuse me, I need to gloat—I mean, speak to my son for a minute."

Henry groaned. "Mo-om! Coming to my place of business like this is extremely inappropriate! Can't you gloat at home?"

"Oh, rest assured I will. But right now I wanted to let you know that Emma's in jail, so you can start focusing on more important things, like me."

The boy shook his head sadly. "Mom-slash-Great-Grandma, when are you going to learn? Bragging about one's evil deeds, especially to someone as bold and resourceful as me, never turns out well."

The little prince rolled his eyes. "This is the stupidest move you've made since enrolling me in a class taught by your archenemy! And speaking of Mary Margaret, it's time for me to go find her and work the old Charming-Family Charm."

"Smart-mouthed kid," Regina grumbled at her son's retreating back. "I should've gotten a dog."

Downtown at the Mayberry Jail, Graham was snapping mugshots of Emma. "Good, now turn to the left. Now stand on your head. Now dance the Macarena."

Emma glared. Graham shrugged helplessly. "Sorry, but it's standard procedure as of five minutes ago, by special order of the mayor."

"Why do you put up with her and her freaky god complex, anyway?"

"Because evil is sexy, of course."

Henry burst into the station with his freakishly young grandmother in tow. "Hey Emma, I heard you got arrested. You must be the coolest mom in Storybrooke! Way to stick it to the man!"

"Um, thanks?"

Henry was still geeking out. "As awesome as it would be to bust you out of here and go on the run together, I've decided to take a more conservative approach. Miss Blanchard's going to bail you out."

"What? Why?" Emma stared incredulously.

Mary Margaret smiled and shrugged. "Well, the kid flashed his Little Orphan Henry smile at me and I was powerless to resist. Besides, it's Random Acts of Kindness Week."
Henry beamed proudly up at his birth mom. "The Charming Family Charm. It's always been her Kryptonite. So, what do we do now?"

"Well..." Emma turned to Graham thoughtfully. "You say you find evil sexy?"

"Everyone does," the sheriff scoffed. "Just ask the Evil Regals."

"Then Henry, my boy, fetch me a chainsaw!"

Regina was sitting at home, innocently smirking at the walls, when a roar of "Emma SMASH!" rattled her windows. She ran outside and found a woman in a hockey mask hacking at her non-poisoned apple tree with a chainsaw. "Hey! Are you the new gardener? Because if you are, you're trimming those branches much shorter than I like them. Knock it off, or you're not getting a tip from me!"

The vandal pulled off her mask. "No, it's me, Emma."

"Oh." Regina gaped. "You know, I picked you a whole basket of those apples just this morning. If you wanted some more, all you had to do was ask."

"No! I'm trying to intimidate you. Is it working?"

The mayor laughed. "Look, Swan, if you honestly want me to believe that you'll be a stable and positive influence in my son's life, you're not off to a very good start."

"Bite me! It's on, now!"

Back at her empty woodland convention hall, the Evil Queen was incensed. "I can't believe it! Rumplestiltskin's curse is defective! Boy, you can't trust anyone anymore; not even manipulative Satanic weirdos!"

"Maybe it's for the best, buttercup," Some Old Man ventured meekly. "I mean, 'dark' and 'curse' don't go well in the same sentence, let alone the same cauldron."

"Shut up, Da—uh, I mean shut up, unnamed caring and concerned older man. I need help, not loving moral guidance!"

Some Old Man sighed wearily. "I guess you could always go ask Rumplestiltskin for help. That never backfires, right?"

While counting the grains of dirt in his cell for the 2,378th time, Rumplestiltskin noticed a rat on the floor, gnawing on an obviously-phony apple. "Wait a minute. Obviously phony ap—Regina, old friend, is that you?" Gleefully, he lifted his boot and stomped on the queen-turned-rodent.

"Ow!" Regina morphed back into a goth, glowering at the Dark One.

He giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Sorry, dearie, force of habit. Thanks for stopping by. Like my new pad? It's sparkly, yet sinister, just like me!"

"I don't have time for your helium-induced chatter right now. I need to know why your curse isn't..."
"Did you keep the warranty?"

"No, I accidentally ran it through my washing machine," the Queen admitted.

"In that case, I'll need you to do me a favor in return."

"Okay. Do you want me to release your long-lost love from my Dungeon of Doom?" Regina suggested.

"No, we'll save that for the season finale."

"Okay, then. Do you want a toothbrush?"

"Hm. Tempting, but no. In the new land the curse takes us to, I want riches and a mansion."

Is a pink one okay?"

"Hell no!"

"Take it or leave it."

"...Fine. Also, you'll be magically bound to obey my every request, so long as I use the word 'please.' But I won't remember any of that, so you have nothing to worry about."

Regina quirked an impossibly elegant eyebrow. "Are you insane?"

"Of course. You're just now noticing that?" Rumplestiltskin was insulted.

"That's way too risky!" the Queen scoffed. "What if you're more polite in the new land? What if you take an etiquette class? What if you find religion?"

"Hey, if I can agree to a pink house, you can certainly agree to this."

Regina couldn't argue with that. "Fine. Now talk."

"You need to sacrifice a heart."

"I already sacrificed my childhood pet's heart. And I won't be able to reuse it; the Blind Witch took it home in a doggy bag."

Rumplestiltskin jumped up in her face. "You idiot!"

The Queen made a face, turning her nostrils as far from him as possible. "Dude, are you sure you don't want that toothbrush? I'll give it to you for free!"

"No time for that now! You have to sacrifice the heart of the person you love most."

Regina brightened. "Oh, is that all? Then I'll simply go to that secret chamber where I keep my True Love's magically preserved corpse and take his—"

"No! You have to kill your fa—uh, your unnamed patient and protective older man."

After Emma left the Stepford House, Regina sat weeping and hugging her not-poisoned tree stump.
"Stupid savior," she sniffled. "I bet Maleficent and her unicorn puppy would get a kick out of seeing me like this."

Graham surveyed the veggie-carnage with wide eyes. "Uh-oh. Did you forget to tip your gardener again?"

"No, Emma did this."

"Really? Hot!"

"What did you say?" Regina demanded sharply.

"Nothing, my villainous vixen."

"Damn right. Now go arrest her!"

"What, because that strategy has worked out so well for us in the past?" said Graham sarcastically.

"That does it!" Regina snapped. "Someone's not scoring tonight!"

Graham caved like mineshaft full of fairy dust. "Let's not be hasty, my dastardly darling. I'm just concerned about Henry's happiness. Let's face it, between you and Jason Voorhees' kid sister, he's going to end up with mother issues to rival even yours!"

"Since when do I care about anyone else's happiness?" Regina paused. "No, wait, that was the flashback-me."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Emma came out of Granny's and found a boot on her quirky little Volkswagen. "Hey! A boot on your enemy's car is my calling card! What gives?" She took out her cell phone. "Hello, Regina? Listen, if you really want me to leave town, I don't think confiscating my only means of transportation is in your best interests."

"Yeah, you're probably right," Regina agreed much too easily. "Why don't we put an end to this silly feud? Come over to my office and we'll talk; just give me a few minutes to finish polishing my bait hook collection."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Henry's two mommies sat in uncomfortable silence yet again. "So…"

"So…"

"So, this is awkward."

"Incredibly."

"Then let's cut to the chase," Regina suggested. "Are you trying to steal my son?"

"We've already had this conversation. No thanks, he's creepy and delusional."

Regina smiled smugly. "Did you catch all that, Henry dear?"

Henry appeared in the doorway, clutching an Extendable Ear and looking stricken. "You think I'm creepy and delusional? I mean, you've said as much before, but I thought you were just being cynical
like all the other recent Disney protagonists!" The boy ran off crying.

"Bwa hah hah!" Regina cackled triumphantly. "I can't believe you were dumb enough to fall for that. Now Henry will be miserable, traumatized, and mine!"

Emma threw a bait hook at her head. "You've got serious issues, lady!"

"Oh, look who's talking! The human wood chipper!" Regina retorted.

Back at the Haunted Mansion, Regina energized into an incredibly dark hallway. "What a day!" she griped. "First I find out I've got to murder a loved one; now my electricity gets shut off. That bill was only two months overdue!"

Her magic mirror's face flickered from frame to frame. "Hey, boss, despair looks good on you!"

"Shut up, Sid! And stop flickering around; you know I'm prone to photosensitive seizures!" She threw a rock at her glass stalker.

Some Old Man looked worried. "Now you're in for seven years' bad luck."

"It's a little late for that, unnamed understanding and—oh, to hell with this, Daddy!"

"So, did you have a nice chat with your friend Rumplestiltskin?"

"He told me to tear out your heart."

Her father blinked. "Honey, I think it's time you stopped spending time with that young man. I've started to notice that he's becoming a bad influence on you."

"But Daddy!"

"Look, I know girls will be girls. Matricide, serial kidnapping, reanimating corpses; that was all harmless fun. But hurting me? That's taking things too far! I think we need to go find a cricket and get you some counseling."

"I know I've gone so far down the crazy hole that even Jefferson couldn't pull me out. But Snow White cost me my hot stable boy!" Regina fell on her father's shoulder in tears.

"There, now, princess," he soothed. "There are plenty of other hot stable boys in the world. Maybe even ones who think evil is sexy."

"You really think so?" The Queen pondered this. "That does sound tempting…but the curse will take me to a land with internet dating. Sorry, gotta go with Rumplestiltskin on this one." She shoved her hand into his chest and tore out his heart. "Yoink!"

Her father crumpled to the floor. "I knew I shouldn't have dropped out of that parenting class," he groaned with his last breath.

Emma appeared at Mary Margaret's door. "Hey, I just came to repay you the bail money so I won't have to hunt myself down like a dog."

"Thanks. You want to come in for a cup of cinnamon cocoa? It's delicious, and even more accurate
Mary Margaret sat her down, poured her some cocoa, and offered her a cookie. Then she licked her thumb and rubbed a smudge of chocolate at the corner of Emma's mouth. "Don't forget to use a napkin, honey."

Emma narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "Why are you acting so motherly toward me? Have you been talking to Henry?"

"No, his mom doesn't approve of him talking to anyone but her. Off the record, you really ought to do something about her."

"Noted," Emma sighed glumly.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Henry sat pouting in Dr. Hopper's office. "Are you sure you don't want to talk?" Hopper prodded. "Personally, I don't care. I get paid either way."

"You know my mom doesn't approve of me talking to anyone but her," Henry reminded him flatly.

"Oh, yeah."

Emma unceremoniously barged into the office. "Hey, Doc, you really ought to invest in a lock for this door."

"I noticed. Sorry about that whole false imprisonment thing. Regina threatened to make a coat out of Pongo if I didn't cooperate."

"Water under the bridge, homie," said Emma. "So, Henry, about that curse?"

"Go to hell."

"Look, I don't really think you're crazy. I was just using reverse psychology. I'm a lot more subtle than your mom that way."

Henry brightened. "You're using the Charming Family Charm on me, aren't you?"

"Is it working?"

"Yeah." The boy grinned. "Lucky for you, I didn't just inherit the Charming Family Charm; I also inherited my grandma's weakness for it."

"Excellent. So, I'm going to burn these pages from your Big Book of Deja-Vu now. Er, because I believe you."

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At her secret woodland convention hall, Regina added her father's heart to the cauldron. "Smokey, haul your lazy butt out here! Don't make me break out my bait hooks!"

Smokey burst out of the flames in the shape of a twister. "Hey, Regina. Sorry for the delay; I've been in Kansas tossing houses on witches."

"What? And you didn't take me along?"
"You wouldn't have enjoyed yourself; Glinda invited herself over. So, I suppose you still want me to avenge you on Snow White, her friends, and all those people who called you fat in junior high?"

"Bingo. And also that waiter who spit in my Coke last week."

Smokey billowed off, cursing heroes and sickening asthmatics throughout the land, and Regina choked out a feeble evil laugh. "Bwa hah…hah."

Out in front of the Stepford House, Regina was attempting to duct tape her hedge sculpture's head back into place. "What I need is a good Reparo spell. Of all the worlds to trap myself in, what the hell possessed me to pick one without magic?"

Mr. Gold wandered along, whistling innocently. "Hey, Regina." He noticed the severed head. "Your mom come to visit?"

"No, Emma did this, and don't you dare say that's hot!"

"Wouldn't dream of it, dearie."

"Anyway, she'll leave town now that I've destroyed her relationship with Henry and taken that ridiculous boot off her car. Ha! That'll teach her to give me the precious gift of motherhood!" Regina gloated, smearing her mangled apple tree with crazy glue.

"Don't count your apples before they're poisoned," Gold admonished. "I just saw her and that kid I hocked you downtown playing a rousing game of Slugbug."

"Speaking of that kid you hocked me, I think he's defective. Pre-teen boys are supposed to be unconditionally obedient and respectful! Can't I trade him in for a puppy? Or a hot stable boy?"

"Did you keep the warranty?"

"No, I accidentally ran it through the washing—hey, wait a minute! Do you know something you're not telling me? Because you're smiling, and you only do that when you're plotting or eating escargot."

Gold laughed. "What are you insinuating? That I purposely hocked you a defective kid as part of an insanely elaborate gambit to free myself from some non-existent curse? Because that's crazy."

"Yeah I guess you're right."

"Of course I am. And Regina?"

"Hm?"

Gold giggled and dumped a jar of body glitter over his head. "PLEASE!"

"...Crap."
Snow Falls

A medieval limo rolled through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia. "Are we there yet?" whined Princess Abigail.

"For the 577th time, no," her fiancé sighed wearily.

"Well we would be if you'd just stopped for directions like I asked you to! Ugh, I hate men who aren't named Frederick."

The quasi-prince picked up his copy of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* and searched frantically for something to say to get himself out of this mess. "Uh, my honeyed harridan, have I told you lately that you're looking thin?"

"Don't change the subject, dragon-bait! I told you we should have taken the Troll Road."

"I value your input, my sweet shrew, but my common sense tells me that traveling on a road named after trolls is just asking for trouble."

Abigail blinked. "Common sense? What kind of fairy-tale prince are you?"

A tree fell into the road and ended their conversation before it could get any more awkward. "There is a God," the quasi-prince breathed gratefully, jumping out of the carriage to smother the fallen tree with kisses.

The princess looked out a window at him, dismayed. "I'm still not a hundred percent clear on whether Christianity exists around here, but isn't there some sort of convent I could join to get out of this marriage?"

"Ow!" Her fiancé pulled a splinter out of his lip. "Hey, some bandit cut this tree down deliberately in order to ambush us!"

The guards waited expectantly for their prince to lead them to the princess' defense, but he just stood with his back turned to the carriage for several long moments. "Uh, Your Highness," the captain finally ventured, "shouldn't you be protecting your bride?"

"Shh!" the reluctant bridegroom hissed. "If we make her look like an easy target, maybe the bandits will haul her away for us. If anyone asks, we'll just say we were in the bathroom when it happened."

The guards were aghast. "That's so cold it makes your father look like a cuddly teddy bear!"

"Oh, don't worry, she won't be harmed," the quasi-prince reassured them. "Don't you guys ever read romance novels? A beautiful young princess riddled with romantic angst, in the clutches of some rougishly bold highwayman? I give it five minutes before they start making out, and maybe three days before they decide to elope."

Right on cue, a cloaked figure swooped down on the carriage. Unfortunately, it absconded with the prince's fancy man-purse instead of his betrothed. "Hey, aren't you forgetting something?" he yelled desperately, giving chase. "Wait up, short and curvaceous man!"

After a long and musical chase, he managed to tackle the bandit and rip off her riding hood that wasn't red. "Hey, wait, you're a chick!"
Snow White rolled her eyes. "Don't act so surprised."

"...I guess this means you're not interested in stealing my woman?"

"No thanks."

"Damn! Could this day get any worse?" he griped.

"I'm afraid so," said Snow White, smacking him upside the head with a conveniently placed rock.

At the only diner in Storybrooke, Mary Margaret Blanchard was babbling like a brook full of cicadas. "Yes, well, I'm an elementary school teacher by day, and my hobbies include volunteering at the hospital, frolicking with my bluebird friends, and knitting fuzzy sweaters for orphaned puppies."

The only doctor in town yawned. "Sorry babe, but the whole sweet and innocent thing just doesn't do it for me. Invest in some stiletto heels and a tight miniskirt and then maybe I'll bother to at least pretend I'm listening to you."

Mary Margaret sighed. "Remind me again why I agreed to go out with you in the first place?"

"Well, I am the only man in town who's not married, short, consumed by evil, or ten years old," Whale pointed out.

"Ugh. I wish I was gay," Mary Margaret lamented, going home to eat some Zoloft cupcakes and check her Eharmony homepage for the umpteenth time.

Outside, Emma was asleep in her microscopic car; her feet hanging out the window with a red flag tied around them. "Emma? You're sleeping on the street and Regina hasn't bothered to have you arrested for vagrancy? She must be off her game today."

Emma shrugged. "Eh, it's not so bad out here. If Henry ever wants to sleep over, I can always strap him to the roof."

"Uh, right. Well, if that doesn't work out for you, you can always come crash at my place."

"No offense intended, Mary Margaret, but I'd rather crash in the gutter than at your place. I'm not interested in friends. Or family. Or casual acquaintances, or Facebook followers, or any other type of human contact that doesn't involve violence."

Mary Margaret raised an eyebrow. "You're really messed up, but the offer still stands. I'm so pathetically lonely that even you seem like good company.

The next day at the only hospital in town, Mary Margaret handed out volunteer work to her students. "All right, Jimmy, hang up these streamers, and Suzy, hand out these party hats. We need to cheer this place up; intensive care isn't supposed to be depressing! Any questions?"

Jimmy raised his hand. "I've got one. Instead of feeding birds or comforting the sick, can we actually learn something tomorrow? I don't know how much longer I can hide my illiteracy from my parents."
Mary Margaret laughed. "Oh, Jimmy, until someone clears all the mysterious smoke and screams out of the library, I'm afraid you'll have no use for literacy around here."

She noticed Henry covertly spraying a coma victim with Old Spice. "Henry, what are you doing?"

Henry popped a mint in the patient's mouth. "Mr. Doe sure is cute when he's comatose, isn't he?" the boy hinted.

Mary Margaret regarded the near-corpse thoughtfully. "Actually, now that you mention it, yeah. And awfully buff and tanned for a guy who's been languishing in bed for several years. And look at his mouth! Not a hint of drool."

"Kissable, isn't it?" Henry took out his boom box and put on a recording of "Unchained Melody".

Mary Margaret finally snapped herself out of it. "Sweetie, I may be hard up, but I'm not yet hard up enough to make out with an unwilling corpse. Check back with me in a couple of days, though."

The little prince grinned knowingly, giving his unconscious grandfather a comradely fist bump. "Aw yeah, this Grandparent Trap is on!"

After school, Henry took Emma to his Pretty-Pretty Princess castle to show her the Big Book of Deja-Vu for the umpteenth time. Emma was getting bored. "Henry, honey, as much as I love our secret mother-son book club, can't we read one of my books for a change? Look, I brought the Hunger Games. It's a lot like our lives too; a cynical, self-reliant man-huntress pitting herself against an incredibly well-dressed dictator."

"Not now, Emma! I've found your long-lost dad. He's in a coma."

"Long-lost dad? Coma?" Emma chuckled. "Henry, have you been watching Days of Our Lives again?"

"No, I'm serious! The Evil Queen made all the men in town idiots, married, comatose, or all of the above in order to keep Snow White from living happily ever after with her prince."

Emma scratched her head. "If that was her goal, then why didn't she just kill one or both of them? Seems like it would have saved a lot of trouble all around."

Henry shrugged. "Knowing Mom, she was probably too busy gloating when the opportunity presented itself. Anyway, we need to hook the drowsy couple up with a blind date."

"I guess that's my cue to go work the Charming Family Charm on Mary Margaret, then?"

"Bingo."

Mary Margaret gave her a funny look. "So...you want me to date a guy who eats through a needle? What am I supposed to do, take him to dinner at a blood bank?"

"No, just read him a few episodes from the Big Book of Deja-Vu. And for the record, this is all Henry's idea. The little dude's a few trolls short of a bridge, but I don't want to be the one to break it to him."

"No, you're giving me that honor. Thanks, very thoughtful of you," Mary Margaret grumbled, her mood as close to anger as any fairy tale princess could get.
Emma sighed heavily. "Time to break out the big guns." She brandished a white hobby horse and a toy sword. "Comfort Mode!"

Mary Margaret melted like a bejeweled egg in a dragon's stomach. "Give me that book and cancel my mail-order husband!" she cried, running to the hospital as fast as her legs would carry her.

Emma looked down at her props in awe. "Wow. Maybe there's something to this Charming Family Charm stuff after all."

Mary Margaret sat down on her dozing date's bed. "So, uh, just to clarify here, I'm not crazy. I just hang around a lot of crazy and it's starting to rub off on me."

"…" drooled the patient.

Mary Margaret relaxed. "I like you, mysterious-yet-familiar stranger. You're not always judging me, your eyes can't roam because they're shut, and you're already proving to be a more interesting conversationalist than Whale."

"…"

She smiled adoringly. "And you're such a good listener! So, I read an interesting book the other day. Would you like me to share it with you?"

"…"

"I'll take that as a yes. Do you mind holding my purse while I read?"

"…"

"Thanks, baby." She hung her purse on his limp, lifeless foot and opened up the Big Book of Deja-Vu. "Mmm, I think I'm in love!"

Four hours later, she was snuggled contentedly up against her new boy toy's motionless shoulder. "…And then Snow White and her necrophiliac quasi-prince rode off into the sunset together, proving that even coma victims and the weirdos who love them can have happy endings."

The patient applauded enthusiastically.

Mary Margaret jumped. "Ahh, you're alive! I mean, yay, you're alive!"

Being the only doctor in town, Whale was stuck at the hospital twenty-four hours a day. He appeared at the patient's door in his pajamas. "Everything okay, here?"

"Back off, Whale," she snapped. "I've got a real man now, one who knows how to treat a lady!"

"Er, not to judge your choice of lifestyle or anything, but that guy's in a coma."

"Is not! He just moved."

"Sorry, but this monitor says he didn't, and I find the word of a piece of plastic and metal much more reliable than the word of a caring and concerned human being. Now if you'll excuse me, I don't want to miss the end of the Frankenstein marathon." He went back to his office, took a beer out of the
cadaver fridge, and stretched out on the exam table to call Regina. "Hey, Regina, you know how you told me to call you if anything ever happened with Sleeping Beau over here? Well, he seems to be waking up, despite all that NyQuil you made me sneak into his IV."

Snow White packed her ill-gotten contraband into a discreet huge sack covered in dollar signs and hit the road. "Sunny Acapulco, here I come!"

Two feet from the front door, however, she found herself scooped up in a net and swinging from a tree branch. "Whee!" she cried in delight. "Again!"

Her freshly-scarred quasi-prince emerged irritably from the shadows. "Stop enjoying yourself! You're supposed to be scared!"


"Beg and plead and beat your dainty fists across my manly chest all you want," he crowed smugly. "I won't release you until you give me back my treasured Action League Secret Decoder Ring."

"Can't you just trade in five more cereal box tops and get a new one?"

"Well, I had this one encrusted with rare diamonds. I was hoping to slip it on my fiancée's finger in order to make her more attractive as bandit bait."

"Well, aren't you a real Prince Charming?" Snow White sneered.

The quasi-prince was insulted. "Hey, I have a name, you know."

"Really?"

"…No."

Snow White chuckled. "It was just a joke, honeymuffin. No one could blame you for wanting to unload that squawking hypotenuse. I could hear her nagging you from halfway to Saskatchewan."

"Hey, you can't talk that way about the woman I lov…lik…toler…uh, endure."

"Yeah, yeah," Snow White waved him off, bored. "You don't have to rationalize on my account. I think love is a load of baloney."

Prince Charming shushed her. "Listen, did you hear that? A million hopeless romantics just cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced."

The princess rolled her eyes. "Can the sweet talk, Romeo. Just look around you! Captain Hook, the Evil Queen, Grumpy the Dwarf; everyone in the world who is evil or even slightly bad-tempered got that way by falling in love."

A smile crept across Charming's face. "Oh, I get it now. You're my True Love!"

Snow White somehow managed to turn even paler than usual. "Excuse me?"

Charming laughed merrily. "Oh, don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. Great romances always start out like this. An attractive, good-natured man and an emotionally jaded woman thrown together by circumstances beyond their control; playful banter, minor conflict…it's all so obvious!"
"This is absurd! I have no romantic interest in you! I think you're lower than a toad covered in pond scum!"

The prince grinned knowingly. "Julia Roberts always says the same thing. So, do you want to go through with this little quest, or shall we skip all that and get right to the making out?" Eyes alight with hope, he smeared on some chapstick.

"Ew!" shrieked the fugitive princess.

"I take it you'd prefer to spend some more time building up our relationship first? Fine, I can respect that." Charming took a wanted poster out of his pocket. It bore Snow's picture, along with the words *Wanted, for the heinous crime of being slightly more attractive than the Queen. Also treason.* "We'll play hardball for now. Help me find my man-purse or I'll drag you off to Ye Olde Police Station!"

"Look, I don't have your ring anymore. I hawked it to some trolls in exchange for a fake ID."

"Trolls? Why were you conducting business with trolls?"

"Because I couldn't find any imps."

"Fair enough. Let me cut you down from there and we'll be on our way."

Since they were still playing hardball, Charming was unable to catch her in his arms for an impromptu embrace, and she hit the ground with a *splat.* "Are you all right my swee—my swashbuckling foe?"

"No," she groaned. "I think you broke my smolder."

Henry met Emma at the only diner in town with a clothespin on his nose. "Emma?" he ventured nasally. "I don't want to offend you, but you've been wearing that same set of clothes for three weeks now, and they're getting more than a little funky. Here, put on this shirt I swiped from Mom. It still reeks of arsenic, but that beats whatever you smell like."

"Thanks, kid. So, now that you and I are bonding, why hasn't your mom barged in to arrest me again?"

"I told her I was at the video arcade."

"Video arcade? Do those even exist anymore?"

"No, but even Mom can't fight the Charming Family Charm," Henry bragged. "Speaking of which, I can't wait to hear what happened with Miss Blanchard and her somnolent suitor."

"Now Henry," Emma said gently, "despite your…uh, our ridiculous delusions, there's no way in hell that your…uh, our idiotic scheme is going to work."

"Henry, your idiotic scheme totally worked!" Mary Margaret squealed. "I've been up all night carving MMB luvs ZZZ into every tree trunk in town. Little buddy, you're better than *Love Connection!*"

"Mary Margaret!" Emma growled. "You're supposed to be crushing his fantasies right now!"

"Oh, crush 'em yourself. I've got a wedding to plan!"

Henry slam-dunked an imaginary basketball. "Swish! My master plan is 3/22nds of the way
complete."

"Henry! Mary Margaret! You guys are being—"

"Talk to the hand, Emma," Mary Margaret interrupted. "Henry's my Love Doctor now. So what's your prescription, Love Doctor?"

Henry thought it over. "Well, Mr. Doe's been asleep a long time. I'll bet he's been dreaming of a True Love's Kiss."

"Sounds good to me!" Mary Margaret giggled. "And Henry? If this works out, you can consider yourself excused from homework for the rest of fourth grade."

"Yay! I love you, Grandma!"

At the only hospital in town, Mary Margaret found her drowsy dreamboat's bed empty and covered in police tape. "No!" she wailed. "I've lost my man to forces beyond my control for reasons I don't fully understand!"

Regina walked in with the only doctor in town and the only cop in town, sniggering none-too-subtly. "Karma sucks, doesn't it?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, nothing, casual acquaintance of mine," said Regina innocently.

"Mayor Mills, what are you doing here?" Emma wanted to know.

Regina smirked. "Mayor Mills is everywhere, baby. The sooner you learn that, the happier you'll be. Now give me back my kid and my shirt!"

"Okay."

Emma began to strip off the blouse, and Regina noticed Graham looking on with undisguised interest. "Um, on second thought, Swan, you can keep it."

"What's going on here?" Mary Margaret demanded. "What have you people done with my future husband?"

"Calm down," said Regina. "There's nothing suspicious going on here. The coma patient simply decided to go for a midnight stroll."

"And, uh, what's your interest in all of this?" Emma asked skeptically.

"I saved his life when he first got injured. I was showing…uh, you know, that thing where you choose to be nice when you don't have to be."

"Mercy?" supplied Dr. Whale.

"Yeah, that's it. Because I'm so full of…what's the word…dispassion?"

"Compassion."

"Right, that. Now come along, Henry. If you're determined to forge a relationship with your biological family in spite of my insecurities, there's only one thing left for me to do."
"Accept it and support me in my decision?"

"No, lock you in your room for the next eight years. Or until I can kill Emma and make it look like an accident; whichever comes first."

"Oh, please, Mom!" Henry tapped his head. "This mind was able to see through the fabric of the most powerful and convoluted curse ever created. Do you really think any lock in this world can hold me?"

Regina's face fell. "It's times like this I wish I'd asked Gold for a special needs kid."

Mary Margaret raised her hand meekly. "Um, as fascinating as the mayor's relationship with her baby mama is, am I the only one who still cares about the dying man on the loose?"

"It's looking that way, yes," said Graham succinctly.

Mary Margaret got an idea. "Psst, Sheriff? I couldn't help but notice you ogling Emma earlier. Are you aware that a good manhunt is her idea of a perfect evening?"

Graham perked right up. "The search is on!"

He banged on the door of the surveillance room. "Open up in the name of the law, and two lay citizens with no authority whatsoever. We need to see your security tapes."

"No prob," said Officer Sleepy. "Privacy and due process have no place in this town under Mayor Mills' watch." He popped a tape in the VCR and handed out popcorn.

"Wait a minute," said Emma. "This isn't a surveillance video. This is Grey's Anatomy, Season Two!"

"Fine, fine, here's the real one."

John Doe appeared onscreen, staggering around in a daze. "I will always find…goo? No, that's not right. Maybe a walk will clear my mangled, concussed head."

Mary Margaret smiled wistfully. "Mm, he's even cuter with his gross motor skills restored. We've got to find him!"

Graham sighed. "Well, considering there's three of us, and several dozen square miles of rugged woodland terrain to search, and we've already lost the daylight, it shouldn't take more than six months to a year."

"Yeah, Graham, you really should have invested in a staff at some point," said Emma.

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Snow White was getting tired. "Hey Charming? My feet hurt. Can we finish up this hike with a montage?"

Charming lit up. "Can it have romantic scenery and soft background music?"

"Okay, I guess."

Some hours, days, or weeks later, Charming called for a time out. "Hey, is that a jar of weed hanging around your neck? You've been holding out on me!"

"Actually, it's supposed to be rare fairy dust, though that may not be true. A rather shady-looking ogre was fencing it out of the trunk of his car."
"Fairy dust?" said Charming. "Then why don't we just dump it on our heads, think happy thoughts, and fly to the Troll Bridge? The sooner we get there, the sooner we can get to the making out."

"No, it's not the good kind of fairy dust. It's the kind that turns you into a CGI cockroach."

Charming grinned slyly. "And you didn't think to use it on me? Heh, you must have subconsciously loved me at first sight!"

"Oh, get over yourself!" Snow White laughed. "I don't need rare magic to squish you; the rock worked just fine."

Charming's grin didn't falter. "Hey, that's cool, baby, I'm not threatened by strong women."

Snow White was ready to explode. "That's it! Hit on me again, and so help me, you're replacing the Queen as number one on my revenge list!"

The quasi-prince's eyebrows shot up. "Revenge list? Are you sure your name is Snow White? It's starting to look like Ethically Grey would suit you better."

"Oh, quit judging me, you overgrown Boy Scout! My stepmom drove me to this by sending her sexy Irish henchman to kill me, murdering my father with her mirror's pet snake (long story), and lowering my curfew to ten o'clock!"

"Harsh. Did she have a reason, or was she just doing it for the evulz?"

"She blames me for ruining her life."

"Wow," said Charming. "I know this is a very personal question coming from some random guy who jumped you in the woods, but did you?"

"Yes, you tactless wonder. But I'm not supposed to know about that at this point in my life, so act surprised if anyone mentions it to you."

"Gotcha."

Several montages later, Snow and Charming found a river. "Hey, Charming, since I didn't have the foresight to bring a canteen on this trans-national voyage of mine, can we stop here and get a drink of water?"

"A wanted criminal with a history of violence towards me wants me to escort her to edge of a fast-flowing river filled with jagged rocks?" Charming shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

Snow White was preparing to tell the quasi-prince he'd dropped a contact lens in the water, but that wasn't necessary. He was already bent over the raging current with his back to her. "Man, this is way too easy," she snickered, kicking him into the river.

"Gah!" shrieked Charming as the rapids devoured him alive. "What's the big idea?! I'm wearing silk, here!"

Snow White shook her head ruefully. "Sorry Charming, but you left me no choice. It was either kill you or be mildly inconvenienced for a few more hours." Without further ado, she turned her back on the drowning prince and skipped off in a flurry of music and bluebirds.

She didn't get five steps down the road, however, before All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men appeared ironically in her path. "Not so fast, Whitey!"
Snow White groaned. "Karma sucks."

Graham and his nosy civilians combed their way through a tangle of West Coast foliage, with Emma screaming every few seconds. "Ah! A grizzly bear!"

"No, Emma, that's just a tree," Graham corrected.

Emma blushed. "Sorry, I just—ah! A pack of bloodthirsty wolves!"

"No, Emma, it's just a rock."

"Uh, yeah, I knew that. I was just testing—ah! A Bengal tiger!"

"That's just a tree, Emma."

"What, another one?"

"There are a lot of trees here. That's why it's called a forest," Graham grated, frowning at Mary Margaret. "I thought you said she was into manhunts?"

"Let's change the subject to something less awkward," Mary Margaret suggested. "Emma, I understand you were abandoned at birth. Care to share your innermost thoughts on the subject?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, Henry tells me cyberstalking runs in your family. Did you ever track down your parents?"

Emma thought it over. "Hard to say. Henry says I have, and while he may be mildly schizophrenic, the kid seems to know more than Wikipedia and Alex Trebek put together."

"Including how to dismantle a combination lock from the inside!" the boy in question boasted, emerging from the woods with a screwdriver and a grappling hook.

The Queen's men got up in Snow White's face, grinning evilly, because that's what guys in black uniforms do. "Sorry princess, but you're leaving us no choice. It's either kill you or live without a mansion and a speedboat."

Snow White snickered under her breath. "If I were you, I'd be spending the reward money on a new uniform. I think your hat needs a shave."

"Oh, that does it!" One of the guards raised his knife to kill her, but was felled by a mysterious bullet. The guards recoiled in horror. "Look out on that ridge! It's the Lone Ranger!"

"It's the Sundance Kid!"

"No! It's the Prince With No Name!"

"Damn straight!" shouted the prince in question. "And while I'm not entirely sure who you are, the fact that you're wearing black and hitting a girl must mean that you deserve to die. Hasta la vista, baby!"

One epic swordfight later, Snow White was staring at him with new interest. "Wow. Your violent
tendencies are kind of hot when they're not directed at me. I'm think I'm ready to skip ahead to the making out scenes now."

"Well, I'm not!" Charming snapped. "You left me to die!"

"Oh, are you still going on about that? It was almost five minutes ago."

"Henry, go home," Emma commanded.

"No."

Emma faltered. "I wasn't expecting you to say that. Hey Graham, as a police officer and friend of the family, don't you have an obligation to get this young runaway home?"

"No."

Emma threw up her hands. "Well, I'm simply out of ideas! Clearly the only course of action left is to let the mentally unbalanced ten-year-old come along on the manhunt."

"Why don't you take him home, Emma?" Graham suggested. "Apart from the occasional scream, you're not contributing much to the search."

"Wait!" Henry pleaded. "I can't go home yet. The Love Doctor needs to consult with his patient first."

Mary Margaret perked up. "The Love Doctor's never steered me wrong before. Let's hear it."

"You're coming on too strong," Henry explained. "You need to play it cool for a while and wait for him to come to you."

"Aw, that's no fun!" Mary Margaret whined.

"Don't worry, it won't take long, he's totally into you."

"Henry, that's so absurd!" Mary Margaret giggled. "Say it again."

Graham cleared his throat loudly. "I hate to interrupt this issue of Dear Abby, but I thought you guys might like to see this." He held up a hospital bracelet covered in gory red stains.

Emma blanched. "What is that?"

"Ketchup?" Henry suggested, earning many stares. "Hey, I'm just trying to be optimistic!"

Snow White ditched her horse at the side of the road. "Since we're going to meet such dangerous creatures, I think it's only logical to abandon our best means of fleeing."

"Naturally."

"Shut up."

"Yes, ma'am."

She led him out onto the Troll Bridge. "Baa! Baa!" she bleated. "It's me, the biggest Billy Goat Gruff!"
Three monstrous humanoids appeared, wearing bibs and toting a barbecue grill. "Aw, man, I can't believe we fell for that stupid trick of yours a twelfth time."

Charming was fascinated. "Hey, cool, orcs!"

"We're not orcs, we're trolls," sniffled one of the creatures indignantly.

"Yeah, what are you saying? That all green people look alike to you?" The troll scowled at Snow White. "What are you doing with this racist jerk?"

"Don't mind the Nameless Wonder," said Snow. "He's just my…uh…love slave!"

"Am not!"

"Shut up, Charming!"

"That's it!" roared the troll. "If we don't get an apology, we're totally eating you."

"Hey, you can't threaten Snow White," Charming protested, breaking out his sword and six-gun. "I'm the only one who's allowed to do that! Hasta la vista, baby!"

Snow White made a break for it, but stopped short when she noticed Charming wasn't behind her. "Aw, shoot! Charming's badass enough that he could probably get out of this on his own, but if I leave him to die a second time, he's never going to agree to that makeout scene." Reluctantly, she trudged to her prince's defense.

The trolls had Charming trussed to their grill and were fumbling with a bottle of lighter fluid. "You know, by eating me, you're just reinforcing a negative stereotype," the prince pointed out mildly.

"We're willing to take that risk. Royal blood is the sweetest of all," growled the head troll.

"I don't suppose you'd believe me if I told you I was adopted?"

"No."

"Rats!"

Snow White lobbed her magic grenade at the creatures. "Think fast, suckers!"

The trolls transformed into slimy black insects, and Charming shuddered. "Sad as it is, I think that actually made them prettier."

Graham and his nosy civilians found John Doe passed out under the Troll Bridge. "There he is!"

"I told you," sighed Henry. "Why doesn't anyone ever listen to me until it's too late?"

"NO!" wailed Mary Margaret, dragging her unconscious Adonis onto dry land. "You can't die now! I just deleted all my online dating profiles for you! Get your soul back into your body this instant!" she commanded, beginning CPR.

"Don't look at the corpse, Henry," Emma admonished, shielding her son's eyes. "Ugh, I'm starting to see your mom's point of view about me being a bad influence in your life."

"Don't worry, Emma," Henry chirped serenely. "CPR may only have a fourteen percent success rate when performed by a layperson outside a hospital setting, and Mary Margaret may be using the
outdated rescue-breathing method, which has been shown to cut a patient's chance of survival in half, but this is true love we're talking about. Grandpa's going to be just fine."

Mary Margaret blushed awkwardly. "So, I'm going to mash my lips against yours now. But it's totally for the purposes of breathing, and not making out."

"Keep telling yourself that, honey," the patient wheezed.

Mary Margaret jumped. "Ahh, you're alive! I mean, yay, you're alive!" She flung her arms around his neck. "My dear, sweet…what's your name?"

"Beats me. You can just call me baby."

"First a coma, now amnesia?" Emma groaned. "Henry, are you absolutely positive this is a fairy tale and not a soap opera?"

"Um…yes?" said Henry uncertainly.

John Doe cleared his throat loudly. "Ahem. Can I get some pants, here?"

They rushed him back to the hospital, where Mary Margaret began thumbing through the phone book to look for a wedding planner. "Mm, I've always wanted to be a June bride! And my darling what's-his-name is going to look so dashing in the tux I've picked out for him."

Regina barged in, as usual. "Not so fast, casual acquaintance of mine! Your darling what's-his-name is totally married."

"If you care at all, Regina, your missing child is right here," Emma interrupted. Regina ignored her, too busy attempting to burn a hole in Mary Margaret's head with her Glare of Evil.

Snow White and Prince Charming strolled toward Neuschwanstein Castle™ as slowly as their feet would carry them. "So, it's a real shame we haven't had time for that makeout scene," Snow lamented.

"Don't worry," said Prince Charming, slipping into comfort mode. "We'll meet again. I have faith in the magic of tropes."

"That's sweet," Snow White giggled. "But for now, you'd best be getting back to Bridezilla."

"Speaking of which, you wouldn't happen to know of any lonely male highwaymen I could contact about her?"

"Sorry, no."

Charming sighed. "Well, I'll come up with something."

"You'd better," said Snow, writing her phone number on his arm.

"So let me get this straight," said Mary Margaret. "You're married to my drowsy dreamboat?"

"His name's David," Kathryn corrected.

"David? He looks more like a James to me."
"Really?"

"...No," Mary Margaret scowled. "So you just left the poor guy here to die alone? I'd certainly never do anything like that!" She tried to hide her glee. "Clearly, you're a coldhearted witch who doesn't deserve him, and he'd be better off with me."

"Actually, I have a very reasonable explanation," said Kathryn, "and I love him as much as I could possibly love any man who isn't named Frederick."

Mary Margaret's shoulders slumped in defeat. "I really wish you were easier to hate."

"Bwa hah hah!" cackled Regina. "I mean, aw, aw, aw! This is all so beautiful. My heart is filled with...you know, the opposite of vindictiveness?"

"Forgiveness?" Emma supplied.

"Yeah, whatever. Come on, Henry. Since the padlocks clearly aren't working on you, you're sleeping in my money safe tonight."

"Again?" The little prince groaned. "All, right, but first the Love Doctor needs to make out one last prescription." He turned to Mary Margaret, who was sadly tearing up a notebook covered in "MMB + ZZZ 4-Ever" doodles. "Trust the tropes, Mary Margaret. He may be a virtual stranger with a loving wife and a serious mental illness, but that doesn't mean he's not a great catch."

"Hold up," said Emma to Regina. "Don't think I didn't notice that poorly-disguised evil laugh of yours, Regina. I know you're up to something."

"Yeah? Well, I have Henry and you don't. So nyah!" Regina stuck out her tongue and left.

Later that night, Mary Margaret woefully spun her diamond-encrusted Action League Secret Decoder Ring. "Tell me, secret decoder ring, will I ever find true love?"


"Aw, you're no help!" Mary Margaret griped, getting up to answer the door.

"Hey, Mary Margaret." Emma greeted sheepishly. "I'm tired of crashing in the Love Bug, and Henry thinks you need to be on suicide watch for a while. Is that spare room still available?"

"You're welcome to stay," Mary Margaret replied, "provided you don't set me up on any more blind dates."
The Price of Gold

One night in yet another nondescript monarchy, Cinderella was glumly sweeping her yard with her Nimbus 2000, when a little winged creature appeared over her shoulder. "Aaah!" the girl screamed, swatting at it with her broomstick. "That new bug zapper must be defective!"

"Hey!" the creature howled, straightening her wings indignantly. "I'm not a mosquito, I'm your fairy godmother, so knock it off or I'll leave and let you solve your own damn problems for a change!"

Cinderella eyed the fairy quizzically. "You're my fairy godmother? How is that even possible? You look younger than I am."

"Yes, well, I have an excellent plastic surgeon. Now then, I can't help but notice that you're lonely, broke, and kind of grimy. I can solve all those problems with three simple words. Bippity boppity-!

The fairy suddenly exploded in a flash of glitter and botox.

"Bippity boppity what?!" Cinderella cried frantically.

"If you have to ask, you'll never know," Rumplestiltskin trilled, picking up the fairy's wand.

Cinderella was outraged. "Hey, dude, you just killed my fairy godmother! That woman has been a kind and loving mentor to me for nearly ten seconds!"

Rumplestiltskin grinned, and it was much more frightening than the unexplained explosion had been. He held up the pilfered wand. "Do you know what this is?"

"A letter opener?"

"Well, it does that too, but it's also good for blowing up wells."

"Huh?"

"It'll all make sense later, dearie." He giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Anyway, I did you a favor. Only complete suckers enter into Faustian magical contracts. And I should know."

Cinderella brightened. "Then today's our lucky day. I'm the biggest sucker in whatever country this is. Let's deal."

"No."

"Aw, give me a break, here! I'm lonely, broke, and grimy."

"Then go get a job and a shower."

Cinderella groaned. "But that sounds like so much work."

Rumplestiltskin shook his head ruefully. "Maybe I haven't made myself clear? Let me spell it out for you, in case the badass leather jacket didn't make my status as a hood evident. I'm a complete sicko and anybody stupid enough to deal with me deserves what they get."

Cinderella yawned. "Sorry, did you say something? I wasn't paying attention."
"You've brought this on yourself, you know." He handed her a scroll. "Sign here, print here, and initial here."

Cinderella examined the contract, looking confused. "Mozilla Firefox End-User License Agreement?"

"Whoops, sorry, that's for later." He rolled out another scroll.

"Wait." Cinderella paused, pen in midair. "Considering that you've told me this contract will change my life and carry a terrible price, maybe I should read before signing?"

"Nah," scoffed Rumplestiltskin. "It's got a lot of big words; you might get bored."

"Oh. Okay, then, screw it," she chirped, dotting the 'i' in Cinderella with a smiley face.

"Poor unfortunate soul," Rumplestiltskin muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing, dearie."

He waved his magic letter opener and the girl found herself wearing a blue prom dress. "Wow, check out those slippers! Is that real polyurethane?"

"You know it, dearie."

"I look hot!" She twirled happily. "This snazzy outfit was totally worth whatever soul-binding oath I just made. Thanks, homie."

Emma walked her son down the only street in town. "So…this is slightly less awkward today."

"Can I call you Mommy?" said Henry.

"And we're back to square one," Emma sighed.

"Is that a no?" Henry asked. "I guess it's just as well. It might hurt Mom's feelings, and Mom has a tendency to arrest you when her feelings are hurt."

"If she gets up in my face again, I can always hack down what's left of your yard." Emma replied cheerfully. "Now get on that bus before my violent tendencies rub off on you."

The only police car in town suddenly jumped the curb in front of her. "Gah! Graham, just because you're sexy doesn't mean you can drive drunk."

"I'm not drunk," said Graham. "I'm trying to get your attention. And apparently the only way to do that is with the threat of violence or the Charming Family Charm. Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for your part in David Nolan's rescue."

Emma blinked. "What, you mean watching while you looked for him, Henry found him, and Mary Margaret performed CPR? I was less use on that adventure than the ten-year-old, for crying out loud!"

"True," the sheriff conceded, "but I've given more thought to your comment about how I should have invested in a staff at some point, and it's totally true. Hell, even Mayberry had at least one deputy. You want a job?"
"Hell no."

"Aw, come on, it'll be fun. We'll put boots on random cars together, and I can give you orders in my smoking-hot Irish brogue."

Emma gave him a once-over. "Hm. Tempting."

Later that morning, Emma was at the only diner in town when Regina barged in, as usual. "My network of high-resolution spy cameras does not lie! You and my son have been walking next to each other!"

"Yeah." Emma quirked an eyebrow. "Did you pass a law against that, too? Because I've still got that chainsaw at home."

"Shut up!" Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "You have major commitment issues, and the only way to solve them is by running out on the son who needs and adores you."

"…Huh?"

"You heard me!" the mayor snapped, storming off to her anger management class.

Head spinning from that bizarre conversation, Emma got dizzy and spilled cocoa all over her shirt. "Aw, nuts! This cinnamon and cocoa mixture is going to lure every Charming family member within a hundred miles. Better go wash up."

Emma went to the laundry room and began stripping, despite the fact that there was a strange maid standing right next to her and an open window right in front of her. "Regina, if you're watching this and thinking of having me arrested for indecent exposure, just remember the chainsaw."

The maid suddenly dropped her head on Emma's shoulder and started bawling. "Woe is me!"

"Uh, who are you, again?"

"I'm pregnant, alone, terrified, and I just mixed white sheets with colored sheets!"

"Really?" said Emma curiously. "I could give you some advice. I've done that, too."

"Mixed white and colored sheets?" said the girl hopefully.

"No, the pregnant, alone, and terrified part."

"Oh." The maid's face fell. "Then you don't know of any good stain removers?"

Emma whacked her in the back of the head. "Forget about the sheets! There are never any guests here to use them anyway! What I wanted to say was, don't give your baby up for adoption, or it might end up being raised by an overbearing killjoy in heavy black eye makeup."

"Noted," said the girl glumly.

"And if anybody tries to convince you otherwise, just mace him in the eyes and bash his head in."

"Huh. I like the way you think, stranger."

That night, Mr. Gold closed up his pawn shop and hobbled painfully home, because apparently he
didn't own a car despite all his riches.

Ashley broke in and uneasily made her way through the darkened shop, passing animal skulls, creepy monkey statues, and shrunken heads with the bodies still attached. "Yikes, this clinches it. The dude is definitely evil."

"I won't say I told you so, but I totally did," Gold chided, popping up out of nowhere.

"Ah!" the girl yelped. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm a workaholic and I had to come back for one last fix. What are you doing here, Ashley?"

"Risking my safety and my future on the advice of a complete stranger!" Ashley replied, brandishing a canister of pepper spray.

Gold sighed. "Aw, hell. Being the richest and most hated man in town, I really should have had the foresight to install a security system in here."

"Sucks to be you. Eat mace, Goldie!"

"Gah!" the man screamed, falling to the floor and bashing his head in. "Attacking a cripple? Oh yeah, you're definitely the real hero here!"

"Don't worry, you'll be fine," said Ashley, snatching her contract and leaving. "There's a horde of adoring Dearies right outside, competing for the chance to tenderly nurse you back to health."

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the hottest of them all?" cooed Regina, piling more dark makeup on her eyes.

"Will you stop saying that in front of me?" Henry pleaded.

"No. Now, be a good boy while I'm at my...er, city council meeting."

"A city council meeting?" Henry repeated flatly.

"Yes."

"On a Saturday afternoon, in your slinky black dress, with the hot Irishman?"

"...Yes."

Henry rolled his eyes. "Mom-slash-Great-Grandma, what have I told you about underestimating my intelligence?"

Regina's face flamed. "Shut up and don't leave this house, talk to Emma, watch TV, talk to Emma, plot my downfall, or talk to Emma while I'm gone."

The boy raised his eyebrows. "If you're that worried about it, you could always get a sitter."

"Are you crazy? That would cost me almost fifteen bucks!"

The moment she was out of the house, Henry picked up his backpack full of Apollo bars and hit the road. "I'd feel more guilty about this, but I don't think even she expected me to actually obey those orders."
Over at the Princess Pad, Emma was unpacking the shoebox that contained all her worldly possessions. Mary Margaret looked over her shoulder curiously. "So all your stuff is in that box? Is it bottomless or something, like Mary Poppins' carpetbag?"

"No."

Mary Margaret glanced at the little box quizzically. "Then I don't buy it. You don't have a bed, or even a blanket to sleep on? No extra sets of clothes or shoes? Nothing to help you pass the time? A TV? A radio? A laptop? What did you do before Henry found you? Just sit in an empty room eating store-bought Zoloft cupcakes?"

Emma was spared the embarrassment of having to answer that question when Mr. Gold knocked at the door. "Hey, Miss Swan, remember me? The creepy stranger who showed an inappropriate level of interest in your arrival?"

"How could I forget?"

"Good, because I have a proposition for you."

Emma recoiled. "Sorry, but you're not my type."

"No, no, no," laughed Gold. "I have fangirls for that. Miss Swan, I understand you enjoy decking fugitives?"

"You know it, buddy."

"Well, then, have I got a victim for you!" He handed her a photo that was surprisingly mangled for being only a few hours old. "This woman stole from me, which I can forgive, and then called me Goldie, which I cannot."

"Wait a minute." Emma looked slightly ill. "Was this girl wearing a lot of pink, perchance?"

"Yeah, and she said something about risking her future on the advice of a complete stranger."

"Aw, hell," Emma muttered.

"That's what I said, too. So will you hunt her down like a mad dog and drag her back to me kicking and screaming? For her own good, of course," Gold added innocently.

Emma nodded. "Sure, why not? I see nothing sinister in that."

Henry walked in. "Hey, Emma, I--" He froze in his tracks upon seeing Gold. "Oh, no! It's the only person in town who's smarter than I am!"

"No need to feel threatened by me, dearie. I was just leaving," said Gold. "Please convey my undying hatred to your mother."

"Do you know who that is, Emma?" Henry whispered.

"Rush from Stargate Universe?"

"No, I'm talking about fairy-tale alter-egos. I'm always talking about fairy-tale alter-egos. You should know that by now."

"For a while there, I thought Gold might be Rumpelstiltskin, but then I realized that was crazy. Rumpelstiltskin is supposed to be three feet tall."

"Uh, right. So what are you doing here?"
Henry beamed. "Well, while Mom-slash-Great-Grandma is out with her sexy Irish henchman, I thought we could do mother-son stuff. You can make me cookies, and yell at me not to sit so close to the TV, and tell me I look just like my father.

"Sorry kid, but I don't own any televisions or cookie sheets, and your father may or may not exist at this point."

"Oh." Henry shrugged. "Well, I guess we could always go on another manhunt together. That last one turned out pretty well, don't you think?" He followed her out to her quirky little Volkswagen. "Slugbug!"

"Ow! Henry, go home!"

"No," said Henry.

Emma sighed wearily. "I really need to come up with a decent comeback for that 'no' of yours."

On the balcony of Cinderella Castle, Ella contentedly watched a fireworks show. "What a great view. I can even see Epcot Center from here. This is the best Fourth of July ever!"

Some prince slipped his arms around her. "Hey baby."

Cinderella shrank away. "Ah! Who the hell are you?"

The prince looked hurt. "I'm the prince. You know, your true love? We met at a ball, remember?"

"...No."

"We were tragically separated and I undertook a desperate quest to reunite us?"

"Doesn't ring a bell."

"We just got married!"

"Huh. I wonder how I missed all of that. Well, anyway, my beloved…uh, what was your name?"

"Thomas."

"My beloved Travis," she continued brightly. "This is a dream come true. All these riches and luxury and adulation!"

Thomas coughed pointedly.

"Oh, and you too, baby," Cinderella tacked on.

Down in the ballroom, the newly-met newlyweds were greeted by Snow White and Prince Charming. "Hey Cinderella, apparently we're friends," said Snow. "Wanna dance?"

"Okay, but just as a friend. I'm straight."

Prince Thomas cleared his throat loudly.

"Oh, and happily married," Cinderella added hastily.

The princesses hustled merrily. "So Ella," said Snow White, "way to dance and flirt your way out of
the working class. You're an inspiration to trophy wives everywhere."

"Thanks, but I really didn't do anything," Ella confessed, doing a double headspin. "Just promised an unspecified sacrifice at an unspecified time to a manipulative Satanic weirdo. Speaking of which, I wonder what ever happened to him?"

Right on the mark, Rumplestiltskin cut in, wearing what appeared to be a Scarlet Pimpernel costume. "Yo."

"Hey, we didn't invite you!" Ella protested.

"Aw, come on! I brought you a toaster."

"Okay, you can stay."

Across the ballroom, Snow White was watching the pair warily. "Hey honeymuffin? Isn't that the Dark One?"

Charming peeked over her shoulder. "Unless there's another three hundred year old green guy running around that we don't know about, then yes."

"Well, he's manhandling and upsetting our apparent friend. Maybe you should go after him with that sword you're always flashing around."

"Been there, done that, not trying again," scoffed Charming. "Besides, if we off 'Stiltskin, who's going to save our relationship the next time we hit a rough patch?"

"So," Cinderella continued, popping a Tic-Tac in her dancing partner's mouth, "I suppose you've come to collect?"

"No, just screwing with you," Rumplestiltskin replied conversationally.

"Fair enough, but as long as I've got your ear, would you mind telling me exactly what it is that I promised you?"

"You know, you really should have asked me that question before you signed the Faustian magical contract," Rumplestiltskin admonished.

"Jeez, what are you, my mother?" snorted the princess. "Come on, out with it. You want jewels? Gold?"

The Dark One looked tired. "Dearie, doesn't the fact that I easily conjured gold and jewels for you indicate that I can easily conjure gold and jewels? I want your firstborn."

Cinderella gasped. "Why?"

"Well, because I sort of misplaced my own and I—hey, I'm the one asking the questions, here!" He disappeared in an indignant puff of purple smoke.

Prince Thomas walked into the bedroom and found his wife throwing her treasured hairbrush collection into a suitcase. "Uh oh, are you going home to your mother?"

"I don't have a mother, stupid."

"Oh, yeah. Then what gives?"
"I have a confession to make, sweetie."

Thomas patted her shoulder consolingly. "If this is about you not being a natural blond, I already know."

"No! Well, yes, but that's not what I meant. Remember how I told you my fairy godmother helped me get to the ball?"

Thomas thought long and hard. "No, we must have skipped over that part, too."

"Well, it was a big fat lie. I got there by promising Rumplestiltskin our unborn baby. But in my defense, he totally tricked me! I honestly thought I could trust the man who blew up my fairy godmother."

Prince Thomas shook his head sadly. "Oh, Ella, it's a good thing you've got your looks to fall back on."

"A lot of good that does me now! I'm going to lose everything; my riches, my castle, my royal hunk!"

"Ahem."

"Oh, uh, and our longed-for child, too. I can't break my deal with Rumplestiltskin; he's too powerful."

Thomas was confused. "If you're not planning on breaking the deal, then why are you packing to leave?"

The princess shrugged. "I thought a nice vacation in the Bahamas might cheer me up."

Her husband consolingly wrapped her in his arms. "No need for that, my impulsive darling. Everything's going to be fine. We'll just make another deal with Rumplestiltskin. That never backfires, right?"

Cinderella smiled. "Boy, you and I sure are well-matched."

Ruby Lucas was standing next to a tow truck when Emma and Henry tracked her down. "Billy, be careful with my completely unoccupied vehicle!"

"Hey Ruby," said Emma. "I've got some questions for you. Firstly, aren't you cold wearing that skimpy outfit in the northernmost state of the continental US? And secondly, have you seen Ashley Boyd?"

"No and who wants to know?"

"The hired goon of the most feared man in town and the son of the most feared woman in town."

"Well, when you put it like that, how can I possibly not trust you?" said Ruby innocently. "Check with Ashley's deadbeat boyfriend. You'll find him at 555 Wild Goose Lane."
Emma knocked on Sean Herman's door. "Open up in the name of a hired goon with no legal authority!"

Sean stupidly obeyed. "What's up?"

"Are you the snake who callously kicked his desperate girlfriend and unborn child to the curb?"

"Yes, how can I help you?" Sean replied cheerfully.

"You can taste my fist, loser!" Emma roared, slugging the kid in the face. "You're a selfish pig and I hate you, Neal!"

"Sean," Sean corrected through a mouthful of blood and teeth.

"Neal, Sean; you creeps are all alike!" Emma bludgeoned him over the head with her purse.

"Hey, what's going on, here?" demanded a Ward Cleaver lookalike.

"Ashley's run away."

Sean gasped. "Oh no! With the baby?"

"Uh, no, she left her uterus at home? Yes, with the baby!" Emma whacked him over the head one last time.

"Dad," Sean ventured meekly, "I know this is ridiculous, but I'm having this silly urge to go and help search for my missing and probably endangered firstborn."

"Now, Beav, we've discussed this," his father lectured imperiously. "If you become a father, that'll make me a grandfather, and open me up to all kinds of cracks about my grey hair. Besides, you're really doing Ashley and the kid a favor by sparing them the humiliation of living with a last name like 'Herman'."

"But…"

"No buts. Gold bought the kid fair and square; it's his problem now."

"Woah, hold the phone," Emma interjected. "You sold your grandchild to a pawnbroker? That's the most horrible and ironic thing I've ever heard."

Emma stormed into the only diner in town. "I finally realized, Ruby, *Wild Goose Lane?"

Ruby giggled. "Yeah, I still can't believe you fell for that one."

"Ruby!"

"Sorry, but I'm not talking in front of the son of the most feared woman in town. Though oddly enough, I have no problem with the hired goon of the most feared man in town."

Emma turned to her son. "Henry, go home."

"Okay," Henry agreed, walking away.

Emma's jaw dropped. "What, seriously? I finally did it?" She began weeping with joy. "This is the happiest moment of my life!"
"I'm thrilled for you," said Ruby dryly. "If you still care about Ashley, she's going to Boston to start a new life whaling on bail jumpers. Just be careful if you go after her; she took her pepper spray and chainsaw with her."

Emma got about five feet down the road before Henry popped out of her glove compartment. "Tee hee! You'll never get away from Henry! NEVER!"

"Gah!" Emma yelped. "I should have known that was too easy."

"Emma, we can't let Ashley leave town, or something bad will happen to her."

"Henry, I don't have time for your paranoid delusions right now!"

"You should really listen to me. Not to brag, but I'm never wrong about anything."

"All right, here's the scoop," said Prince Charming, taking his apparent friends down to his basement. "Snow and I were going to turn this place into a rec room, but since you guys are in a jam, we'll put the pool table in the living room for now and use the basement as a prison for Rumplestiltskin."

Cinderella surveyed the cell incredulously. "You expect that cell to hold the most powerful creature in whatever country this is? The bars don't even close all the way!"

"Don't worry," said Grumpy. "We're going to suck all the magic out of him with this enchanted quill the Blue Fairy gave us."

"Wait a minute," said Charming. "The Blue Fairy knows how to make enchanted quills that destroy a magician's ability to magic? Why didn't she say so earlier? That would have come in handy so many times!"

Prince Thomas shrugged. "Maybe she was miffed that you didn't invite her to the bridal shower. Anyway, Ella, we're going to lie and tell him we're having another baby he can add to his collection. All you've got to do is get him to sign another contract with the quill and he'll be overwhelmed by a Mordenkainen's Disjunction spell."

Ella shook her head. "I don't know about this, Thaddeus."

"Thomas."

"Whatever. Rumplestiltskin is a clairvoyant with centuries of experience manipulating people under his belt. Don't you think he'll be able to figure out we're tricking him, especially given the foreboding red hue of this quill?"

"No."

"All right, you've convinced me."

Henry pointed out the window. "Look, Ashley's car is wrecked and she's gone into premature labor at the side of the road. Boy, do I hate being right all the time."

"Not half as I much as I hate it." Emma got out of the car and ran to Ashley's side.

"Ahh!" the maid screamed. "My baby's coming."
"No, really? I thought you were lying in a ditch screaming and clutching your stomach just for the heck of it." She loaded Ashley into the tiny little car. "Come on, let's get you to the only hospital in town."

"No!" wailed Ashley. "Take me to Boston!"

"I can't, it's a four hour drive."

"So what? The average length of labor for a woman delivering her first child is twelve to eighteen hours, and anyway, wouldn't it be better to give birth in the car than hock my longed-for child?"

"Hell no!" Emma balked. "I just had this upholstery cleaned! Besides, are you really sure you want this baby? What if it grows up to be a creepy little psycho like my kid?"

"Hey, I'm sitting right here, you know!" Henry protested.

"I don't care!" Ashley insisted. "If I can love a man with a name like Herman, I can love anybody!"

"All right, Ella, calm down," Cinderella told herself, pacing nervously. "You're just meeting the most powerful sorcerer who ever lived, at a secluded location, in the middle of the night. Nothing can go wrong."

Rumplestiltskin pranced along creepily, which should have been an oxymoron. "You had your people call my people?"

Cinderella trembled violently. "Ah! Please don't kill me! I'm totally not plotting against you!"

Rumplestiltskin shook his head ruefully. "Dearie, I think your acting teacher owes you a refund. But I'll play along. I understand you have another baby you want to hock?"

"Th-th-that's r-right," squeaked Ella.

"I don't suppose you'd agree to get a sonogram and prove it to me?"

"No!" Ella yelped. "I mean, uh, no. It's the Royal X-Ray technician's day off."

Rumplestiltskin bit back a chuckle. "Right, dearie."

"Please, just sign the contract before I have an aneurism!" Ella pleaded, thrusting the quill into his hand.

"What an alarmingly red quill," trilled the oversized imp. "Wherever did you get it?"

"From a bird?"

Rumplestiltskin smiled indulgently. "Dearie, because I'm a good sport, I'm going to try to warn you one last time. This little plot of yours is just going to blow up in your face like everything else you've done since we met."

"Shut up, shut up, shut up!" cried Ella.

"You have only yourself to blame for this, dearie," sighed Rumplestiltskin, scrawling down his name. To absolutely nobody's surprise, he was immediately engulfed with a Mordenkainen's Disjunction spell. "Tee hee!"
"Why are you giggling?" Cinderella demanded. "And why aren't you attempting to make a saving throw? Did you plan this?"

"I think it's pretty obvious that I did," snickered the sorcerer.

Emma and Henry paced stereotypically in the hospital waiting room while Ashley gave birth. "You know, Emma, you're special," said Henry.

"Henry, you sound like a broken record."

"No, I mean you're the only one who can leave Storybrooke without something bad happening."

"Without something bad happening?" Emma repeated incredulously. "The only time I tried to leave Storybrooke, I got in a car crash and was almost eaten by a wolf!"

"Yeah, but I think that was just a random plot device and not the curse."

A maternity nurse popped in. "Good news, strange woman and little boy who have no relationship with the patient! Ashley's fine and the baby is a healthy three-month-old girl."

"Score! She's going to look great on a shelf next to my creepy puppets," Gold bragged, popping out of nowhere, as usual.

Back at Cinderella Castle, Ye Olde Cops were stuffing the Dark One into a paddy wagon while Cinderella panted frantically into a paper bag. "Did we really take down Rumplestiltskin with nothing but a feather? How very anticlimactic."

Charming elbowed Prince Thomas. "Hey, man, she looks distraught. Maybe you should try comfort mode?"

"You don't mind? Thanks, homie." Thomas wrapped his wife in his arms. "There, there, darling. Tommy's got your back."

"Good, because I really don't want to lose my palace, my cool outfits, and my dreamy blond hunk."

"Ahem."

"Oh, or my firstborn," Ella added absently.

Thomas smiled dreamily. "Yeah, I can't wait to meet little Alexandra either."

"Alexandra? That's a horrible name! Almost as bad as Herman."

"Well," said Thomas cheerfully, "since we've got the evil sorcerer safely incarcerated in a flimsy wooden cage three whole feet away, I see no reason not to go for a stroll in these ominously dark woods. I'll be back in a jiffy."

To absolutely no one's surprise, Thomas wasn't back in a jiffy. "What did you do?" Ella demanded, grabbing Rumplestiltskin by the lapels of his badass leather jacket and shaking him until his teeth rattled. "Where's my hunk?!"

The Dark One just rolled his spooky yellow eyes. "After all the times I tried to talk you out of it, don't you dare blame this on me, dearie."
Emma looked on while Mr. Gold beat the living daylights out of a coffee machine. "Why are you doing that?"

"Because there aren't any florists around."

"I see. That just leaves you to explain the little matter of you buying a freaking baby. Isn't that against the Thirteenth Amendment?"

Gold shrugged. "How should I know? I'm pretty sure I'm supposed to be foreign. But there's no need for you to be concerned. I'm not really going to put the baby on a shelf with my creepy puppets; that was a quip. I'm going to find her a marginally loving home like I did with yours."

"Wait a minute, you arranged Henry's adoption? Then how come I've never met you?"

"That's a very good question," said Gold. "I'm sure I'll have an answer for it someday. In the meantime, fork over the kid. I've got places to go and teacups to fondle."

Emma stared at him quizzically. "You've got some funny ideas about the way adoption works, Gold. A birthmother's parental rights can't lawfully be terminated before the child is born, which means that your contract is completely bogus."

Gold was surprised and delighted. "An adult with a brain? I've never met one of those in Storybrooke before. This is so delightful I'm willing to call off the adoption in exchange for a favor from you later."

Emma thought it over. "An unspecified sacrifice at an unspecified time for a black market baby broker? I don't see how that could possibly go wrong."

Gold's face fell. "I knew it was too good to be true."

That bit of unpleasantness out of the way, Emma and Henry swung by Ashley's room. "Hey, Ashley, how's your very large newborn doing?"

"She cried a little when I told her I was naming her Alexandra, but otherwise, she seems fine."

Emma winced. "Alexandra Herman? Yikes, maybe the kid would have been better off with Gold after all."

"Come again?"

"I just sold my soul to Gold to help you keep your baby. I'm still not sure why; it wasn't legally necessary. I think that spooky theme music of his must have a mild hypnotic effect."

"Well, I appreciate the sentiment."

"Anytime. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to get my son home before Regina gets back from her booty call."

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the hottest of them all?" Regina glanced over her shoulder. "Graham, I'm asking you a question, here!"

"You, my villainous vixen," the shirtless sheriff replied dutifully.

"And don't you forget it." Regina slipped her inappropriate dress back on. "Thanks for the offscreen
nookie. I'll call you sometime, unless of course I don't feel like it."

Graham sniffled woundedly. "Must you so callously disregard my emotional needs? I have a heart, you know."

"No you don't."

"Wait, what?"

"Oh...nothing. Bye!" The mayor ran for her life.

Emma's freshly scotch-guarded Love Bug pulled up in front of the Stepford House. "Hey Henry, you know what you said about me being able to leave?"

"Yeah?"

"I can't. I'm contracted for eighteen more episodes."

"I had a feeling you might say that." Henry grinned, ran up to the cleanest bedroom a ten-year-old boy ever had, and tried to look busy.

"Hey Henry," Regina greeted two seconds later. "Why are you out of breath? And why are you reading the phone book? And why is it upside down?"

The boy smirked. "How about if you don't make me answer that, and in return, I don't ask why you've got your underwear stuffed in your purse?"

"...Deal."

Back at the only hospital in town, Sean shuffled sheepishly into Ashley's room. "Hey baby. Sorry about abandoning you with a child and ignoring your existence for the past nine months."

"No biggie."

Sean breathed a sigh of relief. "That was much easier than I expected. So, is this the baby my old man wanted us to pawn?"

Ashley frowned. "You know, I'm not entirely sure. She looks a little too old to be ours, but let's give her the benefit of the doubt for now."

"Sounds good to me. Here, princess, Daddy got you some fancy polyurethane booties."

"Um, booties are nice," said Ashley, "but child support would be even better."

Emma gave her obvious love interest a call. "Hey Graham? I think I'd like that deputy job after all. I mean, I've been taking it upon myself to solve everyone's problems ever since I got here, so we might as well make it official, right?"

"Amen," said Graham. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to go take a shower. Offscreen nookie with Regina always makes me feel so dirty."

"Huh?"
"Never mind." The sheriff forlornly hung up his phone. "Oh, why must evil be so damnably sexy?"
That Still Small Voice

A wooden puppet ambled onto a handmade stage. "Oh, how I wish I weren't so hideously ugly!"

In the audience, a human Raggedy Andy doll by the name of Jiminy wove through the crowd, swiping gold coins that may or may not have been made of chocolate.

Later on, little Jiminy Human and his parents sifted through the loot. "So, Mom, Dad? I stole you a hairbrush earlier, if you'd care to give it a try someday."

"No thanks, just bring on the chocolate."

"Why don't you just get a job and buy some chocolate?" Jiminy frowned. "Actually, you already have a job, so what's the point of all this?"

The boy's mother was aghast. "Morality, Jiminy? Where in the world did you pick that up?"

Little Jiminy looked pensive. "That's a very good question, actually."

"Well, wherever it came from, knock it off. You're harshing our buzz."

"But—"

"Don't make us sing 'You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two' again, young man!" his father warned.

His mother looked up from the loot bag blankly. "Uh, son, is this a cricket?"

"Yeah, so?"

"What on earth possessed you to steal a cricket? You could have gotten one in the bushes at far less personal risk."

"But I love crickets, Mom!" Their bulging eyes, slimy palps, and grotesquely twitching antennae… what could possibly be more beautiful?"

Jiminy's dad whacked him over the head. "Boy, you're a sicko! If you end up in therapy, don't you dare blame it on us."

They were interrupted when an enraged Fa Mulan charged in, brandishing a katana. "All right, which one of you swindlers took my lucky cricket?!" she thundered.

"It was the boy!" Jiminy's parents shoved him forward and ran for their lives.

At Dr. Hopper's office, Henry's face was buried in the Big Book of Deja-Vu, as usual. "This book is so cool. Even Jiminy Cricket has a dark side."

Hopper burst out laughing. "Henry, doesn't that prove that your book is a load of baloney? Come on,
just look at my nerd glasses and cutesy umbrella. Do I look like a guy who could have a dark side?"

For a moment, Henry's belief in the curse was actually shaken. "Maybe you were less adorkable as a cricket?"

"I have a feeling that I was always adorkable and always will be. But this isn't about me. Why do you believe in these fairy tales? No offense, but isn't that kind of a sissy thing for a ten year old boy to be into?"

Henry shrugged. "I'm secure in my masculinity."

Over at the Mayberry Jail, Graham was showing Emma her hideous new uniform. "Uh, Graham?" she ventured, holding up the oversized khaki suit and tie. "You may not have noticed, but I'm female."

"Oh, believe me, I noticed," Graham assured her, eyes roving. "But I'm hoping that, in that outfit, no other men will notice until I get the chance to put the moves on you."

Emma threw the uniform aside. "There's no need to get competitive. You're the only attractive bachelor in town, remember?"

Cheered, Graham tossed Emma her badge. When she pinned it on, a sudden earthquake rattled through the police station. The sheriff was confused. "Hey, the earth isn't supposed to move until I put the moves on Emma!"

"What gives?" Emma wondered. "Are there even any fault lines in Maine?"

The citizens of Storybrooke were milling excitedly around a brand new crater at the edge of town. "First a ticking clock, now a hole in the ground? Life in this town is getting more exciting by the minute!"

Regina barged in, as usual. "Would you people get a freaking life? Go home! Graham, I order you to get this crowd under control…with your shirt off."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And no peeking, Swan! He's mine! What are you even doing here? Don't you ever get tired of trying to solve every crisis in this town?"

"Yeah," Emma confessed, "but Henry won't let me weasel out of it, so I've decided to make a career of it." She flashed her badge.

Regina turned to Graham. "Oh, no you didn't!"

Graham shrugged apologetically. "Sorry, Regina, but gentlemen prefer blondes."

"That's it! No offscreen nookie for you tonight, buster!" She glared at Emma. "And as for you, as far as acts of defiance go, putting yourself directly in my chain of command isn't one of your best. I order you to go as far away from Graham as possible while I make an epic speech." The mayor climbed onto a conveniently placed soapbox. "My fellow…Storybrookians? Storybrookese? Disneylanders? Whoever you are, there's nothing for you to be concerned about. Our fair city is simply imploding. But a little concrete and crazy glue should fix that."
Henry stepped out of the crowd. "Mom? Is that fairy dust on your shoes?"

"No, it's just, um, body glitter. Mr. Gold must have spilled some on me. Now everyone, go home, keep your mouths shut, and remember: we have nothing to fear but fear itself and freak earthquakes. Henry, go sit in the car. I'll catch up with you as soon as Graham puts his shirt back on."

Henry stealthed his way over to Emma and Hopper. "This calls for a Hero Huddle!"

Emma groaned. "Not another one, Henry."

"Hush, muggle. Dr. Hopper, today's your lucky day. I've decided to make you an associate member of Operation Cobra. Here's your t-shirt and your dues schedule."

Hopper hesitated. "Gee, Henry, I don't know if I'm ready to be part of Operation Cobra. I've never even been to Normandy. Unless the starship SSV Normandy counts?"

"No, the other Operation Cobra; the one that will save Storybrooke, stick it to the man, and more importantly, prove me right. He turned to his birth mom. "Emma, don't you think it's a little suspicious that this town quite literally imploded the moment you made arrangements to stay?"

Emma cringed. "N-n-no?" she stammered unconvincingly.

Henry's face fell. "I must have gotten my brains from my father."

"Henry!" Regina seized her son by the collar. "Stop bonding with people who aren't me. And Emma, as your new boss, I order you to put on this chicken suit and do the Bunny Hop. As for you, Hopper, you don't appear to have made my son any less insane lately."

Hopper shrugged. "It's just going to take a little time. And about a hundred grand in therapy bills."

"I've had enough of Henry's outrageous accusations!" Regina grabbed the good doctor around the neck and squeezed murderously. "Tell him I'm not evil, damn it, or I'll tear out your heart and use it as a ping-pong ball!"

"Urk! You're really not helping your case, here!" Hopper wheezed, turning as purple as a bottle full of True Love.

"Enough! You will gaslight my son until he doesn't know The Rabbit Hole from a hole in the ground, or I'll screw you over just like we did with Emma!"

Hopper faltered. "Then I'll come to your house with a chainsaw like she did!"

Regina burst out laughing. "Oh, please! You expect me to believe someone as adorkable as you is capable of violence?"

Archie's shoulders slumped in defeat. "I'll go get the straight jacket."

Jiminy Human, now a fine, strapping vision of geekiness, carried his parents piggyback into yet another hapless village. "Mom, Dad, how long are you going to make me keep doing this?"

"Until you quit being such an enabler."

Jiminy groaned. "But I'm sick of dishonest living. My parents raised me better than that."

"No we didn't."
"Well, I picked it up somewhere, and I want out!"

His mother sniffled theatrically. "But if you quit, it would strain the finances of your lifelong abusers. And who would provide work for the honest, hardworking cops of our land? It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it."

Jiminy sighed wearily. "All right. But can you at least meet me halfway and start combing your hair? I'm pretty sure there's a family of raccoons living in it."

Henry walked into Dr. Hopper's office wearing his patented Little Orphan Henry smile. The good doctor flinched. "Ouch. This would be a lot easier if you weren't so damn cute."

"Whatever do you mean, my one and only positive male role model?" Henry wondered, batting his adorable little eyelashes.

Hopper was forced to avert his gaze in the face of the Charming Family Charm. "Henry, you know how I told you that your imagination was a positive trait that made you special?"

"Yes?"

"I lied. It's creepy and wrong, so knock it off or I'll lock you in the basement with Belle."

Henry didn't respond; just leveled a junior Glare of Evil at his therapist.

"Gah! It burns!" Hopper shrieked. "Your mom taught you well, I see."

"Serves you right." Henry growled. "I want my Operation Cobra T-shirt back, traitor!"

"Achoo!" sneezed Jiminy Human, setting up spotlights in the middle of a downpour. "I don't know why I'm bothering with this. Who's going to go to an outdoor puppet show in weather like this?"

"I will!" a little boy with an umbrella volunteered.

"Then you're an idiot."

"Aw, come on!" The boy laughed. "How can a man who spends his days playing with puppets positively be so unhappy?"

"Have you actually seen our puppets, kid? They're the stuff of nightmares." Jiminy held up one of his hideous marionettes for inspection.

"Ah!" screamed the boy. "Get it away or gouge out my eyes, I'm begging you!"

Jiminy sheepishly stashed the puppet away. "Sorry, kid, I guess that was kind of a low blow."

The boy shuddered. "Let us never speak of it again. How about we listen to the crickets chirp to cheer ourselves up?"

Their trauma was soon forgotten. "I just love crickets," the boy sighed happily. "With their bulging eyes, slimy palps, and grotesquely twitching antennae."

"Wow!" Jiminy breathed, eyes wide. "Can I adopt you?"

"Sorry, but I've already got parents. You can have my umbrella, though."
"I'm not sure what good that will do me, seeing as how I'm already wetter than a mute mermaid, but thanks for the thought."

At the only hospital in town, Mary Margaret and her newly conscious flame David played a rousing game of Hangman. "Man, a bathrobe and a legal pad? You sure are a cheap date," the double-amnesiac chuckled.

Mary Margaret blushed. "This isn't a date. It's just a man and a woman with a deep emotional bond enjoying each other's company. Alone. In a bed." She groaned. "Oh, we are so screwed."

Then David's alleged wife came in and killed the mood. "Hi, honey!" she chirped brightly. "Hi, nice lady in my husband's bed. Have you two been having fun together?"

"No!" yelped Mary Margaret hysterically. "We've never had any fun together and we never will, I swear!"

Kathryn blinked. "I just meant-"

"Eep! Gotta run!" Mary Margaret bolted home to the Princess Pad fast enough to give the Flash whiplash.

Later that day, she and her daughter were drowning their respective sorrows in a sea of chocolate and marshmallow. "I hate this love triangle," Mary Margaret complained. "Kathryn would be so much easier for me to dislike, if only she was some spoiled princess who verbally abused David. I feel like the worst person in the world!"

Emma raised her eyebrows. "What, worse than Regina?"

"Fine, maybe you can come up with one example…"

"Worse than Gold?"

"Okay, two, but-"

"Worse than Snookie?"

A bluebird chose this moment to fly through the open window and perch on Mary Margaret's shoulder, cooing contentedly. She sighed, defeated. "You've made your point."

Just as the conversation started to drag, Henry ran in crying and latched onto Emma's leg like a lamprey. "Mommy, I need you!"

Emma looked tired. "Next time I enter into a closed adoption, I'm sending the kid to Uruguay."

An infuriated woman barged into Dr. Hopper's office. He sighed. "Regina? I suppose you've come
"No, it's me, Emma. Did you really threaten to lock my son in the basement with Belle?"

Hopper winced. "When you put it like that, it makes me sound like a real jerk."

Emma hit him in the face with his own umbrella. "You idiot! Whatever happened to 'Don't call him crazy even though he totally is'?"

"Er, would you believe me if I blamed this on my evil twin, Bopper?"

"No."

"Fine, it was Regina."

Right on the mark, Emma got a call from her baby mama. "Regina?" Emma grated. "Is there a guy named Bopper in this town? Because if there's not, you're in so much trouble!"

"No time for that now, Swan. Henry's missing, and we've got to find him. You check the beauty parlor, and I'll check the office supply store!"

"Good idea," said Emma, "and don't forget to try all the laundromats."

Archie raised his hand timidly. "I have a novel thought. Why don't we check the mines he's been showing such an unhealthy interest in lately?"

"You stay out of this!"

At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Rumplestiltskin sat spinning fiberfill into gold, when Jiminy Human arrived with a printed money sack. "Did you remember to get the owners' names, PIN numbers, and mothers' maiden names?" the oversized imp asked.

"Yes, Your Darkness," said Jiminy meekly.

"Tee hee, this is going to be the best identity theft scheme since the Prince and the Pauper!" Rumplestiltskin trilled. "Now go away, I don't need any witnesses complicating matters."

"Wait," said Jiminy, "I need your help. I want to move out of my parents' place, and clearly the only way to do that is by making a contract with the forces of darkness."

Rumplestiltskin pondered this. "Or you could just learn a little word called 'no'."

"No? Is that, like, the opposite of 'on'?"

Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Oh, never mind." He handed the reluctant rogue a little perfume bottle. "Here, just sprinkle your folks with this Eau de Or and something horrible will happen to them. They'll also smell a lot better."

Jiminy frowned. "Wait, what's this about something horrible happening to them?"

"Do you really care?"

"No," Jiminy admitted, "but I had to ask or I'd look like a jerk."
Emma and Hopper finally arrived at the mines, with several boxes of dryer sheets and staples in tow. A trail of Apollo Bars led into the mouth of the tunnel. "Huh," Hopper mused. "I would have expected Henry to go with breadcrumbs. More traditional. Oh well."

Down in the mines, Henry skipped along obliviously. "A lone ten-year-old going into an unstable mineshaft without letting anyone know where he is? This genius plot of mine cannot possibly backfire!"

He noticed a mysterious object sparkling on the walls. "This looks magical. Perhaps I should hang onto this? Seeing as how hard magical evidence is the whole reason I came down here?" He went to put it in his backpack, but the pockets were already filled to capacity with Apollo Bars. "Oh well." Henry shrugged and tossed the mysterious shard aside.

Up on the surface, Emma adjusted her badge's position on her belt, and another earthquake rumbled through the mines. "Damn! I've got to remember to stop doing that," Emma cursed.

"Don't worry, I'll save you, Henry!" Lucky umbrella in hand, Archie charged through the storm of rubble without getting a single scratch. He patted the umbrella fondly. "Ah, old friend. At least you'll never fail me."

"Dr. Hopper!" Henry cried happily. "You came back from the Dark Side!"

"No, actually I'm still on the fence."

"Well, by all means, let me give you some more incentive!" With that, Henry ran farther into the crumbling mineshaft. "Last one to commercial break is a rotten egg!"

Jiminy Human and his parents approached a tiny cottage. "Mom, Dad?" he ventured. "If we're going to prey on someone for money, why don't we do it to someone a little richer?"

"Shut up, Jiminy."

Jiminy sighed. "This must be why we're still broke and homeless after decades of thievery." He knocked at the door. "Hello, do you have room at your hearth for a lovable doormat and his elderly abusers?"

The lady of the house waved them in. "Of course." She noticed the state of his parents' hair. "And we've got room in our shower, too."

Jiminy's parents smiled. "Thank you, kind suckers."

Their hosts heated up several plates of Weight Watchers' lasagna. "Sorry, we don't have anything else in the fridge," the man apologized. "We're on a diet."

Jiminy's mother brightened. "Really? Sounds like you could use a bottle of UltraSlim; the weight-loss drug that whitens your teeth and cures baldness while it slims."

The peasants' eyes sparkled with interest. "Ooh, tell us more."

"Clinical trials have shown that patients can lose up to thirty percent more body mass with UltraSlim than with diet and exercise alone. But you don't have to take my word for it." Jiminy's father
elbowed him.

"I used to weigh nearly five hundred pounds," Jiminy droned in a monotone. "But just look at me now. I am so very hot."

Jiminy's father rolled his eyes. "Never mind my son. He's got the same acting teacher as Cinderella."

Luckily, the peasants were either deaf or completely oblivious. "Sold!"

"Sorry, but UltraSlim is only available for a limited time."

"Aw, come on! We'll trade you our firstborn child."

"Can we have that rusty teakettle instead?"

"Oh, all right."

Jiminy followed his parent out to their medieval getaway van. "Mom, Dad? That was very wrong of you, which is why I'm going to stop you after the fact."

Jiminy's mom laughed. "Son, you're really bad at this whole morality thing."

"Gee, I don't know where I got that from," Jiminy sneered, throwing the Eau de Or at his parents. "Hey, what gives? You're still human, and as smelly as ever!"

"That's because we switched the Eau de Or with the UltraSlim," said his dad. "I don't know what you're up to, but we're smelly and we want to stay that way."

"Aw, nuts!" Jiminy ran back to the freshly-plundered hovel, but it was too late. The ugly peasants had morphed into even uglier puppets.

Jiminy's dad chuckled. "Ugly puppets? How very appropriate."

Jiminy rounded on his parents furiously. "Don't you even care that your only son just tried to curse you with a fate worse than death?"

"Obviously not."

Umbrella Boy ran in and screamed. "My parents have been turned into creepy puppets? Clearly this is the work of my meek and warmhearted friend, and not the cackling strangers standing right next to him." The boy turned on Jiminy furiously. "Is this part of your fiendish plot to adopt me? I want my umbrella back, traitor!"

Henry spotted something shiny down in the bowels of the mineshaft. "Could that be another magical artifact for me to casually toss aside?"

"Henry, we've got to get out of here!" Hopper cried.

"Why, so you can lock me in the basement with Belle?" Henry retorted.

"Wouldn't you rather be locked in the basement with Belle than crushed to death in an avalanche of fairy dust?"
Henry paused. "Yeah, that's actually a really good point. Let's go."

"Don't worry," said Archie's best friend Marco in an attempt to console Emma. "Archie's got his lucky umbrella with him, and that thing could easily shield a hundred people from certain death."

"Thanks for the pep talk, homie." Emma's fingers accidentally brushed her badge again, and the ground quaked. "That does it! Graham, you're getting me a new badge. I think there's a detonator hidden in this one."

"You and your damn detonator!" Regina snarled. "None of this would have happened if you'd just skipped town and left me to gaslight my son in peace."

"Bite me! Uh, I mean, bite me, Boss. I mean…oh hell." Emma sighed. "We can finish this argument when our son is no longer in mortal peril."

"Agreed. Truce." Regina grimaced. "Though I'm afraid the Swan Queen shippers are going to have a field day with this. But we can take care of them later. Let's trash this mine."

"I'll go get my chainsaw," said Emma.

Everyone in town hesitated at the thought of Emma with a chainsaw again. "Er, how about explosives?" suggested Marco mildly. "Explosives that Deputy Swan will agree not to touch."

Down in Operation Cobra's temporary headquarters, Archie and Henry heard a dog barking. "That's got to be Pongo!" Archie exclaimed.

"How do you know?"

"Do you know of any other dogs in this town?"

"Not unless you count Graham. Hm, he must be sensing our presence through this convenient elevator shaft. Though I suspect no one will listen to him until it's too late," Henry sighed. "Story of my life."

Topside, Henry's two mommies prepared to blow him sky high. Pongo whimpered a warning, but of course, nobody paid attention. "Five, four, three, two, one, blast off!" yelled Regina.

"Kablooey!" went the mine.

"Kersplat!" went Henry and Archie.

"Crap!" went Emma. "That was an epic fail."

Regina sighed. "A problem that can't be solved with violence? We're both in over our heads, here."

At the only hospital in town, Mary Margaret breathed a sigh of relief. "Whew, I've made it through a whole day without seeing—"

David, upright for a change, walked in with a smile. "Hey baby."

"I knew I shouldn't have said that out loud." She forced a smile. "Hey, David. You're looking vertical today."
David beamed. "Thanks for noticing. Want to go for a romantic walk outside? I promise, this time you won't have to resuscitate me."

Mary Margaret blushed. "It's a date. I mean, a totally platonic—oh, who am I kidding, here?" She slapped a corsage on her date's bathrobe and towed him outside.

Standing out at Makeout Point, David casually slipped an arm around Mary Margaret's shoulders. "I'm getting a little warm in this bathrobe, baby. Mind if I take it off?"

"Dude, you're married, remember?"

"No, actually I don't."

Mary Margaret grinned. "Good. Uh, I mean, goodness, how awful for you."

"Yeah, I'm not enjoying amnesia. It's more dramatic than a coma, but not nearly as relaxing. And that pesky wife of mine! Always showering me with affection and trying to help me rehabilitate my shattered mind."

"I know, it's insufferable!" Mary Margaret vented.

David smiled shyly. "So now that we've handwaved away the whole adultery angle, do you want to make out…?" He suddenly spotted Kathryn standing behind her. "That is, do you want to make out an autograph for me, because I loved you in Walk the Line."

"Hello again, Mary Margaret, nice to see you," Kathryn greeted brightly.

"I never touched him, honest!" Mary Margaret screamed frantically.

"Oh. That's nice." Kathryn smiled tentatively. "David, I baked you your favorite muffins. I thought maybe I could rub your feet while you eat them?"

"Quit suffocating me, woman!"

Back at the new municipal crater, Regina was shaking Marco violently. "You idiot! I can't believe you actually convinced me that dynamiting an unstable mineshaft with a child inside it was a good idea. You're fired, whoever you are!"

"Uh, Regina?" Emma ventured. "Have you had your Xanax today?"

"Shut up and lend me your chainsaw!"

"That's not necessary," said Marco, the blue finally fading from his face. "We could just drill down to pull Archie and Henry out, if only we had some clue as to where they were." After a long, pregnant pause, Marco raised his voice. "I said, if only we had some clue as to where they were!"

Pongo, who had been busy standing on the fire truck and making it look vintage, obediently hopped down and began to dig, barking wildly.

"What's he doing?" Emma wondered.

"He says he's found a vent shaft that will take us right to Henry and Hopper," Ruby translated.
"Also, there's a kid named Timmy trapped in a well somewhere."

"Ruby?" Emma was confused. "Why are you even here?"

"To gawk at all the sexy firemen, of course."

---

Down in the abandoned elevator, Henry's entire worldview had been shaken. "It was wrong of me to come down here and get us into this mess, Dr. Hopper. Wrong! Me! I just don't get it. How could this happen?"

"You know, Henry, if you're wrong about that, couldn't you be wrong about the curse, too?"

"Nah," said Henry dismissively. "This can't be all there is. Without the curse, our lives would be just another boring ensemble sitcom."

Hopper couldn't argue with that. "Well, for the record, I wasn't serious about locking you in the basement with Belle. It's just that your mom's a little…"

"Psychotic."

"Bingo," said Hopper. "But don't worry, you're a great kid and I'm sure you'll turn out fine, should we happen to survive this mess."

"So why did you lie?" Henry wanted to know. "Did Mom threaten to make a coat out of Pongo again?"

"No, she threatened my job, and while I'm not sure what authority a mayor could possibly have over a physician, her Glare of Evil made it clear that she was serious."

---

Topside, Emma and Regina were peering nervously down into the vent shaft uncovered by Pongo the Wonder Dog. "Looks like someone's going to have to pull an Alice in Wonderland and go down this rabbit hole."

Regina brightened. "Perfect, I know just the guy! No, wait, Jefferson's off his meds at the moment. I'd better go myself."

"Really?" Emma shot her baby mama an incredulous look. "You're going to go down there in your white blouse and high heels and lift out two people."

"Yeah, so?"

"Regina, can you even lift this shovel?"

"Of course I can!" Regina reached indignantly for the tool. "Oof! This thing is heavier than it looks." She tugged furiously. "I'll have it in a second; just sit tight."

Emma rolled her eyes. "Lower me down, Marco." Luckily Regina was still too busy wrestling with the shovel to object.

"You know," the chief of the fire department piped up, "if you guys need a hand, my men and I would be happy to go instead."

"Thanks for the offer," said Emma, "but we're good. Why don't you just stay here and flirt with Ruby some more?"
Down below, Henry and Hopper were enjoying a last meal of Apollo Bars, Apollo Bars, and Apollo Bars. "So Henry, off the record, why do you think I'm Jiminy Cricket? It's the umbrella, right?"

"Mostly, yeah. But also the fact that before he was a cricket, he was a human Raggedy Andy doll with trouble asserting himself."

Hopper couldn't argue with that, either.

Emma suddenly dangled by. "Hey, are you two done making up yet? I can always come back later."

"No, that was perfect timing." Hopper boosted Henry up to her, but before he could follow, the elevator began to slip. "That, on the other hand is not. Oh well. You win some, you lose some."

"Archie, why are you so calm? Don't you realize you're about to plummet to your death?"

Archie laughed her off. "Don't concern yourself with me. So long as I've got my lucky umbrella in hand and my name on the regular cast list, I'm invincible."

Sure enough, when the elevator clattered off into the abyss, Hopper was left floating in mid-air with his umbrella, like some sort of singing nanny. "See? Told ya."

Topside, Regina finally abandoned her efforts with the shovel to pull her son into her arms. "Deputy Swan, you saved my only child's life. I guess this means I owe Dr. Hopper a thank you."

"Excuse me?"

Regina unceremoniously shoved her baby mama aside. "Without the shield of luck emanated by your umbrella, Henry would have been toast. How can I ever thank you, Doctor?"

"By not blackmailing me into a life of deceit and misery?"

"Besides that."

"Listen, lady!" Hopper brandished his umbrella menacingly. "Your son keeps telling me I have a dark side, and I'm starting to believe it! So get out of my face and stay out, or I'll help Emma get custody of Henry!"

Emma had overheard this exchange. "I don't want custody of Henry, he's creepy and delusional. How many times do I have to say it?"

"Shut up, Emma!" the good doctor yelled.

Regina stared at him with new interest. "Dr. Hopper, I've never seen this side of you before. It's kind of hot. Tell me, how do you feel about equestrianism?"

"Not my thing."

"Rats!"

Jiminy Human stood glumly out on his parents' porch. "After all that, I still haven't moved out? Jeez, I wish I wasn't such a pansy."

A little blue creature with wings fluttered down, wearing a towel. "I hear your wish. Sorry it took me
so long to answer, I was in the tub."

"Ah!" Jiminy screamed. "Mom, Dad, check it out! There's the weirdest looking mosquito out here!"

"I'm not a bug, I'm the Blue Fairy," said the Blue Fairy indignantly.

"That's too bad, I love bugs. The bulging eyes, the slimy palps, the grotesquely twitching antennae..." Jiminy sighed dreamily. "Oh well. Fairies are cool, too, I guess. So, you must be here to help the people who were just so unfairly cursed?"

"No, I don't do that sort of thing, I'm management."

"Oh. Then are you here to exact justice on the villains who cursed them?"

"Nah, I'll let Santa Claus handle that."

Jiminy scowled. "So what the hell are you good for? Just flying around and making high-handed speeches about morality?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"That sounds awesome! I want in."

The Blue Fairy considered this. "All right, you can start by looking out for little Geppetto."

"Who?"

"The umbrella kid."

"Ah, then he does have a name?" Jiminy pondered this. "I'd really like to, but my parents said that if they catch me performing another act of morality, they'll spank me."

"So? You're an adult. Stick up for yourself."

Jiminy flinched. "I'm not very good at that. It would be so much easier to assert my conscience if only I were three inches tall."

The fairy blinked. "You want me to turn you into a cricket?"

"Bingo."

"You want me to turn you into a cricket?"

"That's right."

"You want me to turn you into a cricket?!"

"Er, yes?"

The insectoid woman stared uncomprehendingly. "Do you have any idea how hard it's going to be to pick up chicks as a cricket? Not to mention all the frogs who will want to fry you up for dinner!"

Jiminy glared. "Hey, it's my wish and I'll do what I want with it!"

The fairy shook her head sadly. "This is a bippity boppity boo-boo, but it's your funeral, Jimmy-boy."
She waved her wand, and a little green bug was left standing in Jiminy's place. "All right! Time to go to town on a big plate of yard trimmings!" He hopped over to a mirror and checked out his reflection. "Wait a minute, I don't look like a cricket at all. You turned me into a short-horned grasshopper! What a gyp!"

"Eh, same diff. Now go find the boy whose life you just ruined and unruin it."

"How?"

"I'm sure you'll think of something."

"You're not a lot of help, lady."

Back at the new municipal crater, Emma noticed Archie playfully bantering with Marco. "Henry, is that Archie's boyfriend?"

"No, his surrogate son."

"...Huh?"

"It's an incredibly long story." A smile suddenly lit the boy's face. "Hey, do you hear that chorus of chirps? I think the crickets have returned to Storybrooke." His smile faded. "I never realized how annoying they would be. Emma, do you have any Raid?"

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Mr. Gold was closing up for the night when he happened to walk by a pair of creepy puppets. He gave them a double-take. "Huh. I wonder if they're the reason I never seem to have any customers in here?"

Meanwhile, at the only hospital in town, Mary Margaret was punching out a letter of resignation. "To Whom it May Concern, your patients are getting too sexy and too married for my tastes, so I'm out of here." The reluctant floozy stuffed the letter in a cubbyhole and pulled out her cellphone. "Hey Emma, do we have any of those Zoloft cupcakes at home?"

Back at the new municipal crater, the entire town was celebrating. "Emma may have done all the work, as usual, but that doesn't mean we don't deserve a party!"

"Amen," said Emma, "now pass me some non-poisonous apple cider."

"Here you go," said Ruby.

"Ruby? Why the hell are you still here? Don't you have a home?"

Regina, playing wallflower over by the abandoned elevator shaft, discreetly dropped a shard of glass into the vent, where it rattled down to join the remainder of a spooky glass case. "Into the hole with you, my pretty. I'll be damned if I'm going to let anyone find out I use a tanning bed."
David Nolan stared dubiously at his alleged house. "This is where I live? That doesn't seem right. Where are all the battlements?"

His wife gave him a worried look. "Well, it's not much, but at least we got rid of the fugly windmill. Do you remember the fugly windmill?"

"Do I remember? That's an insensitive question. You know I'm an amnesiac."

Kathryn grabbed ahold of his face and stared intently into his eyes. "Remember the fugly windmill! It's important! Say the words with me. Fugly. Windmill."

"Fugly windmill," David repeated dutifully.

"Good boy. Now get in the house. All our friends are eager to hit you up for money while you're nice and vulnerable."

Inside the house, David was greeted with a round of applause. "Way to regain consciousness, bro!"

Kathryn paraded him unsubtly around the room. "This is some guy you'll never see again, and his lovely wife, some chick you'll never see again…"

David frowned. "Hey, where are our families? Do I have parents? Do you?"

"It would seem not."

Across the room, Love Doctor Henry was busy strategizing with his sidekick Emma. "Okay, if you ever want to have a little brother or sister, we've got to fix David up with Mary Margaret. Again."

Emma yawned. "Sure, honey."

Henry scowled. "You know, considering that my advice has already saved David's life and brought him out of a coma, you could at least try to keep the sarcasm out of your voice."

"Sorry, kid. I guess I'm just at the age of not believing."

David suddenly flung his arms around them. "Oh, thank goodness! It's someone I know I don't owe any money to!"

"Hey, David," said Emma. "How's amnesia treating you?"

"I'm fine, just a little jumpy. Crowds make me nervous. So do hors d'oeuvres." He bumped into a waiter carrying a snack tray and screamed. "Gah, a carrot!" He stabbed the little veggie mercilessly. "Die, vile fiend!"

Emma took Henry aside. "This is your knight in shining armor?" she whispered dubiously. "What's next? Are you going to tell me our resident bluebird tamer is actually a vicious bandit?"

David sheathed his mighty toothpick. "Hey, speaking of Mary Margaret, is she here? I was hoping we could sneak in a quick makeout scene while my wife is in the kitchen."

"Sorry, no. She said to tell you she's busy tonight, attending the opening of her garage door."

---

**The Shepherd**

David Nolan stared dubiously at his alleged house. "This is where I live? That doesn't seem right. Where are all the battlements?"

His wife gave him a worried look. "Well, it's not much, but at least we got rid of the fugly windmill. Do you remember the fugly windmill?"

"Do I remember? That's an insensitive question. You know I'm an amnesiac."

Kathryn grabbed ahold of his face and stared intently into his eyes. "Remember the fugly windmill! It's important! Say the words with me. Fugly. Windmill."

"Fugly windmill," David repeated dutifully.

"Good boy. Now get in the house. All our friends are eager to hit you up for money while you're nice and vulnerable."

Inside the house, David was greeted with a round of applause. "Way to regain consciousness, bro!"

Kathryn paraded him unsubtly around the room. "This is some guy you'll never see again, and his lovely wife, some chick you'll never see again…"

David frowned. "Hey, where are our families? Do I have parents? Do you?"

"It would seem not."

Across the room, Love Doctor Henry was busy strategizing with his sidekick Emma. "Okay, if you ever want to have a little brother or sister, we've got to fix David up with Mary Margaret. Again."

Emma yawned. "Sure, honey."

Henry scowled. "You know, considering that my advice has already saved David's life and brought him out of a coma, you could at least try to keep the sarcasm out of your voice."

"Sorry, kid. I guess I'm just at the age of not believing."

David suddenly flung his arms around them. "Oh, thank goodness! It's someone I know I don't owe any money to!"

"Hey, David," said Emma. "How's amnesia treating you?"

"I'm fine, just a little jumpy. Crowds make me nervous. So do hors d'oeuvres." He bumped into a waiter carrying a snack tray and screamed. "Gah, a carrot!" He stabbed the little veggie mercilessly. "Die, vile fiend!"

Emma took Henry aside. "This is your knight in shining armor?" she whispered dubiously. "What's next? Are you going to tell me our resident bluebird tamer is actually a vicious bandit?"

David sheathed his mighty toothpick. "Hey, speaking of Mary Margaret, is she here? I was hoping we could sneak in a quick makeout scene while my wife is in the kitchen."

"Sorry, no. She said to tell you she's busy tonight, attending the opening of her garage door."
Meanwhile, Kathryn was busy trying to scotch-tape together the carrots David had so carelessly hacked to pieces. "Honey, it's a lost cause," Regina informed her. "Just go find your man and show everyone how in love you are. Especially Mary Margaret. And maybe write 'Property of Kathryn Nolan' on his forehead with a magic marker just to be sure you're making yourself understood."

Kathryn sniffled sadly. "Oh, Regina, I just feel like he's not the man I married. I remember him being quieter. And shinier. And named Frederick."

Regina's eyes widened in alarm. "Stop talking like that or I'll taser you in the head!"

"Thanks for the encouragement, Regina." Kathryn smiled. "Say, I've got a great idea. Why don't you and I be friends so that the audience will know they're not supposed to be rooting for me?"

"Sounds like a plan."

Kathryn went back out to the party, where several of her guests were triumphantly counting money. "Hey, has anyone seen David or my magic markers?"

Everyone stared at her like she was speaking Chinese. "You mean the guy this party is for? What the hell would he be doing here?"

David was already standing in Mary Margaret's driveway with a congratulatory card in hand. "Hey baby. Nice night for a makeout scene, isn't it?"

Mary Margaret was startled. "David? Did you just skip out on your own welcome home party? That's not very charming."

David waved her off. "Eh, nobody will miss me; they're all too busy counting their money. I just dropped by to congratulate you on the grand opening of your garage door."

"David, that was a lie. And a really bad one at that."

"I know but I figured I'd humor you. So I take it this is about me declaring my undying love for you?"

"Yeah, dude, that was seriously awkward." She giggled bashfully. "Say it one more time."

"I love you, my sexy schoolmarm, and you know you love me back. The soppy theme music whenever we're alone together proves it."

Mary Margaret shook her head sadly. "Sorry, baby, but I'm way too virtuous to date a married guy. If my bluebirds ever found out, they'd never frolic with me again. Of course," she hinted brazenly, "you could just get a divorce. Get yourself out of the loveless marriage that's causing your wife so much pain and get the bluebirds' blessing for our relationship in one fell swoop."

"Divorce?" Her man stared at her blankly. "What is this thing you call divorce? Is it a kind of hair care product?"

She sighed. "Go home before I bludgeon you to death with a birdhouse."

Out on King Midas' front lawn, Prince James was locked in a fierce duel with Conan the Barbarian. He parried a spear thrust with his historically inaccurate shield, and was thrown across the battlefield. "Whee! I can fly!"
Conan brandished his spear menacingly. "You should really be taking this more seriously. Based on my attire, I'm probably planning to eat you when this is all over."

James pointed over his shoulder. "Hey, is that Arnold Schwarzenegger?"

Conan dropped the spear and reached for his autograph book. "Where?!"

"Sucker." He ran the barbarian through with his sword. "Die, you monster! Die like a carrot!"

"That's my boy!" King George beamed with pride. "Bloodthirsty as an anemic vampire, and captain of the football team, to boot."

"Not bad," said King Midas, "but I'm seventy to seventy-five percent sure that barbarian was human. How is he at killing large reptiles?"

"You name it, I can stick a sword in it," James bragged. "I'm a twelfth-level paladin with Weapon Focus: Longsword."

"Glad to hear it," said Midas, "because this dragon infestation plaguing my kingdom has gotten out of control. The beast ate the Royal Exterminator, along with half the helpless damsels in the kingdom."

"Then it's a deal," crowed King George. "You cut us a check, and my only child marches to an almost certain death. Seems a fair exchange."

Midas hesitated. "Are you sure don't need some time to talk this over? Maybe ask your boy how he feels about this plan?"

"No time!" King George replied. "My kingdom is going bankrupt, and my stimulus package doesn't seem to be helping. I don't know what else to do. I mean, it's not like I have any business contacts with a supernatural ability to spin gold out of straw."

"We really need your help, sir," James chimed in. "The Occupy movement is making a terrible mess of our lawn."

"All right, don't cry, let me see what I can do." Midas pulled off his glove and tapped the prince's sword. The blade immediately turned to gold.

"Umph!" James' arms buckled under the weight of the blade. "What are you doing?! This thing weighs a million pounds now, and it'll probably bend in half the first time I swing it! Now what am I supposed to kill the dragon with?"

Midas shrugged sheepishly. "I was just trying to impress—"

"You may be king, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't respect other people's property." The prince fumed. He sat down next to the fallen barbarian. "Can you believe this jerk?"

Conan's eyes fluttered open. "Hey, is that Ginnifer Goodwin?"

The prince spun around excitedly "Where?!"

"Sucker!" He ran James through with the spear that no one had thought to take away from him.

"Goodbye, fake son," wept King George over the card table his child's lifeless body had been stacked on.
"Your Majesty," one of the king's soldiers scolded, "you've been mourning your lost son for five whole minutes. Get over yourself, already. This is time you should be spending worrying about money. The ninety-nine percent is getting restless."

The king brushed away his tears. "Sorry, men, I don't know what came over me. But there's no need to worry. I've sent for Rumplestiltskin. That never backfires, right?"

"Tee hee! Keep telling yourself that, dearie," giggled the Dark One. "So, I see you finally volunteered your son for one suicide mission too many."

"Says the dude who tossed his kid into an ominous green portal," sneered King George. "Oh yeah, I went there!"

Rumplestiltskin glared. "Let's stick to business, shall we?"

"Fine. The kid you hawked me is dead, and I've still got the warranty. Repair him at once or I'll report you to the Better Beasts Bureau!"

"Would if I could, but I can't."

"You can't resurrect my son?"

"No, he's dead as a doornail."

"So what am I supposed to do about Midas' gold?"

"That's easy. Just send your son to fight the dragon."

"But…he's dead."

"Yeah, so?"

"Can you bring him back from the dead?"

"I already told you, no, stupid."

"Then how is he going to help me get Midas' gold?"

"By killing the dragon, of course."

King George clutched his aching head. "But you said—he's—are you just screwing with my head?"

"Of course. It's me, isn't it?" Rumplestiltskin trilled merrily.

The king stamped his foot petulantly. "Come on! I need my son to kill that dragon."

Rumplestiltskin shot him a dirty look.

"And to love and protect and all that good stuff," the king added belatedly. "I'll give you anything. Except money, and stuff that needs to be bought with money. We're a little low on that right now."

"How about a magic letter opener?"

"Sure, whatever. Now bring back my son."

"What part of dead as a doornail didn't you get?"
"You can't bring back my son?"

"No."

"Then how's he going to—"

"Oh, we are not starting this again!" Rumplestiltskin snapped. "Your son has a convenient identical twin brother who is conveniently desperate for money right now."

"But I just told you, I don't have any money."

"Well, clean out your couch cushions before I go get him. I'm sure you'll come up with something."

Over at the Princess Pad, Mary Margaret was attacking a plate with Emma's chainsaw. Emma stared at her roomie, concerned. "You okay, Eminem?"

"Yes. I'm just getting rid of the china pattern I had picked out for David and me, to celebrate my new commitment to avoiding adultery." She sighed wearily. "This would be a lot easier if he wasn't such a babe."

"Now Mary Margaret, attacking innocent plates isn't going to solve anything. Let's drink away the pain like mature adults. And if that doesn't help, I think I've still got some weed in my closet."

"Thanks, Emma. I don't know what I would do without your wise counsel."

"Anytime. Just remember, falling in love with married men is a recipe for disaster. You should save your heart for someone reliable, like a wandering career criminal." She poured her mom a drink. "Now enjoy. This is great whiskey; I swiped it from Charles Widmore."

Across town, David Nolan sat in his living room, clutching his fearsome toothpick like a security blanket.

His wife slipped an arm around his shoulders. "David?"

"Ah!" He brandished the toothpick wildly. "That's unwanted physical contact! No means no!"

Kathryn's face fell. "I take it this means you're not in the mood for some lovin'?"

David paled. "Can't we just cuddle?"

His alleged wife sighed. "This is because I wrote on your forehead, isn't it? Sorry, I won't do it again."

A humble shepherd boy by the name of Honeymuffin herded his charges into a paddock. "Into the pen, fellas. Goliath's coming over later and we wouldn't want you getting caught in the crossfire."

The shepherd heard a rustling in the bushes. "Ah! Wolf! Wolf!"

"No, it's me, Mom," said his mother. "I have good news. Our money troubles are over. I found a nice girl that's willing to buy you."

Honeymuffin flinched. "Jeez, Mom, will you stop pimping me out? I've got my dignity. I can provide for us just fine by frolicking with my animal friends and maybe stripping on the weekends."
She patted his cheek sadly. "Dignity is for the wealthy, honey. Now put on this Speedo and go meet your new bride."

"But Mom, I want to marry a girl who loves me. One who will hold me close at night and smack me in the mouth with a rock when I'm feeling blue."

"Excuse me?" Rumplestiltskin Apparated in with a loud pop. "I couldn't help overhearing. Well, I could, but I don't want to. Anyway, if the kid's for sale, I've got my checkbook with me."

"So let me get this straight," said Honeymuffin slowly. "You hocked my twin brother to that man?"

"Hey, I have a name," Rumplestiltskin protested. "Though I doubt you could pronounce it."

"Cut me some slack, Honeymuffin, I didn't have a choice," his mother defended. "I was broke. It was either sell your brother or go get a job."

"Oh." Honeymuffin shrugged. "Okay, well, then I guess I would have done the same thing."

"Ahem," Rumplestiltskin piped up. "Remember me? The personification of all evil sitting on your porch?"

"Yeah, yeah, we'll get to you in a second," said Honeymuffin dismissively. "Mom, the men need to talk business. Get in the kitchen and make me a sandwich."

"Yes, sir."

Honeymuffin turned to his guest. "So what do you want from me? Are you selling cookies?"

Rumplestiltskin was aghast. "I'd never sell something as precious as a cookie, you sick monster! I deal in children, but I'm trying to branch out into young adults. That's where you come in. The king needs a son to slay a dragon."

"Sorry, but I can't help you. My combat experience is limited to throwing the occasional rock at Goliath."

"Don't worry, you're just going to be the front man. The kings' own Knights of the Redshirt will take care of everything. They're twelfth-level paladins."

"Then why the hell was the king going to risk my brother's life? Why didn't he just let them handle it in the first place?"

Rumplestiltskin shrugged. "Beats me. Georgie's never been that bright. He keeps making deals with me, for example."

Honeymuffin blanched. "Something tells me that throwing my lot in with this clown is not going to be in my best interests."

"Aw, it won't be all bad. You'll get your name on Wheaties boxes, the king will give you a stack of gold bars he found in his couch cushions, and most importantly, you'll be able to get a decent haircut for once in your life."

"Did you say 'haircut'? I'm in."

At the only diner in town, Mary Margaret steeled herself. "All right, you can do this. Just stop
thinking about David. Do some reading, and maybe that will take your mind off him." She picked up a newspaper and found David's picture stamped across the front page. "Aw, nuts."

Dr. Whale snatched the paper and held it high in triumph. "One of my patients survived! I must be the greatest physician in American history!" He sidled unsubtly up to Mary Margaret. "And I'm sexy, too."

Mary Margaret blinked. "Dr. Whale? Are you still alive?"

Whale shrugged. "Alive and dead are such relative concepts. But if you're ever interested in another night of being ignored while I gawk at other women, I'm still available."

Mary Margaret sighed. "Something tells me you always will be."

Regina barged in, as usual. "Blanchard! You robbed me—uh, I mean, my BFF, of her true love. You dirty little gossip…uh, homewrecker."

"I beg your pardon?"

"David left his wife! Said he discovered this thing called divorce. I wonder how he found out about that?"

"Er, saw it on TV?" Mary Margaret suggested weakly.

"Miss Blanchard, you're breaking up a loving marriage in order to take advantage of a mentally ill man! It's sick! Reverse the genders and this could be a Lifetime Movie of the Week!"

Mary Margaret winced. "Yikes. When a villainess in black eye makeup has the moral high ground over me, it's definitely a sign I've gone too far."

Honeymuffin admired his new reflection in another historically inaccurate shield. "You know, I look downright charming under all that hair."

Midas approached him with a smile. "There he is, Dragonslayer Number Forty-Seven! Survive this, and I'll see that you get your own line of Air Charmings."

As Midas walked away, Honeymuffin turned to one of the Knights of the Redshirt. "Excuse me, but did he say number forty-seven?"

"Yeah, but you don't need to worry about that. We'll be doing all the actual work. You're just the eye candy."

"I can handle that." Honeymuffin struck a heroic pose with his useless gold sword.

The knight snatched the blade away. "No playing with knives! I'll protect you during the battle, and it's a good thing, since that sword probably couldn't cut construction paper anymore."

"But won't people get suspicious if I march off to the epic battle without a weapon?"

"If anyone brings it up, just tell them you're so badass you're going to strangle the dragon with your bare hands."

As they descended toward the dragon's lair, they found a trail of charred bodies and empty barbecue sauce bottles by the wayside. "Eep," said Honeymuffin. "Am I the only one who's getting a bad
feeling about this?"

"Yes!" snapped the knights in unison.

"Just checking."

"Now, then," the head knight announced, "the dragon is obviously inside this foreboding black cave. The only sensible thing to do is charge blindly inside and attack it on its home turf."

Honeymuffin raised his hand timidly. "Can I say something, here?"

"No. Just stay here and stay pretty until we get back. Some journalists will be dropping by to get pictures of you standing over the dead dragon. It'll be a good photo op, and we don't want you looking all charred and bloody."

Honeymuffin and his bodyguards stood outside the cave in awkward silence. "So, uh, you guys want to play I Spy?"

"No."

"The Alphabet Game?"

"No."

"Then do you want to tell me about my late brother? What was he like?"

"He liked to keep his mouth shut."

Taking the hint, Honeymuffin kept quiet until a plume of flame burst out of the cave, followed by a chorus of screams and the scent of barbecue sauce. "Oh no! We've got to help them!"

"Are you crazy?" one of the bodyguards cried. "I joined this service to qualify for student financial aid, not die in a vortex of flame and KC Masterpiece!"

"Okay, then let's run for our lives!"

The second bodyguard shook his head firmly. "No dice. We can't risk missing the photographer."

"You guys are useless!" Honeymuffin pulled a toothpick out of his pocket and made a beeline for the cave. "Die, you monster! Die like a carrot!"

He found the head knight twitching and burning on the ground, with grill marks all over his face. "Think, man think!" he groaned to himself. "Stop, Drop, and…what was the last part? Eh, screw it. Just take my useless gold sword."

Honeymuffin groaned under the clunky blade's weight. "I think I'll stick with my toothpick, thanks."

The dragon rudely swooped in and burned the little toothpick to ash. "My toothpick!" the shepherd wailed. "That does it! Now it's personal!" He picked up the blade in a truly herculean feat of strength.

"Oh, shut up!" roared the dragon. "You think you've got problems? I'm having the worst heartburn attack of my life over here!"

"Oh?" said Honeymuffin. "I think I've got some Tums in my scabbard. Would you like one?"
The dragon brightened. "That would be great."

The shepherd unsheathed his sword and sank it into the dragon's neck. "Psych!"

David poked his head into Mary Margaret's classroom. "Hey, baby. I checked into that divorce thing you were telling me about and it looks awesome. So, how 'bout that makeout scene?"

Mary Margaret recoiled. "David, we're in my fourth-grade classroom. During school hours. I'm pretty sure there are laws against that."

Blushing, David gave the children surrounding him a sheepish little wave. "Oops, hey kids. I didn't see you there."

"The makeout closet is right over there, Gramps," Henry called out helpfully.

"Shut up, Henry!" said Mary Margaret. "As for you, David, I'm not hooking up with a married mental patient in a room full of ten-year-olds!"

"Fair enough. Would you be willing to hook up with a married mental patient on a public bridge?"

"…Maybe."

"Sweet! See you tonight, baby."

As David left the room, a bluebird landed on Mary Margaret's desk and cocked its head at her quizzically. The schoolteacher flushed. "Don't you dare judge me!

At Mayberry Jail, Graham plunked a five gallon bucket of cinnamon cocoa down on Emma's desk. "How's my favorite and prettiest deputy today?"

"What do you want, Graham?"

"I need you to cover for me tonight while I'm busy screwing Reg—uh, feeding homeless puppies."

"You don't need to talk about puppies to make yourself look cute, Graham. The sexy Irish brogue already sold me on you."

Mary Margaret ran in. "Oh my gosh, I could smell this bucket of cinnamon cocoa from clear across town!"

Graham knew better than to get between the Charmings and their cinnamon cocoa. "I'll leave you ladies alone. If anyone calls 911, just tell them I'm on break."

"What's up, Mary Margaret?" said Emma. "You look upset. Are the bluebirds snubbing you again?"

"No, it's David. He left his wife because he loves me and wants to make a commitment to me!"

"Um…what a bastard?"

"Emma, this is serious! This relationship of ours is sick and wrong! I know, because Regina said so."

"You're going to take ethical advice from a woman with a secret corpse vault?"

Mary Margaret brightened. "You know, you're right." She scooped up a mug of cinnamon cocoa
and hurried off to meet her prince. "If there's a necktie on the door tonight, don't come home!"

David examined his wedding ring, dismayed. "This cheap thing doesn't even decode. That's got to be a sign that this marriage is doomed." He discarded the band and jumped out the window. "Here I come, Eminem!"

King Midas clapped his hands excitedly. "Another dragon's head? Throw it on the pile, men!"

"King George," whispered Honeymuffin, "why does Midas have so many monster heads?"

"He's a hoarder. He's also got a giant stack of Barbie doll heads and three whole rooms full of old peanut butter jars."

"Oh. Well, whatever. Rumplestiltskin said something about a stack of gold bars you found in your couch cushions?"

"Yeah, yeah, we'll get to that later."

Midas started to pat Honeymuffin on the shoulder, then thought better of it. "That's some mighty fine hack 'n' slash, son."

King George held out a printed money sack and cleared his throat loudly.

"Yeah, yeah, we'll get to that later." Midas smiled. "I have a confession to make. I didn't really need another dragon head. This was all just a ruse. My daughter needs a husband, and I wanted to make sure she has the most violent and aggressive one available." He whistled. "Hey, Abigail!"

The princess walked in. "Yeah, Daddy?"

"I know you've been upset since your man died, so I bought you a new one. You'll have to pay for his shots and license yourself, though."

Abigail groaned. "Can I just have a goldfish instead?"

"Yes!" Honeymuffin agreed eagerly. "Fish are wonderful creatures. So easy to care for, and I understand they'll even sing to you about life under the s—ow! King George, did you just stab me with a toothpick?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Ouch! You just did it again! GAH! Stop that," cried the quasi-prince, rubbing his backside gingerly. "Er, on second thought, goldfish are overrated. I'd be honored to marry your daughter."

A befuddled David stared uncomprehendingly at a map he'd found on the back of a placemat. "Note to self, buy a GPS at soonest convenience," he wrote on the back of his hand.

Regina suddenly leaped into his path. "RAAAH!"

"Ah!" screamed David, reaching for his trusty toothpick.

"Oh sorry, did I scare you?" the mayor asked innocently.

"If I said no, would you believe me?"
"Hell no. Are you looking for something?"

"True Love! And a reliable GPS system."

"Oh. Well, there's a Radio Shack right down the street. Just keep going until you reach the end of the pier, then jump off it."

"Will do, thanks."

Three hours later, David was still wandering in circles. "On second thought, maybe I should find someone a little less sinister to ask for directions. I know! I'll ask Gold!" He walked into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, and found himself surrounded by creepy puppets, non-chipped teacups, and eerily familiar mobiles. "Wow, this guy has got to be the second-worst hoarder I've ever met."

"Third-worst," Gold corrected. "You should have seen the size of Regina's mirror collection."

"Huh?"

"Oh, nothing." The pawnbroker choked down an oxymoronic evil giggle.

"Um, okay. I just came in because I need to find my True Love. Can you please direct me to the pier I'm supposed to be jumping off of?"

Gold snickered under his breath. "Well, I'm fresh out of magical Action League Secret Decoder Rings at the moment, but that shouldn't be a problem. Just go outside and follow the trail of bluebirds, dearie."

"Thanks, homie." David turned to leave and stopped dead in his tracks. "Is that a windmill?"

"Yes."

"It's so…fugly." The amnesiac was mesmerized. "How long has it been here?"

"Twenty-eight years, just like everything else."

"Fugly windmill!" David cried epiphanically. "I totally get it now! I remember!"

"That nice, dearie. Now either buy something or go away. You're making the puppets uncomfortable."

"Hey, Mom!" yelled Honeymuffin triumphantly. "I'm back, and I brought you a lifetime supply of Wheaties!"

His mother looked him over proudly. "Look at you! A dragonslaying prince on a white horse. How cliché. Please promise me you won't start kissing dead girls now."

"Yes'm."

"Good boy. Now come on inside and check out the pile of gold King George gave us. There's some lint and an old lollipop stuck to it, but we can take care of that later."

"No can do, Mom. King George wants me to go live with him and marry Midas' daughter. By the way, is there a pet shop around here? I need to get her a wedding gift and I was thinking maybe a goldfish—"
"Are you serious?" his mother cried. "This is an outrage! Nobody gets to pimp out my son but me!"

"But Mom—"

"No buts! This is the worst tragedy that's ever befallen our family! Who does King George think he is? Taking my son away from this life of poverty and hardship to make him king over a glorious new nation! It's heinous!"

"Er, where exactly was this maternal outrage of yours when you hocked my brother to the Dark One? He's dead now, by the way."

"Forget about that guy! They can't force you to do this."

"Uh, actually they can. See, they have the advantage of weapons, dungeons, and an army."

"Crap, you're right." His mother sighed. "Well, here. Take my Action League Secret Decoder Ring. Your cheapskate father gave it to me as a wedding band. It'll help you find true love, and decode messages about Ovaltine. I'll feel better knowing you'll be loved and fed."

"Thanks, Mom. I'll see you…uh, when I'm dead, I guess."

Mary Margaret stood on the toll bridge, staring dreamily into the sky. "Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, score a makeout scene with my prince tonight."

"Yeah, about that…" David shuffled guiltily out of the forest. "I sort of cured my amnesia with a fugly windmill."

"Damn!" Mary Margaret hissed. "That is, damn glad to hear it, baby."

"So, uh, now that I remember how troubled and miserable my marriage was, I think the only reasonable thing to do is stick with it."

"…Huh?"

"Oh, but don't worry, I'm still into you, too. I'm not a total cad."

"Please, I'm begging you, stop talking," groaned Mary Margaret. "I'm leaving. Next time you drop dead, find someone else to smooch the life back into you. Or don't. I'm really past caring."

Emma was cruising down Stepford Street, an arm draped lovingly around the bucket of cocoa in her passenger seat, when she saw a mysterious man in black skulking out of the Stepford House. "All right, a crime in progress! Finally I get some action this episode!" She ducked behind a bush, revved up her chainsaw, and pounced.

"AAAAH!" screamed Graham, clutching his bloodied arm. "You nicked my cool leather jacket!"

"Graham?" Emma glowered. "What were you doing with Regina? You said you were feeding homeless puppies!"

"Er, would you believe Regina finally traded Henry in for a puppy like she's always threatening to?"

"Oh dear Lord!" Emma groaned, burying her face in her hands. "My love interest has been screwing my archenemy with my son in the house? Could this possibly get any more creepy and wrong? Are you secretly my long-lost brother or something?"
"I don't think so, but you never know. Sweeps week is coming up, after all."

"Ew!" Emma tossed him her keys. "I'm going home, I need a drink and a shower."

David went to his alleged home to see his alleged wife. "Hey Kathryn. I finally got it! Fugly windmill!"

"Baby, you're back!" squealed Kathryn, flinging her arms around her husband.

Out on King Midas' front lawn, Princess Abigail and Quasi-Prince Honeymuffin were holding hands and chewing anti-nausea tablets. Midas smiled brightly. "Aw, isn't young love beautiful, King George?"

"Yep. Almost as beautiful as a piggybank made out of solid gold."

Midas sighed wearily. "This guy is sucking the life out of me. You kids hit the beach. I've got some piggybanks to caress."

"Yes sir," said Honeymuffin meekly. "Princess Abigail, I thought maybe we could take the road that's not named after flesh-eating monsters?"

"Pfft. You would think that, loser," Abigail sulked.

Mary Margaret sat weeping at the only diner in town. "Hit me with another Zoloft cupcake, Ruby."

"Don't you think you've had enough, hon?" said Ruby gently.

Mary Margaret seized her by the collar. "I'll tell you when I've had enough!"

Dr. Whale sat down beside her. "Hey, there, hot stuff. Bad day?"

"No, I sit at bars crying just for the hell of it. It's a hobby of mine."

Whale grinned. "Mm, you're a doll when you're mad. You in the market for a rebound guy? Because I'm still available."

Mary Margaret sighed wearily. "Okay, but at least let me get nice and drunk first."
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter

At the only diner in town, Graham was hatefully flinging darts at a picture of some cats. "Bet you can't do that again," scoffed Sidney Glass.

Graham raised his eyebrows. "Dude, trying to gamble with a cop isn't the brightest idea you've ever had."

"Oh, yeah, the cop thing," Sidney frowned. "Well, maybe if you ever bothered to wear your uniform, I wouldn't have forgotten."

"Eh, I'd arrest you, but I'm too drunk to find my handcuffs at the moment." He flung an umpteenth dart at the kittens.

"Fine," Sidney sulked, holding out a twenty. "Take my money, just like you took my woman!"

Emma had overheard this exchange. "Ew, Sidney, not you too!"

Graham shrugged helplessly. "I told you I'm not the only one who thinks evil is sexy. But we've got more important things to talk about right now. Firstly, if we're both here, who's manning the 911 line? Secondly, what are you doing here, anyway?"

"I'm getting as far away from you as possible, as rapidly as possible." Emma bolted for the door.

"No you don't! We're going to discuss this situation calmly and rationally, like the mature adults that we are."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I'll have to shoot you with this dart."

Emma rolled her eyes. "Buster, you're a little outgunned. I've still got my chainsaw, you know." She turned to leave and a dart slammed into the wall beside her. "Woah, dude, you were serious? I thought that was just playful banter!"

"Emma, I know you're annoyed with me about what happened with Regina, but in all fairness, you really should have seen it coming."

His deputy gaped at him. "Graham, you just flung a weapon at a cop in front of half the town! This isn't the time for you to be talking about your love life. It's time for you to see a lawyer about your upcoming assault and drunk-and-disorderly arrests!"

Graham smacked his forehead absently. "Right, the cop thing. I keep forgetting." He followed her outside. "Look, I know it must be upsetting to find out your boyfriend is having an affair with your archenemy—"

"Graham, you are not my boyfriend."

The sheriff cocked an eyebrow. "Come on, Emma, who do you think you're fooling, here?"

She sighed. "Graham, go away. I'm angry with you and I'm trying really hard not to stop."

"But Emma, it's not my fault! When I'm with Regina, I feel all numb and dirty. I think she might be drugging my donuts."
"So dump her."

Graham's mouth opened and closed dumbly while he fumbled for a comeback. "I can't or I'll lose my job," he finally came up with.

"What, the job of hooker?"

Graham considered this. "You're right, I've got nothing. In appreciation for showing me the light, please accept this drunken kiss."

"Blech!" Emma sputtered, shoving him away. "I think that kiss gave me alcohol poisoning! Get out of here and quit perpetuating a negative Irish stereotype!"

Graham crumpled to the ground. "Emma, help, I'm hallucinating!"

Emma flushed with pride. "Really? I'm that good?"

"No, I think it was some kind of deja-vu."

"Oh." Disappointed, she stepped over his pale, trembling body, hopped into her Love Bug and drove off.

Sprawled helplessly on the pavement, Graham groaned. "Why do I keep getting mixed up with these abusive chicks?"

That in mind, Graham went over to Regina's place and knocked on the door. "Let me in, Regina! I need mental and sexual abuse, and I need it now!"

Regina brushed him off. "You'll have to wait your turn, I promised I'd go abuse Sidney tonight."

Graham cut her off with a smooch, and she staggered backwards. "Woah. We probably shouldn't be doing this, but I think the alcohol fumes in your mouth just got me drunk. Get upstairs and break out your handcuffs."

In a magnificent palace designed by the one and only Frank Lloyd Wright, Snow White was weeping bitterly over her father's coffin. "I miss you so much, Daddy. And black really isn't my color. This day sucks!"

Queen Regina pulled her stepdaughter into her arms. "There, there, Mommy's here. Want to cry on my shoulder?"

Snow White glanced down at the jagged spikes covering her mom's shoulder. "Erm, no thanks."

"Well, if you change your mind, you know where to find me." She headed up to her Royal Rumpus Room and turned on her magic mirror.

"Congratulations on the recent death of your husband, Your Majesty," he fawned.

"Thanks, homie. I couldn't have done it without you. Now all that remains is to kill Snow White, burn down Parliament, and rewrite the succession laws."

"I'm afraid I'm no good for any of that without a body."

"Then I'll have to find a new hitman-slash-lover. Any suggestions?"
The mirror shed a single manly tear. "How about a trained warrior?"

"No, that would be practical, and we both know that's not my style."

"Well, how about a hired assassin?"

"That's no good, either. King George just hired the entire assassins' guild to hunt down some dwarf named Stealthy.

The mirror sighed. "Well, I guess if you're downright desperate, we could use the Huntsman. He's kind of a softie, but he's better than nothing."

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, the Huntsman somehow managed to instantly kill a deer by shooting it in the shoulder. He was just that cool. "Sorry homie," he apologized, "but it was either kill you or eat vegetarian tonight. And I really hate tofu."

A little fawn named Bambi wandered out of the bushes. "Oh, no! Mother, speak to me!" he wailed pitifully.

"Yeah, yeah, we've all got problems, kid. Mine being finding room in the fridge for your mom."

"I'm telling King Mufasa you said that!" Bambi cried, galloping off.

A white wolf with one red contact lens slunk out of the forest. "Hey Dad," Graham greeted. "I stopped to pick up some dinner."

"Rowr."

"Yeah, I know, we'd better get home to Mom before she gets cranky and bites us."

Graham bolted awake with a scream. "Gah! What the hell was that?!"

Regina yawned. "I don't know and I don't care, but I have a feeling you're going to tell me anyway."

"Darn right. I dreamed I was a thinly-disguised version of that kid from The Jungle Book!"

Regina stiffened. "How very lethal—I mean, unpleasant for you. Why don't you come here with me and go back to sleep?"

Graham stared at her in abject horror. "You want to cuddle? That's even scarier than the deja-vu!" Terrified, the sheriff grabbed his clothes and dove out the window. "I'm okay!" he yelled up to her. "Some wolf with contact lenses broke my fall. AAAAAAH!"

Regina sighed and took out a Post-It note. "Next on my to-do list, get a less erratic boy-toy."

Over at the Princess Pad, Emma noticed a bouquet of flowers on the table. "Graham thinks he can buy my love with flowers? Outrageous! I'm worth at least a diamond solitaire!" She revved up her chainsaw menacingly.

"Wait!" One of the roses in the vase began to tremble. "Don't kill me! I am Sir Gaston and I've been cursed by an evil sorcerer!"

Emma clutched her head. "Ugh, those alcohol fumes in Graham's mouth really must have done a
number on me." She dumped the screaming bouquet in the trash.

"Emma, those were mine!" Mary Margaret protested. "You're not the only one who can have a cheap, torrid love affair, you know."

"Really?" Emma threw her arms around her mom. "I'm so proud of you, you little skank!" Later on, they would come to realize how creepy and wrong this whole scenario was.

"Well, I'm not!" her mother whimpered. "I'm way too pure and noble for something as filthy as a one night stand. I'd rather be sneaking around with vulnerable married guys like a respectable woman."

"Aw, come on, I do it all the time."

"Sneak around with vulnerable married guys?"

"What? No, I meant the first part." Emma started to panic. "Why? Have Regina and Graham announced anything? Answer me, damn you!"

Mary Margaret pried her roomie's hands off her shirtfront. "We are so severely screwed up."

Emma shrugged. "Could be worse. We could have Sidney's love life."

Graham stumbled through the woods, a jumbo Milk Bone in hand. "Here, poochie, poochie, poochie!" He reached into the underbrush and felt something moving around, so he yanked it out. "Mr. Gold? You're not a wolf."

Gold grinned wolfishly. "Whatever you say, dearie."

Graham noticed the dirty shovel in Gold's hand. "I don't particularly care at the moment, but as sheriff, I'm obligated to ask you if you're burying a dead body."

"No, just making mud pies. In Armani. I'm quirky like that."

"Whatever. I'm looking for a wolf."

"Have you tried Granny's?"

"No."

"You should."

"Huh?"

Gold's smile somehow managed to turn even creepier. "Oh, I'm not saying that there are amnesiac magical creatures in this town. I'm simply saying that there are amnesiac magical creatures in this town. Later!"

The Huntsman was drinking at a standard fantasy tavern, when he found himself suddenly surrounded by idiots. "Hey, I've got a great idea," slurped one. "Since the pool table's broken, let's entertain ourselves by provoking the heavily-armed loner who lives outside the social contract."

"Go away or I'll shove a steak down your pants and take you to my family reunion," the Huntsman seethed.
"Oh, that's right, you were raised by wolves," sniggered a second drunken idiot. "I guess that explains why you keep licking your own elbows."

"You're wasting your time," said the Huntsman. "I'm far too cool and stoic to be goaded into a fight."

The barkeep tapped him on the shoulder. "Excuse me, sir, but there's a no pets sign on the door. I'm afraid your wolf will have to leave."

"He's not a pet, he's a service dog. He helps keep me from going on killing sprees. But I guess rules are rules."

"Eep! Never mind! Never mind!"

The Huntsman scooped him up and slammed him headfirst into the mirror. "Ouch!" yelped the barkeep.

"Ouch!" yelped the mirror.

The Huntsman picked up a shard of Sid and turned on the crowd. "Anybody else want to try and force their fancy medieval ideas about hygiene on me?" He was met with dead silence. "Yeah, didn't think so."

In the Queen's palace, her magic mirror was reeling in pain. "Damn, that hurt! Somebody call 911 and get me a glazier!"

Regina ignored him. "Hm, I don't know if a guy who spends his spare time protecting puppies can ever be ruthless enough for the task I have in mind. But on the other hand, he's sexy and Irish. Tell the Royal Personnel Director to slap a leash on him and invite him over."

Graham was still in the woods stalking man's best friend. "Here, boy, come on out!" he wheedled. "If you show me the true meaning of my existence, I'll give you people food."

At that, the wolf crept out of the woods, carrying a plastic dog dish labeled "Dad" in his mouth.

Graham approached him nervously. "So why exactly are you stalking me? Actually, on second thought, don't answer that. I'm already crazy enough without throwing talking animals into the mix." He leaned down to put a Slim Jim in the dog's outstretched bowl, and was overcome by another fit of deja-vu. The sheriff shuddered. "That does it. This is the last time I accept free donuts from Regina."

He staggered into Mary Margaret's classroom, absently licking the back of his hand. "Hey, Eminem, I have the funniest feeling we've met before."

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes good naturedly. "Graham, that line doesn't work when you actually do know the girl."

"No, I was serious."

Mary Margaret patted him gently on the head. "Oh, honey, you must be wasted."

Graham cut to the chase. "Have I ever hurt you?"

"You're giving me a serious headache right now, does that count?"
"No, I'm talking about smooch-induced memories from another life."

"That does it!" Mary Margaret threw up her hands in disgust. "I am not, repeat not getting involved with another damn amnesiac!" She pulled him out of his seat and started shoving him toward the door. "And so help me, if you say one word about a fugly windmill, I'm going to sic a flock of rabid bluebirds on you!"

"But Mary Margaret, you've got to help me! I'm going insane and the only shrink in town is at an amateur entomologists' convention for the day."

Mary Margaret just slammed the door in his face. "If you're really insane, you should go talk shop with Henry and leave me out of it."

All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men dragged the Huntsman into the Queen's castle. "Thank Aslan we finally made it. This guy's been biting and slobbering the whole way here!"

"It was your own fault for refusing to throw the stick again," the Huntsman countered.

The Queen's eyes roved over him shamelessly. "Mm, you're so feisty. And I've always had a thing for men who reek of dirty animals. Tell me, do you have a name, or should I just call you Mowgli?"

"Actually, my real name is Haa-OOOOOOOWL!" howled the Huntsman. "It's an old family name."

"Haooowl!" the Queen tried.

"I do not have ringworm! You take that back!" snarled the Huntsman, drawing his dagger.

"Um, you know what, why don't we just stick with 'Huntsman'?"

He shrugged. "Fine by me. So tell me, is there a reason I'm wearing this stupid leash?"

"Yes. I need someone to hunt down a sheltered and vulnerable little girl, and a tough job like that is going to require the best of the best."

The Huntsman grew wary. "You are hunting her for food and not for sport, right?"

"Well, in some versions I eat her heart and liver."

"Good enough, I guess," he conceded. "What's in this for me?"

"A lifetime supply of kibble?"

"Pass."

"A post at court as my personal love slave?"

"Ew, no! I want you to sign the Canine Conservation Act and provide 2.8 million dollars in funding for PETA."

"Fine."

"And while you're at it, put an end to offshore oil drilling."

"Don't push your luck, jungle boy." The Queen handed him a box labeled "Property of Pandora."

"Put her heart in here when you're done, then come back to my place for coffee. With your shirt off."
"Ah, I just love a good stroll in beautiful British Columbia," Snow White jabbered, following the Huntsman through the forest. "Almost as much as I love bluebirds. And puppies. And raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens!" The princess smiled radianty.

The Huntsman groaned. "Did you say puppies?"

Snow couldn't answer. The radiance of her smile had drawn a mob of adoring bunny rabbits. "Hello, my darlings! Shall we whistle while we walk?"

"Aw, hell, I don't know if I can do this," muttered the Huntsman. "She's even harder on the heartstrings than that Bambi kid." He pensively scratched the back of his head with his foot.

Snow gave him a double-take. "You want an apple? Don't worry, I didn't get them from Regina."

"Will you stop being so insufferably sweet?" the Huntsman whined. "Why can't you be all shrill and shallow like your Disney counterpart?"

Snow sighed. "If this is about you being here to kill me, I figured that out a long time ago."

"Really? How?"

The princess laughed. "Oh boy, where do I start? There's the oddity of sending a princess into the forest with no horse, no carriage, and only one escort; the fact that said escort snarls whenever he sees a cat; the convenient timing of it all, sending the heir to the throne off into the wilderness the moment the throne becomes vacant…"

*Three hours later…*

"…Your sinister black uniform, the Queen's Glare of Evil, and finally, that big empty box you refuse to discuss the meaning of," Snow finished smugly.

The Huntsman sighed. "That's quite a list, all right. I don't know what I was thinking when I took this stupid job."

"I hope you were thinking of buying some good health insurance," said Snow.

"Why?"

"Eat twig, sucker!" she screamed, smacking him in the knees with a branch and running off into the forest. "Now that's what I call a hit-and-run!"

The Huntsman crumpled to the ground. "Gah! Brought down by an old stick? This armor is even worse than that stuff Imperial Stormtroopers wear!"

Emma was at the Mayberry Jail, flinging darts at a picture of Graham's face and listening to "Your Cheatin' Heart", when Regina barged in as usual. "Swan! My network of high-resolution surveillance cameras tells me you've been making out with Graham. In response, I've passed a new city ordinance requiring all deputy sheriffs to undertake vows of celibacy."

Emma rubbed her head tiredly. "Regina, if I were you, I wouldn't pick fights with someone who's holding a bunch of darts. Anyway, you're wasting your time; I'm not interested in Graham. He's sexy enough, but the schizophrenia is a major turn-off."

Regina's face fell. "You're not? I mean, of course you're not! You've got an even worse fear of
commitment than Michael Tillman does!"

Emma blinked. "I'm well aware of that. I've openly admitted it countless times. It's the reason I gave you custody of my son all those years ago."

"Oh, right. I forgot about that." The mayor was clearly disappointed. "'Then what the heck are we supposed to fight about this week?"

"We could fight about Henry's upbringing."

"No, that's getting old." Regina looked stumped.

"Tell you what," said Emma. "Let me spend a few hours watching Phantom of the Opera, Wuthering Heights, and some other gothic romances, and see if I can develop some sort of attraction to insanity. Meanwhile, you take these darts and keep throwing them at a picture of me until your rage is at its zenith. Maybe after that we'll be able to do this fight the right way."

"One can only hope," Regina sighed, taking the proffered darts and leaving.

---

At the Stepford House, Henry found the sheriff wigging out on his doorstep. "Hey, Graham. Do I need to lock myself in my room and put on noise canceling headphones like I always do when you come over?"

"Not today, little buddy. I'm here because I need some advice regarding deja-vu."

"I'm your man."

---

Finally free of his ugly and pointless armor, the Huntsman found Snow White calmly digging her own grave, with a little help from her animal friends. "Heya," she greeted, cheerfully climbing into the hole. "You sure you don't want this last apple before you kill me? I won't need it where I'm going."

"You're taking this rather well," the Huntsman observed.

The princess shrugged. "Eh, there's no sense in fighting it. I mean, it's not like I'm going to conveniently stumble across seven strapping men with pickaxes, who are willing to offer their protection to a complete stranger."

"No, the odds of that seem pretty low," the Huntsman agreed.

"Right. So I figure I may as well go with the flow." Snow White laid down and crossed her hands over her chest. "Oh, I almost forgot. I've prepared a Hallmark card for my murderer. Will you give it to her with my love?"

The Huntsman buried his face in his hands. "Damn it all, I can't kill you! A freaking Nazi couldn't kill you!"

She bit her lip guiltily. "Sorry, sir, the last thing I want to do is inconvenience you—"

"Just shut the hell up!" he groaned. "Here, take this weird little piece of bamboo. It'll help you next time you get into trouble, but I'm going to leave it to you to figure out how. Or you could just flash your pretty smile. That seems to work well for you."

Snow White hesitated. "Are you sure you don't want to kill me? I really don't mind. I've already
called and cancelled all my magazine subscriptions—"

"Get out of here!" the Huntsman roared.

"Whatever makes you happy," said Snow White, fleeing dutifully.

Henry pressed a stethoscope against Graham's chest. "When did your symptoms start?"

"When I kissed Emma," the sheriff replied. "Which I did right after consuming mass quantities of alcohol, but I'm going to blame the kiss anyway."

Henry made a face. "Ew, you kissed my mom?"

"Both of them. Actually. And I use the term 'kissed' loosely."

"You disgusting sicko! Get out of my house!"

"Henry, please, you've got to help me. You're the smartest person in town. And that's so sad it makes me want to cry." Graham reached for a Kleenex.

The little prince grudgingly patted him on the back. "There, there, double-stepfather of mine. Go ahead and tell Henry what's bothering you."

"Well," the sheriff sniffled, "I had this vision of myself killing Mary Margaret, but she seems awfully energetic for a dead girl."

"That must mean you're the Huntsman. Please accept my condolences."

"What? Why?" Graham demanded.

"Well, according to the Big Book of Deja-Vu, you've got a terrible case of fleas. Also, the Queen ripped your heart out."

"Why would she do a thing like that?"

"It's a hereditary trait," Henry explained. "I really hope it's nature and not nurture. But back to the subject of your heart. Mom keeps her collection in a secret vault, though she does take them out every February to use as Valentine's Day decorations."

"Thanks for the info, bro."

The boy scowled at him. "You can thank me by not telling me anymore stories involving you, my mothers, and the exchange of bodily fluids."

Emma was waiting outside for him. "Hey Graham, I'm here to take you home. Er, as a friend."

"Then get a bigger car," said Graham, "because there's no way two fully grown adults are going to fit in your Love Bug. Anyway, I can't go home at the moment. I've got a date with a dog."

"Graham, please don't make me lock you in the basement with Belle."

"I'm not crazy! Your mentally unstable ten-year-old told me so."

"Why does everyone I love end up going insane? I'm starting to take it personally." The savior
sighed. "Oh well, at least he's got a great body." She started running her hands over his chest.

Henry's bedroom window suddenly flew open. "Knock it off, you two! You're scarring me for life, here!"

"Sorry, Henry," Graham apologized.

"Yeah, yeah. Just get out of here and find your wolf—I need to go see my therapist," the boy grumbled, slamming the window shut.

"Ah!" Emma cried, looking over Graham's shoulder. "Graham, there's a freaking wolf wandering around the middle of an upscale residential neighborhood! We need to create an animal control department and then call it."

"No, it's okay, he's family," Graham explained, taking her hand and smiling with nervous excitement. "Hey, Dad! Come here, I want you to meet my new girlfriend, Emma." The wolf turned tail and ran. "Sorry, honey, he's a little shy, but I'm sure he's going to love you." Graham dragged her off after the wolf. "Dad, wait up! I've been looking all over for my heart but I can't find it anywhere. If you see it lying around, can you let me know? And also try not to eat it?"

Emma reluctantly followed him along. "You're lucky you're the only attractive bachelor in town, buster, or I would be so out of here."

The Huntsman was sweating bullets when he returned to the Queen's palace. "Hm, you're clearly up to something," she observed breathlessly, "but it's making you glisten so beautifully. I'll hear you out."

The Huntsman unshouldered Pandora's box. "One extra-large princess heart with a side of waffle fries, just as you ordered. Oh, and a Hallmark card from your victim."

"Read it to me," the Queen commanded.

"Why?"

"I'm dyslexic. That's why I took up evil sorcery—I was compensating for my disability."

"Then I'd be happy to read it. Good thing the wolves sent me to school." The Huntsman tore open the envelope. "The front flap says 'Not All Stepmoms Are Wicked!' The inside says 'Just you, but I love you anyway. Hugs and kisses, Snow. P.S., sorry for narking on your boyfriend.' Aw, isn't that sweet?"

"It would have been sweeter of her to keep her freaking mouth shut," growled Regina, tossing the card into a trash compacter.

"Why do you hate her so much, anyway?"

"I hate everything except apples and stable boys. And jumbo princess hearts with waffle fries. Speaking of which, fork them over or you're not getting your tip."

The Huntsman dumped the box into her outstretched hands. "Here you go. Enjoy."

Regina peeked inside. "This is awfully big to be Snow's. She must have had a severe case of cardiomyelagia. Maybe I should have just skipped this whole assassination and let her illness take its course." She frowned. "Wait a minute. This isn't Snow's heart! And these are French fries, not waffle
"fries!" She glowered at the Huntsman. "What did you do?!"

"Nothing. I suspect that's why you're so mad at me."

At the only graveyard in town, Graham and Emma stumbled across a massive crypt inscribed with the words *Here Lies the Original Henry Mills, Beloved Father and Spell Component*. "Score!" cried Graham. "We've got to get inside. Emma, did you bring your chainsaw?"

"I'm not letting you anywhere near a chainsaw in this state, honey," Emma replied warily.

"Really?" The savior smiled shyly. "In that case, I'd be glad to help you." She charged the door.

"Emma SMASH!"

Graham poked around frantically. "Could it be inside this canopic jar? No, that would be too obvious. Taped to the ceiling, maybe? No. Well, I'm not going to even bother checking the massive casket taking up the majority of the structure. There's absolutely no way it could be in there. Emma, look under the doormat."

Emma wrapped her arms around her babbling boyfriend. "Graham, Erik and Heathcliff have shown me that a man can be insane without losing his sex appeal, but let's not push it."

Regina barged in, as usual, and shielded her eyes in horror. "Aw, jeez! Please tell me my archenemy and my boy-toy are not hooking up in my father's grave. Because that would put me in an eternity of therapy."

"Please allow me to beg your forgiveness," Emma apologized, unable to look the mayor in the eye. "Even you don't deserve an image like that haunting your memories."

"Don't blame Emma, Regina," said Graham. "I was looking for my heart, which I know that you have, and which I know gives you absolute power over me. Incidentally, I'm dumping you because you're a frigid witch and I hate your guts. I hope you'll have enough class not to kill me in retaliation."

"So sexy, yet so stupid." Regina sighed wistfully. "I suppose this is your doing, Swan? First Henry, now Graham? Quit touching my stuff!"

"Hey, I didn't touch anything that didn't want to be touched," sneered Emma.

"Oh, that's it!" Regina flung a dart at Emma's face.

"Hey, not the face!" The savior decked her baby mama in the head.

Graham jumped between them. "Ladies, as thrilling as it is, please don't fight over me! Let's settle this in a civilized manner. Maybe hot oil wrestling?" The sheriff smiled hopefully.

"Oh, screw it," grumbled Emma, walking away. "I need some McCutcheon's and a Zoloft cupcake."

Regina smirked. "Well, now that she's out of the way, Graham, I'm going to give you one last chance. Slap on those handcuffs and get in the backseat of my car and we'll forget this whole thing ever happened."

"No," Graham snapped. "I'm sick of this! I want to use my handcuffs for law enforcement purposes for a change!" The sheriff ran after his new squeeze. "Emma, wait up. I think I need some Zoloft and
McCutcheon's too."

Graham took Emma back to Mayberry Jail, because apparently he didn't have a home. "So Emma, I'm really sorry for getting raped and threatened and mind-controlled."

Emma glared. "You should be, you pig. Kiss my wounds better and we'll call it even."

The sheriff brightened. "Ooh, done and done!"

Back at the crypt, Regina laid a bouquet of flowers on her father's casket. "Hey, Daddy, can you say hi to Graham for me? You'll be seeing him soon. Now scoot over, I've got some ex-terminating to do."

"A stag's heart?" the Queen roared. "That was the best you could do? You could have robbed a graveyard, or cut a heart one out of those guys you killed in the bar fight, or at least used the heart of a non-human primate! Were you even trying?!"

"Hey, I think for a guy who was raised by wolves, my intelligence and high reasoning skills are pretty impressive." The Huntsman folded his arms defensively.

"I'm not paying you to talk!" the Queen roared, plunging her hand into his chest and tearing out his heart.

"Ow!" the Huntsman whined.

"I'm stuffing your heart in my magic sock drawer. And don't bother trying to steal it back. We both know you lack the initiative for that." The Queen whistled for her guards. "Strip him down, slather him in coconut oil, and chain him to my bed."

"Aw come on!" the Huntsman protested as the guards dragged him away. "You're an attractive woman. You don't need to resort to mind control to get a guy, just be yourself."

"He's right, you know," her magic mirror interjected.

"Shut up, Sid."

Graham placed a smooch on the last of Emma's bruises. "All done."

"No, you missed one." Emma pointed to her lips.

"Emma, what are you talking about? Your lips are fine."

"Man, you're dense." She scooped him into her arms and kissed him senseless.

Graham stumbled back, eyes shining with joy. "I remember! I remember everything! The Enchanted Forest, the Evil Queen, the botched assassination." He paled. "Oh, crap, I'm a dead man."

Down in her trophy room of doom, Regina pulled out the Huntsman's heart and crushed it to ashes. "For the record, this lonesome tear does not mean I have feelings for you," she sobbed.
Graham crumpled to the floor. "Gah! You've got really lousy timing, Regina," he gasped with his last breath.

Emma cradled his dead body in her arms, sobbing miserably. "Dammit, I liked him!"
Desperate Souls

A ragged peasant named Rumplestiltskin sat spinning at his wheel. "Man, I wish someone would hurry up and invent soap," he sighed wistfully.

His son Bae burst through the door screaming. "Papa, help! The Duke's men have drafted Morraine before I got the chance to make a move on her!"

Rumplestiltskin cringed. "What the hell do you expect me to do about it? I'm an unarmed cripple, in case you've forgotten."

Bae faltered. "You could write a letter to our Congressman?"

Rumplestiltskin considered this. "I don't know. Are we even literate?"

"Papa!"

"Fine, fine, I'm coming." He hobbled after his son.

Little Morraine's parents were staring up at the evil knight Hordor in disbelief. "So, let me get this straight. You're going to send a malnourished little girl to fight ogres, and you still haven't figured out why we're losing this war?"

Hordor nodded. "That is correct. And just in case that hasn't cemented my status as villain, I'm going to grope the little girl first." He hauled Morraine up into the saddle with him. "RAWR! I'm evil!"

Her mother drew a dagger. "Tremble before the awesome fury of a mother's love!"

"No," Hordor replied calmly, signaling his pet Dark One to Force Choke Morraine's parents to death. "This is no time for cowardice. In case you haven't noticed, the horizon appears to be on fire."

Rumplestiltskin glanced uneasily from the twisted demon to the creepy child molester to the writhing bodies of Morraine's parents. "On second thought, Bae, maybe I shouldn't have let you watch this. That scene was definitely rated R."

Bae burst into tears. "They'll be coming for me next! My fourteenth birthday is in three days! Papa, I know I said I wanted a basketball hoop, but I think I'm changing my birthday wish to 'not getting killed'."


"Well maybe I'd be bigger if you fed me a little better!" Bae sniffled. "I want my mommy!"

"No you don't, son, she's even more useless than I am."

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Emma found Mr. Gold working at his cauldron. "Cooking, Gold? I didn't know you were the domestic type. What's for dinner?"

"Wool…of bat and tongue of dog, and eye of newt and toe of frog. Tee hee!" Gold giggled cryptically.

"Well it smells horrible. Can we order some takeout instead?"
Gold smiled, which was always a sign of trouble. "That won't be necessary."

"So why did you call me over? Are you finally going to call in that favor I promised you so that I can stop living in fear?"

"No, just screwing with you. Plus, I wanted to offer my condolences for the death of your almost-boyfriend."

"You made me come all the way over here and face down your creepy puppets for that? Next time, just send me a text."

"Will do. Say, I couldn't help but notice you're still wearing your old badge. Now that you're going to be sheriff, wouldn't you rather wear one without a detonator inside? It's, like, the only perk there is to the job."

Emma edged nervously toward the exit. "Stop sympathizing with me, Gold. It's making me feel all dirty."

"My apologies. I just figured that, given your minutes-long romantic relationship, you should be the one to inherit all of Graham's worldly possessions. They're all right here in this little shoebox. Looks like you two were made for each other."

Emma shook her head. "No thanks. Graham's death has already left me with a ton of emotional baggage. I don't need any literal baggage piled on top of that."

Gold shrugged. "Suit yourself. I'll give it to Regina. I'm sure she's got a lot of fond memories of these handcuffs."

"Are you trying to make me throw up, or is that just a delightful side effect?"

"A little from Column A, a little from Column B," said Gold. "But getting back on topic, do you want Graham's walkie-talkies? You could use them to play Cops-and-Overlords with your son."

"What possible use could Graham have had for a pair of walkie-talkies?" Emma wondered. "Until I came along, there weren't any other cops in town for him to call."

"Beats me," said Gold, "but you really should have fun with your boy while you've got the chance. Before you know it, he'll be all grown up and moving to another dimension."

Emma found Henry at his Pretty-Pretty Princess castle, despondently devouring a box of Zoloft cupcakes. "Hey, honey. You look blue. Did your mom cancel your subscription to the Disney Channel?"

"No. A man just got himself killed by following my advice."

"Is that what's bothering you?" She patted her son's shoulder gently. "Look, there's nothing mysterious about Graham's death. He simply died of a massive heart attack while still in his twenties, mere seconds after breaking up with your cold and ruthless mother."

"That's great, Emma. Keep saying idiotic stuff like that and hopefully my mom won't see you as a threat to her anymore."

Emma was still trying to figure out whether or not she'd been insulted when Henry started crying. "This is hopeless! Good never defeats evil. Except in Snow White. And Sleeping Beauty. And
Cinderella, and Hansel and Gretel, and Little Red Riding Hood, and every other story in my Big Book of Deja-Vu. But not this time, no siree!"

His mother sighed. "I think I liked you better when you were the delusional and manic kind of crazy, instead of the depressed and suicidal kind of crazy."

Over at Mayberry Jail, Emma gingerly picked up Graham's badge and began to scream in pain. "Ahh! Responsibility! It burns!"

Regina barged in, as usual. "Hands off the badge, Swan. With Graham's passing, I've decided to give it to my second-string boy-toy."

"Sidney? The paparazzo? What does he know about law enforcement, apart from how to circumvent a temporary restraining order?"

"I'll have you know he's watched over twelve hours of Miami Vice," Regina defended.

"And his lack of a spine gives him the unique ability to slide under closed doors and windows," Emma added knowingly.

"Precisely. I'm glad we understand each other. By the way, I'm finally firing you. Sorry it's taken me so long, but these past few weeks have been a busy time for me."

Mary Margaret came home that night to find Emma beating the hell out of her toaster with a baseball bat. "Emma, why are you beating the hell out of my toaster with a baseball bat?"

"Because I couldn't find my chainsaw!" the savior snarled, drop kicking the unlucky appliance across the room.

"Emma, if you're angry, smash your own stuff!" Mary Margaret snapped, summoning her animal friends to retrieve the toaster. "What's your problem, anyway?"

"Apart from the man I love dropping dead in my arms? Regina's putting a puppet in as sheriff."

Mary Margaret paled. "Oh, no! Is one of those creepy puppets from Gold's shop?"

"No, it's only Sidney."

Mary Margaret breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew, you had me worried. But what's the big deal about this anyway? Weren't you telling me just yesterday that responsibility causes you excruciating pain?"

"Yeah, but I want to beat Regina. With a tire iron, if possible, but I'll settle for at politics if I have to."

Gold appeared in the doorway with an oxymoronic evil giggle. "Violent and bitter, dearie? Oh, you and I are going to have so much fun together!" He glanced at Mary Margaret. "But get rid of Eminem first. I don't plot well with bluebirds chirping in my ear."

"Aw, man, how come I never get to stay for the good parts?" Grumbling under her breath, Mary Margaret locked herself in the bathroom.

Emma turned back to Gold. "So what do you want? If you need help with more semi-legal human trafficking, I'm afraid I'm a cop now."

"No you're not."
"Oh, right." Emma gave the toaster another angry kick.

"You know, instead of taking your anger out on innocent appliances, why don't you take it out of Regina's skull?"

The savior's ears perked up. "I like what I'm hearing so far. Continue."

Gold wheeled in a hand truck containing all 570,983 pages of the town charter. "This may shock you, but the power of a small-town public official isn't as absolute as one might think. For example, did you know mayors are supposed to be elected instead of self-proclaimed?"

"Get out of town! Really?"

"And that's not all, dearie! Put on a singing, dancing pot of tea. It's gonna be a long night."

Mary Margaret tapped timidly on the bathroom door. "Can I come out yet?"

"No!" Gold and Emma barked in unison.

Rumplestiltskin gently nudged his sleeping son. "Bae, wake up! Please. If it's not too much trouble."

Bae stumbled out of bed groggily. "You're lucky I'm too perfect to take advantage of your spinelessness, Papa," he yawned.

"Hurry up, son. We're skipping the country. I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner."

"You did," Bae reminded him, "but we ran into a bunny on the road, and you got scared and ran home again."

"Hey, it looked like it might have been rabid," Rumplestiltskin defended, dragging his son down the road.

"But Papa, isn't running away sort of a sissy thing to do?"

"Well, now that they're filling the army with little girls, military life is probably going to be pretty feminized, too," Rumplestiltskin pointed out.

A suspiciously well-fed beggar stepped into their path. "Alms for the poor?"

Rumplestiltskin raised an eyebrow. "Who do you think you're looking at, old man?"

"Give me money!" the beggar demanded, whacking him over the head with a begging cup.

"Yes, sir," said Rumplestiltskin meekly, handing over his wallet.

"Papa," Baelfire said as they continued on their way, "is this really necessary? This floofy hair of mine already makes me a target for bullies. I don't need the added stigma of being a coward."

Rumplestiltskin bristled. "We're not cowards, we're conscientious objectors." The spinner suddenly screamed. "AAAAAH! I hear footsteps! Quick, son, hit the ground and play dead while I scream for mercy!"

"Hold it!" barked Hordor, riding out of the darkness. "An unarmed cripple and his young son innocently walking down the street? This is suspicious behavior if ever I've seen it."
"We're sorry! We'll never walk again, we promise!" whimpered Rumplestiltskin.

Baelfire frowned. "Wait a minute, what are you doing in the middle of the woods at this time of night?"

"I have chronic insomnia. It's why I'm such a grouch," the knight explained.

"You poor dear. Do you want some soothing chamomile tea from my singing, dancing pot?" Rumplestiltskin offered politely.

"Tea? That's a little too girly for my tastes," scoffed the knight. "But not yours, of course! You're such a sissy that your wife left you for a guy who wears eyeliner."

The spinner flinched. "Please don't call me a sissy in front of my boy. I was hoping he wouldn't notice."

The knight ignored him, because that's what being an evil bastard is all about. "Ah, yes, your son. Did you teach him how to run as well?"

"To be fair, he could have picked it up from his mom just as easily," said Rumplestiltskin.

The knight glared. "Wise guy, eh? Just for that, you've got to kiss my boot."

"Ugh, this is like middle school all over again." The spinner knelt down to kiss the proffered boot, but because he'd sold his only toothbrush some years ago, the leather withered and melted at the touch of his grimy lips.

"Ew, gross!" The knight kicked him in the face and rode off into the night. "RAWR! I'm so very evil!"

"Well, that was a bust," sighed Baelfire. "I guess there's no point in fleeing now. That guy kind of killed the mood for a daring getaway."

Rumplestiltskin sniffled indignantly. "What does that jerk know, anyway? I'm not a coward. AAAAAAH! An elderly beggar! Run, Bae! Save yourself!" He cowered pitifully behind a tree.

The beggar rubbed his ringing ears, wincing. "Relax, I'm here to help you."

"Thanks, but I can't pay you. You've got my wallet."

"That's okay. The only payment I need is your thanks and your soul." The beggar muffled an oxymoronic evil giggle.

Regina awkwardly twisted her usual smirk into a smile for the press corps. "Greetings, beloved papparazzi. I called you here today to let you know I've appointed one of your own as Sheriff. While I'm pretty sure Sidney's never handled a gun—"

"Why don't we ask him? He's standing right there," one of the press corps pointed out.

"I don't pay him or you to talk," growled Regina. "Anyway, while he's never handled a gun, he's punctual, moderately attractive, and most importantly, not Emma Swan."

Sidney's eyes welled up with tears of joy. "Baby, that's the most beautiful thing you've ever said to me."
"Shut up and put on the damn badge, Sidney."

"Yes ma'am."

Emma stormed into the office. "Shut up and put down the damn badge, Sidney!"

"Yes, ma'am."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Giving orders to my lackey? You're out of order, Swan!"

"No you're out of order! They're out of order! The whole town is out of order!" Emma giggled. "I've always wanted to say that. But that's beside the point. If Sidney wants to be Sheriff, which I doubt, he's got to run against me."

Sidney groaned. "Aw, do I have to run, Regina? Wouldn't you rather I spent my time planning a romantic date for us? The carnival's in town, and I hear they've got a great hall of mirrors—"

Regina smacked him over the head with a lamp. "When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you!"

"Well, we're screwed," sighed Rumplestiltskin, spooning some Gruel Helper™ into a bowl for his guest.

"Yeah, about that. You should really stop being so screwed," the beggar advised.

"Oh, brilliant deduction, kind mentor," the spinner sneered. "Whatever would I do without you?"

The stranger whacked him over the head with his spoon. "Get a grip!"

"Yes sir, sorry sir." sniveled Rumplestiltskin. "But what am I supposed to do against Hordor? I'm spineless as an earthworm and twice as dirty." Overwhelmed with self-pity, the spinner burst into song.

Yeah, it's sad, believe me, missy
When you're born to be a sissy
Without the vim and verve.

But I could show my prowess
Be a lion not a mouse
If I only had the nerve-

The old man clamped a hand over Rumplestiltskin's mouth. "Promise me you'll never try to sing again, and I'll do what I can to help you."

"Deal," said Rumplestiltskin, gasping for air.

"Excellent. I just happen to know the secret to gaining absolute power and immortality."

"Then why are you a homeless bum?"

"That's for me to know and you to ignore. Now, there's one very simple way for you to keep your son out of the army."
The spinner hesitated. "Bash his legs in and get him declared 4-F? It worked for me, but I don't know..."

"No! You've got to set fire to the Duke's castle, steal the Dark One's magical dagger-shaped remote control, enslave him to your will, stop the war, and file your new-hire paperwork with the Better Beasts Bureau."

Rumplestiltskin blinked. "Are you crazy? What do I look like, a guy who's not spineless?"

"Fine, fine. If you'd rather, you can stab him to death and take his power. Just be gentle. He's got a really low pain threshold."

---

At the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold sat toying idly with a cigarette lighter. "Hm, maybe I should take up smoking? It could only enhance my bad-boy image."

Regina barged in, as usual. "I know you found that loophole in the town charter, Gold. Emma's way too cool to be caught reading."

Gold shrugged. "What can I say? I love contracts. In a completely mundane and non-magical way, of course."

"You're a bastard!"

"It took you twenty-eight years to figure that out? Man, you're slow. Anyway, you shouldn't be talking back to me. It's starting to look like I could be your father."

The mayor groaned. "Ew, can we please talk about something else?"

"Okay. How about Graham?"

"Something besides that. Like how you're trying to sabotage me. It's not going to work. I cannot be defeated as long as I have the mighty Glare of Evil on my side!" She began burning a hole in his shirtfront with said glare.

"Ow!" Gold yelped, batting at the flames. "Henry loves Emma more than you!" he fired at her.

A flood of tears doused the Glare of Evil and sent Regina fleeing from the shop. Gold smirked, straightening his singed tie. "Still got it."

---

Meanwhile, over at the only diner in town, the mayor's little Achilles heel was miserably slamming back a cinnamon cocoa. "Hit me with another double, Ruby, and leave the pitcher."

Emma sat down next to him. "Henry, whatever your problem is, you're not going to find the answer at the bottom of a piping-hot mug."

Henry didn't answer, he just showed her the latest newspaper headline: *Young Emma Swan Gave Birth in Jail and Wore Really Dorky Glasses*. Emma blanched. "Ruby, make it two."

The boy looked up at her with large, frightened eyes. "Emma, I can get past the trauma of being born in prison. Frankly, I kind of like having an edgy backstory like everyone else in town. But the matter of these glasses is a different story. The need to wear them isn't hereditary, is it?"

She hugged him consolingly. "You don't have to worry, honey. You'll never see those glasses again. Your father took them when he left, just like he took my heart, my innocence, and my mental
Henry took another hit of cocoa. "I told you good can't win. It's just too cliché."

"Well, if you really think that, then I've got great news for you. I've allied myself with the most evil man in town."

His eyebrows shot up. "You and Gold? That's just asking for trouble. If he ever starts giggling, don't hesitate, just run for your life."

Emma regarded her son curiously. "So...you're saying goodness can't win?"

"Yes."

"And neither can the forces of evil?"

"That is correct."

"Can neutrality win?"

"Nope."

Exasperated, the savior fell on her knees. "What do you want from me, kid?!"

Angry, discouraged, and utterly confused from that exchange, Emma decided to go vent her frustrations on Regina. "Regina! I can't believe a woman evil enough to gaslight her own beloved child would also be evil enough to violate her archenemy's right to privacy!"

The mayor snickered. "And Gold thought I was slow?"

"Regina! You're causing psychological damage to Henry! Haven't you learned your lesson about that yet?"

"What, you didn't want him to know you cut his cord with a shiv?" said Regina innocently.

Emma choked back a laugh. "Okay, I'll grant you, that was a little funny, but I'm still mad at you."

"Henry's fine," said Regina dismissively, turning to leave. "In fact, he's rather advanced for his age. I was well into my twenties before I started plotting my mother's downfall."

"But you're just perpetuating a multi-generational cycle of abuse," Emma protested, following her down the hall.

"If you're that worried about Henry's upbringing, you really should have checked me out before you let me adopt him. Or at least put him up for adoption through a reputable agency instead of hocking him to a crooked pawnbroker," Regina pointed out. "And speaking of Gold, you really should be careful about getting into bed with him. If the Rumbelle shippers find out, they're going to have your head."

"I'm not getting into bed with anyone!" Emma denied. "I always end up jailed or bereaved when that happens. I'm not going there again."

At the mention of her late boy-toy, Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil, and a massive explosion broke out. "Woah, that's not normal!" She landed in a battered heap at Emma's feet. "Save me, Emma! We're friends, right? Emma, where are you going? Don't tell me you're still sore about
my little newspaper prank? It was all in good fun. Emma? Emma!"

Rumplestiltskin and his son stood around a putrid cauldron, wearing gas masks. "Add the wool of bat slowly, son. We don't want it to scorch."

Bae grimaced. "Just when I didn't think it was possible for us to smell any worse, you go and pull this. What gives, Pops?"

"We're going to make some pipe bombs out of wool and plant them in the Duke's castle. With luck, the recent budget cuts to Homeland Security will keep us from getting caught. Then I'll break in, swipe the Dark One's remote, steal his power, and become a superhero. Tell me, son, which alias do you think would work best for me; RunningMan or Wheel-O-Fortune?"

"Before you start making a cape, Papa, aren't you going to ask me for my opinion? No offense, but I don't want to follow in your footsteps as the town coward."

"Do you want to follow in my footsteps as the town cripple? Because that's the best case scenario when pitting an undersized, underfed, undertrained little boy against a lumbering monster."

Bae considered this. "Fair enough. That just leaves the matter of Mom and her knight in shining eyeliner. You told me she was dead!"

"She will be when I catch up with her," Rumplestiltskin growled quietly.

"What was that, Pops?"

"I said, uh, it's for the best that she's gone. The Rumbelle shippers would have killed her off eventually anyway."

Bae couldn't argue with that. "In that case, do you want a sidekick? I could be the GoldenBoy to your Wheel-O-Fortune."

The spinner beamed with pride. "I'd like that, son. And now that we're partners, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Wood burns!"

"No way! Really?"

"I know, I couldn't believe it either!"

"This is amazing, Pops! The world will tremble before our mind-blowing knowledge!"

"Emma?" Regina was still yelling. "You can't just leave me here! What about all the great times we've had together? Remember that wonderful garden party you threw me with your chainsaw?"

Emma appeared in the doorway holding a fire extinguisher. "Stop patronizing me or I'll bludgeon you over the head with this thing."

"Yes ma'am," the mayor obeyed meekly.

Emma picked her up and carried her through the flames, but as they emerged from the burning building, Regina was more horrified than grateful. "Not bridal-style, Swan! The Swan Queen shippers might see!"

Right on cue, a horde of fangirls swarmed over and began clicking pictures. "Aw, how cute!"
"I always knew they were meant for each other!"

"This is going right on my desktop!"

Emma dropped her like a hot potato. "Yikes. Sorry about that."

"Oh, just get away from me and go find a new man to love. It's the only thing that's going to shut them up!"

"I wish it were that easy. I really do."

Sidney shoved through the crowd and snapped his own photo of the happy couple. "Congratulations, Emma. You're a lucky woman, and I hope you'll treat her right."

"Sidney!" Regina balked. "I'm straight!"

The paparazzo beamed. "All right! There's hope for us yet!"

"No there isn't."

"Oh." Sidney's shoulders slumped sadly. "I'm gonna go home and stick my head in a lampshade, then. I don't know why, but it always seems to comfort me."

Meanwhile, everyone in town but Sidney was fawning over Emma's heroics. "You saved the life of the woman who's been oppressing and tormenting us all for twenty-eight years? For some reason, we're thrilled! That's awesome!"

Emma sighed. "No, it was Lawful Stupid, but what's done is done. At least it's good publicity."

"Good is going to triumph just like it always does!" squealed Henry excitedly. "I never saw that coming!" His nose crinkled. "Hey Emma, is it just me, or do you smell wool of bat and tongue of dog?"

Emma sifted through the wreckage. "A pipe bomb? Made of wool? Wow, Gold really is a cheapskate, isn't he?"

Emma stormed into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, and Gold giggled. "Back again, Emma? Wow, the creepy puppets usually discourage any kind of repeat business."

Emma waved the squishy pipe bomb in his face. "You blew up Regina's office, Gold! When I allied myself with the most evil man in town, I never dreamed we'd be using such underhanded tactics!"

Gold shook his head ruefully. "Emma, if you're honestly planning on a career in politics, you're going to have to start sooner or later."

"Can't I start small with some slander or libel, instead of a freaking terrorist attack? She could have died!"

"Do you actually care?"

"Yes, unfortunately respect for human life is obligatory for heroes."

"Pity. You really should try coming over to the Dark Side. You can be as self-centered as you want, plus we've got cookies."
"Tempting, but no thanks."

"Then you should embrace evil for your son's sake, since that strategy worked out so well for me."

Rumplestiltskin and his son tiptoed carefully through the grounds of a suitably foreboding grey castle. "Pops," Bae whispered. "Don't you think it's a little suspicious how there aren't any locks or guards around here?"

"No, I specifically timed this operation for the half-hour when the Duke's elite legion of little girls would be busy watching My Little Pony," Rumplestiltskin explained. "Now let's torch this dump!" He put a torch to a convenient heap of straw, and flames crawled up the side of the building.

Bae's eyes widened. "Oh my gosh, straw burns too?!"

His father grinned. "Amazing, isn't it? Now, then, I'd better get inside and nab that dagger-slash-remote before it melts."

"You're going to charge into a burning building? Pops, you can barely walk. Maybe I should go instead, or at least come with you."

"I'll be fine. I may not be immortal yet, but I'm wearing plot armor that would make Master Chief himself jealous." The spinner calmly skipped past the guardhouse, still alive with the sound of giggling, and into the Duke's secret remote safe. The dagger, conveniently labeled with the Dark One's name, sat on a stand in the middle of the room. The floor was painted with several large red arrows which pointed to it. The spinner chuckled. "Man, he's not even trying, is he?"

Outside City Hall, Mary Margaret was tacking up signs reading, "Vote for Emma Swan, the Future First Lady of Storybrooke," when she bumped into David. "Hey, baby. I haven't seen you in a few episodes. How's it going?"

"Well, I got a job at the animal shelter, but it's been kind of disappointing. I was hoping there would be more sheep involved, but it's mostly just been female dogs."

"Speaking of which, how is your wife?"

"Still alive, I'm afraid," David apologized, "and forcing me to work for the Dark Side." He tacked up a poster reading "Vote Sidney Glass: Storybrooke's Wish Come True!"

Mary Margaret didn't answer; she just nailed his hand to the wall with her staple gun. "Oops, sorry about that," she said insincerely, walking off without a backward glance.

Inside, Sidney was gazing soulfully into a mirror. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the manliest marionette of all?"

Meanwhile, Archie was pacing around trying to remember his lines as moderator of the sheriff's debate. "Man, I wish this stupid town could afford a teleprompter. Just one. Is that so much to ask?"

Emma grew slightly nauseous at the sight of her son sitting in the audience, wearing his patented Little Orphan Henry smile. "Ugh, Mary Margaret, this is tearing me up inside. Henry sees me as a hero, when all I want is for him to see me as a hero."

Mary Margaret pressed a hand to her daughter's forehead. "How much McCutcheon's have you had,
"Emma?"

"None! I just want to do this honestly."

"Then why the hell did you ally yourself with a black market baby broker?"

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Bae's face lit up as he saw his father approaching him. "Papa, you made it out of that inferno completely uninjured? I guess I'll just have to suspend disbelief for now."

"There's a good lad. Now get on home to the Baa Cave, GoldenBoy. Wheel-O-Fortune's got an ancient evil to enslave."

"I have a bad feeling about this."

Alarmed, Rumplestiltskin clamped a hand over his son's mouth. "Don't say that out loud! You'll jinx us!"

"Sorry, Pops. I don't know what I was thinking."

"Just go home before you make it worse," the spinner groaned.

"Yes, sir." Bae slunk off dejectedly.

The spinner held the dagger up to the light and read the name engraved on the blade. "Yancy? That's almost as bad as my name. No wonder he goes by 'Dark One'," Rumplestiltskin mused.

A cloaked figure suddenly appeared behind him. "You rang, boss?" the creature asked in a low, unnatural voice.

"Gah! Are you the Dark One? Or just a tracheotomy patient?" Rumplestiltskin was shaking even harder than usual.

"No. I am your father."

"Really?"

"No, just screwing with you. Be sure to take notes."

Rumplestiltskin shuddered. "This isn't going like I'd planned. Aren't you supposed to smile and dance and tell me I've never had a friend like you?"

"No, you're thinking of genies."

"Aw, man, what a drag!"

There was a long, awkward silence. "You know, if you're disappointed with the way I'm working out, you can always just kill me," the Dark One suggested. "I don't mind, honest."

"No thanks, I'm a pacifist."

"No, you're a coward," goaded the Dark One.

"Well, yeah," Rumplestiltskin conceded. "There's that, too."

The Dark One looked stumped. "Well, maybe this will get some action out of you. I'll bet your kid
isn't even yours!"

The spinner looked confused. "Well, yes, I thought that was obvious. My wife slept with pretty much every man in town but me. I just thank my lucky stars that the kid didn't inherit his biological father's propensity for eyeliner. That would be too much humiliation to bear."

The Dark One scrambled for a more effective insult. "Well, that hairstyle of yours looks absolutely ridiculous!"

Rumplestiltskin fumed. "How dare you?!" the formerly mild-mannered spinner shrieked, plunging the dagger into his chest like a toothpick into a carrot. "I'm totally stealing your power, and the first thing I'm going to do with it is give myself a wicked-cool perm! So nyah!"

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather save your son from the ducal draft committee? I thought that was the whole point of this?"

"Dammit! And I sent him right into their hands! I picked a really lousy time to start shielding my son from the sight of violence, didn't I?"

"Don't be so hard on yourself. You may be a failure as a father, but at least you make a mean Gruel Helper™," the Dark One soothed.

"Aw, thanks, that really means a lot to—" Rumplestiltskin paused. "Hey, wait a minute. I know you. You're that jerk who insulted my singing!"

"And with my last breath, I'm going to do it again. Don't quit your day job, bro," cackled the Dark One.

"But why did you want to die? Surely my voice isn't that bad?"

"No, I did it because being a manipulative Satanic weirdo isn't nearly as fun as it looks," the dying demon rasped. "Sure, women love the whole bad boy persona, but the hours are crap, there's tons of paperwork, and the curse makes you allergic to makeout sessions."

"NOOOOOOOO!" screamed Rumplestiltskin.

Dr. Hopper addressed the audience with his usual adorkable charm. "Good evening, ladies and germs." This pathetic excuse for a joke was met with the sound of crickets chirping, and Archie scowled. "I never should have brought those things back to Storybrooke. But no matter. I hope you all enjoy the catfight to come and remember to always let your conscience be your guide."

Sidney, wearing a lampshade as a hat, approached the podium. "Just to clarify, I'm not drunk. The lampshade is just a psychological crutch. Anyway, Regina told me to tell you all that if I'm elected, she'll enforce our laws to the best of her ability."

"Er, that's a beautiful sentiment, Sidney," said Archie uncertainly. "Emma, it looks like it's up to you to spice up this yawn-fest. Don't let us down, hon!"

Emma went to the podium, looking everywhere but at Henry. "Um, hey everybody. I'm afraid I have some shocking news for you. Mr. Gold is evil!"

Those pesky crickets started chirping again. Emma blinked. "Um, okay, if that didn't shock you, maybe this will. Gold isn't just evil, he's manipulative!" The only response from the audience was more chirps and a few scattered coughs. "And he manipulated me!"
"What, you think that makes you special or something?" Laughing his head off, Gold turned to leave. "You're hopeless, dearie."

"But-but-but…" Emma stuttered. "I inadvertently endangered Regina's life!"

At that, the audience finally responded, breaking out in thunderous applause.

At the only diner in town, Emma slammed back a double cinnamon cocoa. "Hey Ruby? Can I get a twelve pack of Zoloft cupcakes too?"

"Would you like some McCutcheon's with that?"

"Hell yeah!"

Henry walked in and sat down beside her. "Ooh, Zoloft cupcakes! Can I have one?"

"Sure, any medication I get you to take voluntarily is a blessing, my little schizo."

"Thanks. Listen, I just came by to tell you I was wrong about the whole 'good never wins' thing. Enjoy this, because it's probably the last time in my life I'll ever be wrong about anything."

Regina barged in, as usual, with Sidney in tow. Her lips had been painstakingly duct-taped into a smiling position. "Hey Swan. I just came to congratulate you."

Emma backed away nervously. "Well, do it from a respectable distance. I don't want this scene ending up as anybody's wallpaper. What are you congratulating me for, anyway?"

"I lost the election!" Sidney squealed, unable to contain his excitement any longer. "I've never been so happy! Now I'll have time for that date with Regina."

Regina considered this. "Can we go back to my place for apple turnovers afterward?"

"Sure, baby, whatever my lady wants."

"Then it's a date." She handed Emma a beautiful non-exploding badge.

Emma looked up at the gathering crowd in disbelief. "You want me to be sheriff? But I was manipulated by Mr. Gold!"

"So what? That just means you're officially part of the community," said Archie.

"Yeah. It's like a hazing," Mary Margaret explained.

"Congratulations, unworthy foe," said Regina, her eyes twitching violently. "Oh, and about your split with Gold? You may have saved yourself from the wrath of the Rumbelle shippers, but the Golden Swan shippers are going to be furious."

Emma sighed. "I just can't win, can I?"

"Happy birthday, soldier!" crowed Hordor, dragging Bae from his home. "As a gift from your beloved government, here's a bloodstained secondhand uniform."

"It's too big," Bae observed.
"Yeah, I wish I could tell you you'll grow into it, but frankly, the odds of that are pretty low. Now fall in line, you sniveling maggot! I've got to be back to HQ before my staff officers wake up, or they'll waste the whole morning playing tea party with their mess kits. Hey, Bill!" he yelled to one of his lackeys. "Who's the next draftee on our agenda?"

"Some kid named Ender Wiggin—OW!" he screamed.

"Ender Wigginow? What kind of stupid name is that?"

Bill didn't answer, just slumped to the ground, revealing the new Dark One poised behind him with a bloody dagger. "I don't think so, sucker!" he trilled in a newly-impish voice. "Hey, what gives?" Rumplestiltskin scowled. "I was hoping my voice would go all low and menacing like Yancy's. What a rip-off!"

"Hey, you're not Yancy!" Hordor finally realized.

Rumplestiltskin rolled his eyes. "Very good. And here's another piece of news for you. This isn't a patching trowel." He held up the cursed dagger that bore his ridiculous name. "Hey, wait a minute! This stupid dagger misspelled my name! Dammit, I've had this job for five minutes and it already sucks out loud!"

"Papa, is that you?" Baelfire asked tremulously. "This is horrible! When I helped you plot to usurp the Dark One, I never dreamed it would result in you usurping the Dark One!"

"Shut up, Bae." He turned to the knight. "And as for you, kiss my boot."

Hordor reluctantly knelt down to obey. "I'd put up more of a fuss, but you've actually got really nice boots for a starving peasant."

The new Dark One grinned evilly. "If you like them that much, I'll let you borrow them to wear to your funeral."

"Wow, thanks! I...what?"

Without further preamble, the spinner reached down and snapped his big, meaty neck. "POW! To me, GoldenBoy! I sense an action sequence coming on!"

Some three seconds later, Rumplestiltskin was laughing evilly over a heap of human shishkebab. "Man, if I'd known how easy these clowns would be to kill, I'd have taken them out with a toothpick that night on the road and skipped all this subterfuge. Oh well. Feeling safer now, Bae?"

"At least stop advancing on me with the blood-soaked dagger before you ask me a question like that!" the boy snapped.

"Sorry, Bae."

"Papa, what's happened to you? Your teeth look even worse than before, and I didn't think that was possible."

Rumplestiltskin shrugged. "Well, I met a wizard and he gave me courage. It came with a few side effects, though. Come along, I'll make an appointment with the orthodontist right after we swing by the Better Beasts Bureau and hand in these forms."

Emma was at Mayberry Jail cleaning the last few stale, drugged donuts out of Graham's desk, when
Gold happened by. "Hey, dearie. I've come to congratulate you on, heh, 'your' victory." He snickered under his breath.

"Your evil giggle doesn't scare me," Emma retorted. "There's no way you could have planned this. Xanatos himself couldn't have planned this."

"I could have planned it if I knew how to see the future. I could have planned pretty much everything, in fact."

The sheriff frowned. "Are you saying you can see the future, Gold?"

"I didn't say that."

"Well, what *are* you saying?"

"Something cryptic and ambiguously menacing, as usual."

Emma glared. "I really hate you, old man."

Gold grinned. "Then my work here is done. Later, dearie!"
At the only drugstore in town, little Henry Mills plucked a comic book off its rack. "I'm sick of everyone's smart-mouthed comments about a ten-year-old boy still liking fairy tales. Maybe if I carry a copy of Wolverine vs. The Incredible Hulk around for a few days, everyone will stop questioning my masculinity."

Ava Zimmer tapped him on the shoulder. "Hey, Henry. You're looking gullible today."

Henry's jaw dropped. "Holy smokes, another child in Storybrooke?! I thought I was the only one!"

Ava's brother Nicholas walked up behind them, hands tucked behind his back, whistling innocently. "The toothpaste has landed. Proceed to Phase Two, sis."

Henry's eyes sparkled. "Ooh, code phrases! Are you guys into covert ops, too? We should talk. Tell me, how do you feel about cobras?"

"Er, love them?" said Ava uncertainly.

"Score!" Henry did a fist pump. "Come, my friends, let us repair to my Pretty-Pretty Princess castle for an afternoon of Apollo Bars and intrigue."

"Brilliant. Glad you thought of that." Ava smirked, grabbing her brother and following Henry to the primitive non-automatic door.

"Hold it right there!" Mr. Clark, the pharmacist, commanded, jumping into their path. "My beady little eyes do not lie! You dirty toothpaste smugglers and your hapless mule are in a world of trouble!"

"Oh no!" Nicholas wailed, cowering behind his sister. "A short, unarmed, immunocompromised pharmacist! Run! Run for your lives!"

Ava shoved him away impatiently. "Nicholas, we can't run. This is the only store in town. If we get blacklisted from it, we'll starve to death."

"Oh, right."

"This was all some diabolical set-up?" Henry looked at them with new respect. "Wow, we really do have a lot in common!"

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, a woodcutter by the name of Woodcutter was hacking down a redwood with his trusty axe. "With this little beauty, I might finally be able to show up that Paul Bunyan jerk."

His daughter Gretel yawned. "That's nice, Daddy. Can I have an axe now?"

"Are you crazy? I'm not letting you kids anywhere near this thing. You're an evil genius, and your brother's so stupid he'd probably try to eat the damn thing!"

"No worries, Dad," said Hansel cheerfully. "I already filled up on several pounds of nails before we left the house."

Woody picked up his son and gave him a little shake. Sure enough, the boy's stomach was jingling.
"Aw, nuts. Gretel, I'm going to go find your brother an ambulance. If he tries to eat you while I'm
gone, this compass will point you to the nearest police station."

By the time nightfall rolled around, Woody still hadn't returned, Gretel was getting cold, and Hansel
was so hungry he'd started gnawing on a tree trunk. Gretel seized her brother by his pseudo-Bavarian
vest, slapping him impatiently. "Snap out of it, Hansel! We've got to get home to Daddy. Oh, if only
you hadn't eaten that trail of breadcrumbs I laid down this morning as a precaution, we could be there
by now."

"Sorry," Hansel mumbled guiltily, picking bark from between his teeth. "Say, do you happen to
know who or where our mother is? Maybe she could help us," he suggested.

"No, I'm pretty sure she's dead, like every other mother in the Enchanted Forest." Gretel took out her
father's compass. "Come on, let's follow the spinning arrow. It worked for Pocahontas."

But instead of leading them to their father, it led them into the path of a bleak and possibly haunted
black carriage. "Hey!" Queen Regina barked, rolling down her window. "Didn't anyone ever teach
you kids to stop, look and listen before you cross the street? What are you doing in my forest,
anyway?"

Gretel was outraged. "Your forest? Do you think you own whatever land you land on? That the earth
is just a dead thing you can claim?"

Regina rolled her eyes. "Oh, great, not another bleeding-heart liberal!"

Back at the only drugstore in Storybrooke, Mr. Clark was cringing under the awesome power of
Regina's Glare of Evil. "I'm sorry and terrified to be the one to tell you this, Madam Mayor, but your
son was shoplifting."

"No, I wasn't," Henry denied.

"There, that settles that," Regina declared cheerfully. "Now, then, if you'll just apologize for your
insolence, we'll forget the whole thing."

"But Madam Mayor!"

Regina laughed. "Oh, come on, Mr. Clark. Does my little Henry really look capable of doing
anything immoral?"

Mr. Clark glanced over at Henry, standing in the sunlight with a radiant smile and several bluebirds
twittering merrily on his shoulders. "All right, you win."

The mayor's face screwed up like she'd just bitten into a lemon. "I never thought I'd see the day
when I, of all people, would be rooting for the Charming Family Charm. I feel so dirty." She
shuddered. "Henry, let's go home. Mommy needs a shower."

But just when Regina thought her day couldn't possibly get any worse, Emma walked in, wearing
her dead boy-toy's badge. "Henry? Already getting in trouble with the law? I guess you really can't
fight genetics."

Regina scowled. "Emma, I know I'm risking another chainsaw attack by saying this, but get out of
my face."

"Can't. I'm here to lock up the two pitiful little children."
"Oh? In that case, I might just learn to like you, Swan." The mayor grabbed her son and split.

The sheriff turned to the Zimmer twins and their pile of confiscated loot. "Toilet paper? Soap? Care to explain why you're stealing stuff you could have taken legally from any public bathroom in town?"

Ava shot a death glare at her brother, who hung his head in shame. "Don't we have the right to remain silent?" she asked.

"I'm not reading you your rights, kid. Reading is for nerds, coma patients, and Henry. Now talk!"

Ava covertly squirted generous amounts of Visine into her eyes. "In mercy's name, a little soap is all we need! Our sister's child was close to death and we were starving! Please don't sentence us to nineteen years as slaves of the law!"

"It would break our parents' hearts, and it wouldn't do us any good, either," Nicholas put in.

Back in beautiful British Columbia, Gretel was still making a valiant attempt to stare down the Queen. "So, in conclusion, all you'll own is earth until you can paint with all the colors of the wind."

Regina glared daggers at them both. "Annoying the Queen is a felony in this kingdom, little girl. Guards! Seize them!"

"I don't think so, you royal pain!" Gretel snarled back at her. "Hansel! Eat them!"

Hansel groaned, holding his stomach. "Sis, I know I don't say this very often, but I'm full," he whined.

"Then get out of here, you useless moron!" Gretel roared, throwing one rock at him and another at the Queen's lackey.

"Ah! I'm shot!" the soldier screamed, keeling over in agony. "Please, Your Majesty, if my wife and kids ask, tell them I was brought down by a dragon rather than a little girl with a rock."

"Maybe the Huntsman has a point about this armor needing a redesign." The Queen kicked her lackey's corpse aside with a rueful sigh. "Time to bring out the big guns." She whistled shrilly. "Yo, Childcatcher! Get out here and do your duty!"

A guy who somehow managed to make top hats look creepy came rolling up on a paddy wagon. "With gusto, my lady." He flashed a bouquet of lollipops. "Come back, kiddiewinkies! I've got lots of lovely goodies for you! Ice cream! Lollipops! Treacle tarts!"

Hansel froze in his tracks. "Whatever a treacle tart is, it sounds a lot tastier than poorly-armored guards. I'm sold!" He flagged down the Childcatcher, who immediately tossed a lasso over them both.

"Hansel, you idiot!" screamed Gretel. "I wish my arms were free so I could strangle you!"

"Thanks for your help, CC." Regina dismissed the Childcatcher and untied the children. "Now, then, children, if you're done spewing this environmentalist nonsense at me, I just might have a job for you."

Gretel thought it over. "Does it come with a good medical plan? Because my brother could really use treatment for his compulsive eating disorder."
"No, I'm going to…bwa hah hah!...'find' your father for you."

"Thanks just the same," said Hansel, "but maybe we should find someone a little less shifty-eyed to help us. Stranger-danger being an issue and all that."

"Don't make me use my Devil's Snare on you!" the Queen barked.

Now that she had access to the only squad car in Storybrooke, Emma was spared the humiliation of driving the twins home in her Love Bug. "This is a really nice house for a family that has to steal toothpaste for a living."

"Well, we've been doing a brisk business with Mr. Gold. He has an inexplicable obsession with dental care products," Ava said. "Can we go now? Our parents, who totally exist, will be getting worried about us."

"Then maybe I should go in and set their minds at ease?" Emma suggested.

"No!" yelped Ava. "I mean, uh, no, you can't. We sold our only welcome mat to pay for soup."

"Then perhaps, as the only social aid official in town, I should tell them about a little thing called welfare?"

"Uh…we couldn't apply because we hocked our Social Security cards to Mr. Gold for his human trafficking ring?" Nicholas offered lamely.

"Kids, I may be a human lie detector, but for the record, it wouldn't take a human lie detector to see through you two."

Ava averted her eyes. "We don't know what you're talking about. Now if you'll excuse us, there's a documentary on Bonnie and Clyde that we really should be watching."

"Sure there is," Emma chuckled.

"She's on to us! Run, Nicholas!" The twins sprang out the door and ran down to their secret hideout in the basement of the abandoned house.

"Phew. Thank you, American housing bubble," Nicholas sighed contentedly, flopping down on his bed.

The floorboards above their heads squeaked eerily, and Ava frowned. "Hey Nicholas, is this house haunted?"

"Two juvenile delinquents alone in a haunted house? I don't know, that would be awfully cliché," Nicholas pointed out doubtfully.

"Well, if there's some stranger lurking in the house, clearly the only sensible thing to do is confront him on our own, without seeking help from the nearby police officer who has shown such concern for our welfare."

"I'm with ya, sis," Nicholas concurred.

The twins climbed upstairs and found Emma standing in the doorway with her chainsaw. "Freeze, junior dirtbags!"

"Ah! Please don't kill me!" Ava whimpered. "Take Nicholas! His metabolism is so screwed up he
probably won't live much longer anyway!"

"What, this?" Emma shut off the chainsaw. "It's not for you guys; I had to chop through that locked door somehow. Now where are your parents?"

"Er, would you believe a rhinoceros ate them?" Nicholas tried.

The sheriff sighed. "I'm starting to think I wasted my level-up points on that stupid lie-detection power."

She took the kids home to the Princess Pad and proceeded to feed them heaping plates of breadcrumbs. It just felt right, somehow. "So Eminem," she whispered to her roomie, "seeing as how your school is the only one in town, I presume these children go there?"

"Yeah," Mary Margaret confirmed. "Not terribly bright, if you ask me. What kind of stupid kid goes to school when they don't have any parents to make them?"

Emma held up a folder. "According to this file I swiped from who-knows-where, their father doesn't exist and their mother died a few years ago. Years, Mary Margaret! You'd think that, in all that time, they'd have had at least one parent-teacher conference. Come to think of it, shouldn't they have passed through your own class two years ago?"

Mary Margaret shrugged. "They might've. Like I told Graham once, I never remember meeting anyone. That's just how we roll here in Storybrooke. I think someone may be drugging our water supply. Perhaps it would be best to get these kids into an out-of-town foster home so they don't have to deal with that," Mary Margaret hinted unsubtly.

The savior bristled. "Not for all the shrooms in Wonderland! My foster parents were jerks, and naturally, what was true for me must be true for every foster family in America."

"Well, we can't just adopt them!" Mary Margaret protested. "Adoption never seems to end well around here."

"I noticed," Emma said, holding up a copy of her son's enormous psychiatric file. "I think that the best solution is to dump them on this mysterious father of theirs. I don't know who, where, what, or if he is, but anything is better than the licensed, screened, trained caregivers the foster system would saddle them with."

"That's the most boneheaded thing I've ever heard. I think that Nicholas kid is rubbing off on you."

"It's not boneheaded, it's optimistic!"

"But—"

"No buts! The system is Lawful Evil!"

"Emma, I hate to be the one to break this to you, but as sheriff, aren't you part of the system now?"

Emma glanced down at her badge in dawning horror. "Oh hell, you're right!" She ran to the window, tore off her badge, and waved it frantically in the air. "I changed my mind, Sidney!" she screamed into the street. "You can have it back now! Please! I'm begging you!"

Mary Margaret dragged her back in. "Emma, will you get a grip?"

The savior swallowed an unheroic sob. "Sorry. I'm having a bit of an identity crisis. I do that a lot,
but don't worry. It always passes after forty-two minutes or so." She composed herself. "The bottom line here is, we need to rustle up an old man for these kids or they'll be separated."

"We will?" Ava began to sob. Nicholas took advantage of his sister's distraction, devouring her plate of breadcrumbs in one massive bite.

Emma started. "You heard us?"

"Of course we heard you! You're five feet away! We're young, not deaf!" Ava snapped. "Please don't split us up, Sheriff Swan! My brother has a tendency to stop breathing if I'm not around to remind him every few minutes."

---

Emma walked into the only records office in town. "Excuse me, Mr….Krzyskowski? What, were your parents morally opposed to vowels or something?"

Krzyskowski shrugged. "Could be worse. I could have some corny noun for a name like everyone else in this town seems to."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Swan, Gold, Glass, Ruby, Whale…" He thumbed idly through a stack of census records. "I've had a lot of time to think about this."

An idea popped into Emma's head. "Hey, do you have any records of a man named Longlostdad?"

"No."

"It was worth a try. Oh well. As a consolation prize, can I have the Zimmer twins' birth certificates?"

"Sure."

Emma brightened. "Really? That was a lot simpler than usual."

Krzyskowski burst out laughing. "Nah, I was just playing, the mayor has them. But didn't you feel happy for a few seconds, there?"

---

Emma faced down her archnemesis tiredly. "Madam Mayor, I'm sick of confronting you in your office all the time. Can't you just give me your freaking cellphone number so I can quit storming over here every ten seconds?"

"Sorry, but I can't take the risk. I might need you to carry me to safety again one of these days."

"Fine," Emma sighed, "then let's get this over with." She cleared her throat. "Madam Mayor, I disagree with your goals and the methods by which you are working to achieve them. I believe I have found a more effective and moral way of aiding the Storybrooke citizens in question."

"While you may disagree with my goals and methods, they are technically lawful and totally not motivated by spite," Regina recited. "Now get out of my way and do as you're told."

Emma slunk out of the office in defeat. "In retrospect, if I wanted to undermine her authority, I really should have run for mayor instead of sheriff."

---

As the Evil Queen led the twins through the woods, Gretel examined her father's compass. "Hansel,
"Did you take a bite out of this thing?"

"What is that?" Regina asked. "Anything that could be used for evil?"

Gretel glared at her brother. "It was a really spiffy compass until he got his teeth on it. Our dad gave it to us to keep us from getting lost. A fat lot of good that did. I knew we should have stuck with breadcrumbs. But there's no use crying over spilled milk. Where are you taking us, and why couldn't we just ride there in your fancy carriage?"

"We're going to the Blind Witch's crib on Drury Lane. The streets there are paved with muffins and I don't want my sweet ride getting all sticky."

"The Blind Witch?" Hansel repeated. "You mean the elderly white Rastafarian lady with the gaping eye sockets?"

"No, a different Blind Witch. This one is young and fairly attractive, with mild cataracts. I caught my Huntsman checking her out the other day, and I can't abide a roving eye. That's why I'm sending you kids in there to smash her windows. Oh, and if you have time, could you snatch my purse back from her? I'm pretty sure she swiped it while I was busy yelling at my boy-toy."

"So what do you need us for? Don't you have some flying monkeys or something that you could send after it?"

"You're thinking of a different evil witch. An understandable mistake—there are an awful lot of us in these parts. Unfortunately, all my henchmen are male and easily distracted. But one thing I have learned in all my years of television viewing is that adorable children on an adventure never fail. Just remember not to eat anything, particularly the contents of my purse, or you'll die horribly." She pushed aside a curtain of foliage, revealing a magically delicious gingerbread house.

"Well, we're boned," said Gretel with a glance at her drooling brother.

Henry barged into Mayberry Jail with the Big Book of Deja-Vu in hand. "Hey, Emma."

"Henry? Don't you ever have school anymore?"

Henry grinned. "I told Miss Blanchard I was stepping out for a while to feed the birds. She gave me tuppence and wished me well."

"Well I still have to work and I don't think that excuse will fly with your mother, so if you have any plot points to share, make them quick."

"The Zimmer twins are Hansel and Gretel, their father abandoned them, and my mom is still evil."

"Sure, honey."

Henry flashed his book at her. "If I showed you this eerily accurate full-page portrait of the Zimmer twins in my Big Book of Deja-Vu, would that convince you? Or at least give you pause?"

"You underestimate the depth of my cynicism, kid."

The little prince sighed. "How did you ever find a man with an attitude like that? Was my father some kind of masochist?"

Emma stiffened. "Questions about your father? Henry, I never thought I'd say this, but can we go back to talking about the curse?"
"Aw, come on!" Henry wheedled. "I'm sick of doing exposition all the time. Can't we switch roles for just a few minutes?"

His mother racked her brain for a story. "Er, would you believe the stork brought you?"

"No."

"A wizard on a motorcycle?"

"Try again."

"Okay, how about this? When I first met him, your father was a great Jedi Knight and star pilot, but then he was betrayed and murdered by a guy named Darth Vader."

"Woah, cool! Let's go with that one. Tell me, did you happen to hang onto Dad's lightsaber? I'd like to take it back to class with me for show and tell."

The savior's eyes suddenly lit up. "Did you say lightsaber? Henry, you're a genius!"

"That's what I keep trying to tell you."

At the Princess Pad, Ava nibbled daintily on a cookie, while Nicholas emptied the rest of the jar directly into his gaping maw.

Emma came in, toting a large box. "Hey kids, you'll never guess what I've found!"

"Our father?" said Nicholas hopefully.

"No, my old blankie."

Ava scowled. "Did you have to get our hopes up like that?"

Emma blatantly ignored her. "But this isn't just any blankie, no sir! It's my only memento of the deadbeats who left me in the woods to die."

Grimly, Ava turned to her brother. "Maybe we should find someone with a longer attention span to ask for help."

"No, I promise, I'm building up to something, here. I don't like to generalize, but all orphans are giant pack rats."

"That's a horrible, vicious lie!" said Nicholas defensively, trying to conceal the cookies he'd stuffed down his shirt.

"Shut up, Nicholas. I was talking to the brains of your operation. Ava, do you kids have anything that belonged to your father?"

"Besides the killer good looks? Well, there's always his compass." She took out a compass in a fancy gold setting. "Mom said she picked his pocket while they were in the sack and this was all she found."

Emma raised her eyebrows. "Your mom sounds like a real prize. Anyway, do you think you could overcome your orphanly hoarder instincts for a few hours and lend me the compass?"

"If you'll promise to keep us together."
"Fine."

"And as long as you're making ridiculous promises you have little to no chance of keeping, can we each have a pony?"

Hansel and Gretel crawled into the witch's house, Hansel leaving a mighty river of drool behind him. "This is even better than Cake Boss!" the boy squealed, licking ganache off the wall.

His sister slapped him upside the head. "Remember what the queen said about dying horribly?"

"…No."

"Hansel, don't eat the gingerbread house."

"Okay." A moment later, Hansel's fingers started to creep toward a bundle of licorice.

"Hansel, don't eat the gingerbread house."

"Right, I forgot." Hansel picked up a cookie.

"Hansel, don't eat the gingerbread house."

"Sorry, my bad." He put it down.

"Look, there's the Queen's purse!" Gretel pointed.

"Awesome," said Hansel around a large mouthful of cupcake.

"Hansel!" cried Gretel.

The boy swallowed, folding his arms imperiously. "Hey, you forgot to remind me not to eat the gingerbread house for a few seconds. This is as much your fault as it is mine."

The dozing witch in the corner suddenly sprang to life. "All right, time to butcher some kids! Heh heh, differently-abled women really can lead rich, full lives."

"Don't worry, Gretel!" Hansel attacked the gingerbread walls with his teeth, chomping a growing hole in the house. "I'll have us out of here in no time!"

"Hey, stop that!" the witch scolded, restraining him with magic. "The whole reason I went to the trouble of building this place was because I was tired of termites always eating my walls."

Mr. Gold shot a sinister grin at Emma as she walked into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. "Hey, Emma. Still in denial, I presume?"

"Dude, stop leering at me. I don't want to get caught up in any more shipping wars."

"Sorry. What can I do ya for?"

"I need to find out everything I can about this old compass, and since the Antiques Roadshow isn't in town at the moment, I'm stuck with coming to you for help again," said Emma grudgingly.

Gold examined the proffered compass. "Hey, did someone take a bite out of this thing?"

"Nicholas claims it was always like that, though I'm not sure I believe him."
"Well, you're in luck. The compass came through my shop just like everything else that matters in this town, and I keep a file on everyone who has ever purchased anything in my store. I also have a listing of every person who's ever wandered in here to use the restroom."

"No wonder this place is so cluttered."

Gold shrugged. "It's actually not as difficult as one might think. You, David, Ashley, and Regina are the only people who have been in here all year, and none of you even bought anything."

"So how much blood are you going to make me spill in exchange for the guy's name?"

"None, but I'd like you to forgive me for granting you instant popularity and power."

"No deal, you scummy bastard!"

"All right, then, I'll think of something else you could do for me. Say, I haven't had a date in a while…"

The sheriff cringed. "Fine, fine! I forgive you! I forgive you with all my heart!"

Gold smirked.

Emma headed over to the only garage in town to confront the twins' father. "Hey, are you Michael Tillman?"

"That's what it says on my stereotypical coveralls."

"Well, then, have I got a surprise for you!" Emma beamed excitedly. "Congratulations, you're a father!"

Michael blinked. "Uh, do I know you?"

"Oh, not with me. With Dori Zimmer, the sexually-liberated pickpocket."

Michael paled. "Holy crap, I have a kid?"

"Two kids, actually. Delinquent little things on the cusp of a troubled adolescence. Isn't it wonderful?" Emma shoved a congratulatory cigar in his mouth. "You must be so excited. Here, I bought you a *Father Knows Best* cardigan."

Michael shook his head vehemently. "This isn't possible!"

"Are you a virgin?"

"No."

"Then it's possible." Emma flashed the compass at him.

Michael scowled. "That skank swiped my compass! I knew it! Was there a wallet and a Rolex with this, by any chance?"

"No, just the two kids," Emma reminded him. "Look, I know how you must be feeling right now, but it could be worse. Your long-lost children could be paranoid schizophrenics who try to suck you into their delusions with them." She waved to Henry, who was watching from across the street with a pair of binoculars.
"I admire your courage," said Michael, "but I don't have time to be a father right now. I just signed up for a pottery class at the Y."

"You really suck."

"That's what I keep trying to tell you."

Henry beat Emma back to the Princess Pad and was already getting chummy with the twins by the time she reached the front door. "Hey, man, sorry for gratuitously framing you," said Ava.

"Think nothing of it," Henry chirped. "I'm so glad to finally meet another child that I'd befriend anyone. Even that creepy kid from The Omen."

Emma called up Mary Margaret on her cell phone. "Hey, roomie. Remember when you said that my plan to dump the twins on their big question mark of a father was the most boneheaded thing you'd ever heard?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, you were right. The guy's a dud and I'm a big fat liar. Can you come out here and bring a couple of hats with you? I was hoping we could take up a collection and buy the kids a pony before they go."

Out on the street, Emma was wigging out. "I'm really bad at this whole 'finding parents' thing. Maybe I should just stop trying."

"The kids are going to be so sad when you tell them."

"Are you crazy? I don't want to be the one to tell them they're screwed. That's why I started this stupid tapestry of lies to start with."

"So what are you planning?"

"Easy. I'll tell them we've won a trip to Disneyland. That'll get them packed and in the car. Then when we get to Boston, I'll just shove them out the window and hope they take the hint."

Mary Margaret shook her head sadly at her roomie. "Okay, we have a new winner. This is now the most boneheaded thing I've ever heard. Emma, you can't just keep lying like this. Dr. Hopper would be furious if he found out."

Regina approached the pair from behind. "As much as it pains me to say these words, I agree with Blanchard."

At the tastiest cottage in the Enchanted Forest, the Blind Witch bolted Hansel and Gretel into her custom-made human-sized veal crate. "My diet starts tomorrow!"

"Please don't eat me!" wailed Nicholas. "I'm full of sugar, saturated fats, and scrap metal."

"It's a long story," said Gretel.

The Blind Witch looked pensive. "I think I'll cook the weepy one first, while he's nice and moist."

"WAAAAAAAAH!" howled Hansel.
"That's right, keep it up, little boy." The witch went to the kitchen and began preparing a walnut and apple dressing for Hansel to wear to his doom.

Gretel tried to shake some sense into her brother, and when that failed, she moved on to slapping him. "Hansel, don't panic! All you've got to do is keep your cool when she comes for you, swipe the keys out of her pocket, and toss them to me through the bars. Then I'll call 911, and hopefully help will arrive before your burns become third-degree."

"Do I look like I'm smart enough to do any of that?" shrieked Hansel.

Gretel sighed. "Good point. I'll swipe the key."

The witch opened the cell and grabbed Gretel by the arm. "You've got awfully puffy sleeves for a boy."

Gretel kicked her brother in the shin. "Uh, I'm a transvestite?" Hansel stammered.

Gretel grabbed the key and tossed it to him through the bars. Hansel squirmed his way free and headed for the phone, but got distracted by a cupcake on the way. "Hansel!" Gretel screamed.

"I'm working on it, I'm working on it," Hansel mumbled around a mouthful of frosting.

The witch glared at Gretel. "Hey, you're not a transvestite." She dropped the girl and nabbed Hansel. "You kids should be ashamed of yourselves, trying to put one over on a blind lady!"

"Hey, you can't kill my brother!" Gretel protested. "I want to be the one to do that!" She rushed the witch and shoved her into the oven. Meanwhile, Hansel chose that moment to finally be of some use by grabbing the Queen's purse, and together the kids fled into the night.

"Come back here!" the witch screamed from her fiery tomb. "If you leave I can't eat you, and I really want to!"

"Times are tough all over, sister." Back at the palace, the Queen stood contentedly at her mirror, watching the witch burn, with her Huntsman tied to the bed behind her. "So, baby, do you still think she's hotter than me?"

"If I say no, will you quit hitting me?"

"No."

Security escorted the twins into the palace. "Your Majesty, these children don't have backstage passes, but they said you were expecting them?"

"Do you have the stuff?" the Queen demanded.

"Yeah," Gretel confirmed. "It wasn't easy, though. That other witch made you look like a regular Pollyanna."

"I know, I saw the whole thing."

"If you saw, then why did you need to ask if we had your stuff?" Hansel wondered.
"Just making conversation. It's been so long since I had visitors," the Queen sniffled. "It's a lonely business, being a black widow."

"Whatever," Gretel yawned. "Here's your apple. You'd better appreciate it. I had to nag like I'd never nagged before to keep Hansel from eating it on the way back."

"Hansel's very lucky you were there." The queen caressed the apple raptly.

The twins shank back awkwardly. "Um, should we leave the two of you alone, or…?"

"Don't worry, you have nothing to fear for me, provided you're not into gossip."

"Um, okay," said Gretel. "Now, about our father. You promised to 'find' him for us. I'm not sure exactly what those quotation marks mean, but if you'll just produce him, we'll be on our way."

The Queen advanced on them thoughtfully. "Let's not be too hasty. Gretel, you're a clever girl, and I could easily see you tearing out my heart and taking over the family business one day. And as for you, Hansel, I've always had a weakness for cute yet stupid men. How would you like to come live with me? If your hearts are set on having a father figure, I've got an overindulgent grandpa and ruggedly handsome stepdad all lined up for you."

"We don't want anything to do with your evil plans!" Gretel thundered boldly.

"We don't?" said Hansel. Gretel kicked him in the shins. "Ow! Okay, fine, we don't," the boy relented unhappily.

"Aw, come on, it'll be fun," the Queen wheedled. "I'll buy you each a snazzy all-black wardrobe, you can eat chocolate cake for every meal, and the only rule in the house will be 'don't break Mommy's curses.' You think you can handle that?"

"Sorry, Your Majesty," said Gretel firmly, "but we've made up our minds. Adoption never ends well around here."

The Queen shook her head. "You should really reconsider. I think it's only fair to warn you that I'm evil and powerful and I don't handle rejection very well."

"We're not afraid of you!" said Gretel.

Hansel hesitated. "Er, actually, I sort of am—"

But it was too late. The queen had already enveloped the children in a mysterious purple whirlwind. "Enjoy Kansas, suckers!"

Emma shoved the kids into the only squad car in town. "Are you ready for two weeks at the happiest place on Earth?" she asked, unable to meet their eyes.

"And you said we were crummy liars?" snorted Ava.

Regina stood off to the side with Henry tucked under her arm. "This is what happens to little punks who reject my attempts at mothering. Capisce?"

Henry shook her off and ran to Emma's side. "Emma, you can't let them leave town, or I'll be stuck here with no one to play with again."

Emma looked pointedly at the floor. "How about if I get you a pony to play with?"
The only squad car in town began to shake and sputter as it approached the town line. "I don't believe this!" Emma groaned. "The moment we get within sight of that ironic Welcome to Storybrooke sign, the car breaks down. Kids, promise me you won't tell Henry about this. It will only encourage his delusions."

"It'll be our little secret," Ava vowed.

"Good." Emma whipped out her cellphone. "You two try to enjoy your last few minutes of freedom, while I give the most boneheaded idea I've ever had one last try."

The Evil Queen lounged in front of her magic mirror, watching the latest episode of Snow White and Friends. "Snow White hanging out with seven dwarves?" She laughed out loud. "It will never catch on."

A pair of her impractically-clad henchman dragged Woody Woodcutter into the room. "Your Majesty, you said you wanted to see the prisoner on the next commercial break?"

The woodcutter sighed. "I suppose you're going to pump me for info on the enchanted tree that has the power to unmake your curse?"

Regina frowned. "What do you mean?"

"The Pevensie kids took it!" he revealed hastily. "Can I go home to my children now?"

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Your children suck. They actually chose a life with their loving father over a life with the woman risked their lives for a measly apple."

"Hah hah! Nobody loves you, nobody loves you!" Woody chanted in a singsong voice. The Queen discreetly wiped away a tear.

Hansel and Gretel awakened in the depths of a vast, empty forest. "I don't think we're in the Enchanted Forest anymore, Hansel," Gretel breathed nervously.

"I'm scared, Gretel," Hansel whimpered.

"So what else is new?"

The only tow truck in town pulled up behind Emma, and out popped Michael Tillman. "Ah, nuts, not you again! Aren't there criminals you should be catching?"

"Hey, your kids swiped seven dollars worth of toothpaste and Kleenex. If that's not a public menace in need of my attention, I don't know what is."

Michael glanced at the children through the car window. "This would be a lot easier if they weren't so damn cute."

Emma smiled knowingly. "Believe me, I know the feeling. Just be thankful your kids don't have the Charming Family Charm at their disposal."

Michael's eyes shimmered. "I think I'd like that cardigan after all."
The sheriff beamed victoriously. "Got it right here."

He shrugged it on and knelt down in front of his children. "Hi, kids, I'm your dad. Sorry I tried to abandon you for a pottery class. I should probably warn you before you get too attached; I really suck."

"That's okay, so does Nicholas," Ava soothed.

Her father smiled. "I think I feel a hug coming on!"

Emma waltzed into the Princess Pad wearing a celebratory smirk. "What's the occasion?" Mary Margaret asked.

"You know you said my plan to dump the kids on their big question mark of a father was the most boneheaded thing you'd ever heard, and then later I said you were right?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, I'm taking that back. It totally worked. I'm so very awesome!" Emma gloated, flopping onto her roommate's bed.

"The guy who decided to commit to the children he never knew he had also had a little something to do with it," Mary Margaret reminded her.

"Hey, who's the protagonist here?"

"Okay, fine, let's talk about you. Any thoughts on your long-lost deadbeats?"

"Yes, actually. I'm starting to think that if they wanted me to find them, they wouldn't have dumped me in the woods to die."

"Oh, Emma, that's crazy talk!"

"You're right. I don't know what I was thinking. Incidentally, would you mind taking a DNA test, just to put my mind at ease? Henry thinks you're my mom, and he has this creepy habit of being right about everything."

Mary Margaret burst out laughing. "Me, your mother? That's ridiculous. By the way, you're looking too skinny lately, so I made you a grilled cheese sandwich with the crusts cut off, just like you like them."

Emma shrank away from her. "Thanks, but you're making me a little uncomfortable. I think I'm going to go out…uh…somewhere you aren't."

"Okay, but put on your galoshes and your sweater first. I don't want you to catch a cold."

Emma decided to camp out in the Love Bug until the sense of deja-vu faded. Unfortunately, the presence of Henry quickly quashed those plans. "Hey, Emma. I brought a couple of glow-in-the-dark lightsabers so that we could reenact my father's heroic last stand."

"Henry, I'm pretty sure it's my civic duty to arrest you for breaking curfew."

Henry opened his mouth to protest, but was interrupted when a mysterious stranger rode by on a motorcycle. His eyes widened. "Wow, that was weird. Emma, does this mean you were telling the
truth about the wizard on the flying motorcycle?"

"I don't even know anymore!" Emma buried her face in her hands miserably.

The stranger approached them with a twinkle in his eye. "Hey, Emma. Long time no see."

"How do you know my name?"

"That's a very good question." He smiled innocuously. "I'm looking for the only hotel in town."

"It's down the street," said Emma. "Just don't get in trouble with the law, or they'll toss you out on your butt." Henry elbowed her. "Oh, uh, and I'll have to arrest you, I guess."

"Thanks. I'll see you later, but probably sooner than you're expecting." He hopped onto his motorcycle and sped off.

Emma finally managed to tear her eyes off the stranger. "Henry, who the hell was that?"

"Judging by that mysterious twinkle in his eye, my new competition for the title of town sage."
7:15 am

The only stranger in town crouched on the sidewalk outside the Stepford House, trying to look busy. Henry approached him warily. "If you're trying to convince me that you're working on that motorcycle, you could have at least bothered to get out some tools and dirty up your hands a little."

The stranger grinned. "You're pretty sharp, kid."

"And don't you forget it. So, now that we understand each other, are you going to tell me what's in that mysterious box you're hauling around?"

The stranger's eyes hardened. "Hey kid, just because I split up your loving parents and condemned you to a miserable childhood under the thumb of an evil witch, it doesn't mean that I owe you anything. Anyway, shouldn't you be getting to school right about now?"

"Eh, there's no rush. My teacher is probably still busy stalking my grandpa at the moment."

"I see."

Henry regarded the stranger curiously. "The fact that you don't seem disturbed by that statement tells me I need to keep a close eye on you."

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about, Your Highness." The stranger sped off without further ado.

Regina ran up and enfolded her son protectively in her arms. "Henry, haven't I told you not to talk to strangers? Wait, no I haven't, because there aren't supposed to be any strangers here." She paled. "Oh crap."

Over at the Princess Pad, Emma awoke to find a luminous blur whirling around her apartment. "The Flash, here in Storybrooke? Who's next, Dr. Frankenstein?"

"No, it's me," Mary Margaret jabbered around a mouthful of toothpaste. "I'm late for my creepy stalk —uh, altruistic volunteer mentoring.

Emma studied her roommate intently. "Is it just me, or is your nose looking a little bigger today?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about."

"Uh huh. Well, even if I wasn't a human lie detector, there would be no future in lying to me. In case you've forgotten, my very chatty, very nosy son spends every freaking day with you."

"Eep! I'm doomed!" Mary Margaret sobbed, fleeing out the front door. The moment she was gone, Emma took all the coffee and Red Bull out of the cupboards and threw it out the window.

Mary Margaret rushed over to the only diner in town, where she took out the high-powered binoculars Henry had lent her and waited for her true love.

When David walked in, Ruby handed him his coffee with a flirty smile. Mary Margaret ran over and seized her throat in a jealous rage. "How dare you flirt with my secret married lover?! David is strictly a two-woman man, do you hear?"
"Erk!" Ruby choked. "Get a grip, Mary Margaret! I flirt with everyone—it's my gimmick, remember?"

"Oh, right. Sorry." She released her slightly bruised friend, propping the wheezing girl against the counter.

David sidled up to her shyly. "Hey, Eminem. Those new binoculars look great on you."

She smiled coyly. "Thanks. Just for the record, I got them to watch birds and not you."

"Sure you did, honey," said David, scuttling back to his wife's side.

"And if I stare longingly after you when you leave, I'm not checking you out. I'm just overwhelmed with emotion."

"Sure you are, honey," said Emma, popping out of the shadows with her own pair of binoculars. "Eminem, stop being dishonest. You have absolutely no aptitude for it."

"Noted."

"And please quit stalking David. While I'm not the kind of sheriff who likes to get hung up on what's 'legal' and what's not, I'd really hate to have to arrest you."

Mary Margaret bristled. "I'm not stalking him! I simply follow him everywhere he goes, know the intimate details of his daily routine, make lame excuses to talk to him, and occasionally videotape him while he sleeps. If that makes me a stalker, then...oh, hell, maybe I really am related to Henry."

"I think you should end this unhealthy romantic attachment by not showing up here tomorrow," Emma proposed.

"And I think you should end your unhealthy romantic attachment by finally selling that stupid Love Bug," Mary Margaret shot back at her.

"...Stalemate," Emma finally conceded.

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Snow White was stalking a turkey with a spear. "It seems a little out of character for me to be killing a helpless bird. Oh well. I already went to the trouble to lift this spear, so I suppose it would be a waste not to throw it."

Red Riding Hood suddenly appeared in front of the spear. "Hey, watch it! I'm wearing the brightest shade of crimson imaginable; you have absolutely no excuse for not seeing me."

Blinking as though she'd just woken up from a dream, Snow tossed the spear aside. "Sorry Red. Thanks for stopping me for I committed avicide. I don't know if my fanbase could have recovered from a blow like that."

"I'm here for you, homegirl. Oh, and I brought you another month's worth of supplies." She handed over a single tiny basket of low-cal fruits and vegetables. "Incidentally, I was reading a fascinating book on anorexia the other day..."

"Red, I've already told you, I want to slim down so I can look my best for Charm—uh, for swimsuit season on Woodland Hermit Beach."

"Speaking of the Nameless Wonder, word on the cobblestone street is he's marrying Midas' daughter just like he said he would."
"For some reason, I'm shocked."

Red pulled her friend into a hug. "There, there, it could be worse. You could be living with the traumatic memory of your first love's horrible, gory death at your own accursed hands."

"Love really sucks, doesn't it?" Snow sobbed.

"It would seem that way, yes."

"Well then, let's end our self-destructive dependency on it one and for all," Snow White suggested. "There must be some sort of Loverette patch or gum out there to help people like us."

Red considered this. "If there is, it's probably at Rumplestiltskin's pad like everything else that matters."

"Cool, let's go."

"Are you crazy?" Red blurted. "I'm way too clever to ask Rumplestiltskin for help! You're on your own, sister."

Snow paddled her lonely boat across Rumplestiltskin's moat full of dry ice. "Man, this place is creepy. I thought a place called the Dark Castle would be a little more inviting."

The Dark One suddenly Apparated into her boat. "How very odd. I don't remember my castle ever having a moat before. I guess I'd better buy a boat. Is yours for sale, by any chance?"

"No, I borrowed it from my friend Prince Eric, and he needs it back by sunset for his date with that mute chick he picked up."

"Pity. Well, I suppose some introductions are in order. I'm Rumplestiltskin."

"Aren't you a little tall to be Rumplestiltskin?"

"Aren't you a little grungy to be the fairest one of all?" Rumplestiltskin retorted, leering creepily.

"Touche. Well, enough pleasantries. I'm here because I'm trying to kick my pesky love habit."

"Oh, I've been there, dearie. I found smashing stuff to be a very valuable exercise. Have you tried it?"

"Yeah."

"Have you tried getting angry and violent with the True Love in question?"

"And how! I almost drowned him."

"Well, then, did you try severing all contact?"

"Yes, actually."

"How about pretending not to love him? Did you try pretending not to love him?"

Snow White flinched. "I was really hoping to avoid that, if possible."

"Fair enough." He scooped up a vial of moat water. "Here, this ought to make quitting suck less."
The princess' eyebrows shot up. "Are you kidding me? A bottle of dirty water, and not even a very big one? That's what I came all this way for?"

"Hey, who's the Dark One, here?" Rumplestiltskin barked.

"You, sir, sorry, sir," Snow relented.

"That's better." Rumplestiltskin yanked a hair from her head and dunked it in the alleged potion.

"Are you making Polyjuice Potion? What good will that do?"

The Dark One leveled a glare at her. "This isn't Polyjuice. It's a magical elixir that will erase all memories of your true love, and-wait a minute!" He looked down at the potion with renewed interest. "I just realized, I could drink this myself and forget about my tragically dead girlfriend!" He snatched the vial back. "Sorry, dearie, this Anti-Love Potion Number Nine is no longer for sale."

"Hey, no fair! You promised!" Snow White grabbed angrily for the little bottle.

"No, it's mine!" cried Rumplestiltskin, hugging the vial close. "I'm sick of wasting my nights chugging Jack Daniels from that stupid chipped cup!"

The exiled princess pointed over his shoulder. "Hey, is that Emilie de Ravin?"

"Where?!!"

"Psych!" She grabbed the potion and swam for her life.

Rumplestiltskin sighed sadly. "Well, at least I got this precious hank of soggy hair out of the deal. I could have always just gone to her house and cleaned out her drain, but this way works too."

Mary Margaret was at the only drugstore in town, filling her basket with Batteries-brand batteries and Cotton Swabs-brand cotton swabs, when she bumped into Kathryn. "Whoops, sorry," she said insincerely.

Kathryn laughed it off. "No trouble. Apollo Bars always taste best when eaten off the floor."

"Stop being so damn reasonable! I'm trying to hate you, here!" Mary Margaret exploded. "Sorry, sorry, it's not your fault. I'm just not cut out for hatred."

"No problem," Kathryn replied easily. "I'll just take my pregnancy test and get out of your hair."

Mary Margaret's eyes widened. "You're having David's baby? I wish I knew what that was like."

Emma came skipping by. "Hey, Mary Margaret, check out this charming box of toothpicks I just found. They're shaped like swords, see?"

"Not now, Emma!"

Regina suddenly popped out of the freezer case behind Mary Margaret. "Caught ya!"

"Ah! Madam Mayor, what are you doing in there?"

"Just restocking the film in some of my spy cameras," said Regina. "While I was in there, I overheard your little confrontation with Kathryn, and I really think you should butt out. If the Nolans are having a baby, that's nobody's business but theirs and mine."
Prince Charming stared sadly out of his window at Neuschwanstein Castle™, while the ren faire of the century raged down below. "Man, being rich sucks even harder than being poor. If only there were some sort of class in the middle that I could join," he sighed wistfully.

His father knocked at the door. "Hey James?"

"That's not my name and you know it."

"Shut up, boy."

"And I'm not a boy. I'm thirty-one."

King George glared, and the temperature in the room dropped substantially. "Why can't you shut up and do as you're told, like your brother Alex Meade?"

"You mean Prince James?"

"Whatever. I just came to bring you your wedding gift from King Midas." He opened a large wooden box, revealing a solid gold Speedo. "I'm sure Abigail will love it on you."

Charming grimaced. "Wasteful extravagance has never looked so cheap."

"Cheer up. I hear he sent your bride a matching bikini."

"But Pops, I don't want to marry a bitter, lonely princess who nags me all the time. I'd rather marry a bitter, lonely princess who drowns me all the time."

The king seized his phony son by the scruff of the neck. "Perhaps I haven't made myself clear. I don't just want you to shut up and do as you're told. I want you to shut up and do as you're told with a smile."

"Yes, sir." The prince plastered on the most charming smile he could muster.

The king slapped him in the face. "Not genuine enough! Try again!"

"Sorry." Luckily, the smack to the mouth had conjured up a lovely memory of his first meeting with Snow White, and a dreamy grin spread across Charming's face.

"Are you thinking about another woman while I'm hitting you, boy?" the king roared angrily.

"No, sir."

"Good. Because a man of high-rank loving a woman he isn't married to, why, that would be simply unheard of!"

The moment the king was gone, Charming ran to his writing desk and pulled out some surprisingly shabby stationary. "Dear Snow," he penned, "I don't want the audience to find out how I feel about you until after commercial break, so I'm going to keep this letter nice and ambiguous until the cameraman loses interest. Wait for it…wait for it…There, that ought to do. Now we can talk."

After he finished the letter, he handed it off to a bird. "Find her, Mr. Feathers! I know that's usually my department, but I'm a little busy at the moment."

Mary Margaret was a little upset by her run-in with her sister wife, and decided to go for a hike in the
woods like she always did when she was having man troubles. She didn't get far, though, before she stumbled across a dove tangled in a net. "Oh my gosh! A bird that's not blue? This is incredible! Here, let me get you out of that net."

"Coo!" cooed the bird. Which, in the language of doves, meant, "Get away from me, you stupid human! I promised my boyfriend I'd meet him here for dinner!"

She scooped the squalling bird into her hands. "There, there, my avian amigo. Eminem's here."

The bird squirmed in protest. "Coo!" Which meant, "Mind your own damn business!"

"Aw, I think I've made a new friend!" giggled Mary Margaret obliviously.

Mary Margaret dragged her reluctant pet to the vet. While the doctor examined her, David and Mary Margaret hovered in their neutral corners, trying not to ogle each other. It worked for about five seconds.

"Well," the vet finally pronounced, "the bad news is, there's nothing wrong with this bird, you've torn her from her mate for absolutely no reason, and she's going to end up a lonely old spinster just like you."

"Coo!" the bird squawked, which meant, "I told you so, featherbrain!"

"What's the good news, then?" asked Mary Margaret.

"I'm getting two hundred dollars for doing absolutely nothing." Grinning from ear to ear, the vet handed her a bill.

Mary Margaret glanced from the swindling veterinarian to her cheating boyfriend in dismay. "It's no wonder I prefer the company of birds to humans," she sighed.

"Coo!" cried the dove, meaning "Screw you!"

"Aw, I love you too," cooed Mary Margaret, nuzzling the bird's feathers tenderly. "Come on, let's go get your man back before he finds himself another woman and gets tied down to a nest full of eggs."

She said the last part while glowering at David.

David was perplexed and confused. "Mary Margaret, I really don't think you should be going out while the weather and your mood are both so erratic."

"If I was the type to let little things like that stand in my way, you'd still be floating face-down in the river," she reminded him.

"Hm, good point. Well, at least let me drive you. I can't promise that we'll get caught in the rain together and have to cling to each other for warmth, but it does look promising."

"Dude, you're married."

"Oh, right. That." David pouted.

Emma was loading up her squad car with a stack of emergency umbrellas donated by Archie Hopper, when Regina came over, wearing her mighty Glare of Evil. The savior sighed. "I know that look. If you're looking to have me thrown in jail again, I'm afraid arresting myself might prove to be a little awkward."
"No, Sheriff Swan, this glare is meant for that strange smug, cryptic, leather-clad man. Not Gold, I mean—the new one."

"Oh, yeah, I talked to him last night. Or at least I tried to. He's kind of a dead end, conversationally speaking."

"Well, he gives me the heebie-jeebies, and that leather jacket and motorcycle of his obviously mean he's some sort of rebel." Regina shuddered.

Emma chuckled. "What's the matter? Are you afraid that there's something in that mysterious box of his that will one day prove to be the key to your undoing?"

"N-n-no, of course not, that would be ridiculous," the mayor stammered uneasily.

The savior gave her a friendly slap on the back. "Then relax! This town could use a new attractive bachelor after Graham's unfortunate demise."

"But Sheriff Swan, you don't understand how evil this man is." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "That scumbag was talking to Henry!"

The sheriff froze. "Talking? Are you sure?"

"I saw it with my own two eyes! Their lips were moving and everything!"

Emma was appalled. "That sick monster! Who does he think he is?"

"Hopefully no one magical," Regina muttered.

Mary Margaret's hulking SUV thundered through the forest like a charging bull. "This ought to scare up plenty of birds. And if it doesn't, I'll rent an elephant."

"Coo," squawked the dove, meaning, "Damn doo-gooder."

Snow White sat alone in the wilderness thinking, because that's what hermits do. "Hm," she mused thoughtfully, looking down at her hard-won vial of Anti-Love Potion Number Nine. "Maybe I should be a sport and give this back to Rumplestiltskin. After all, I'm young and hot and should have no trouble finding love again, but there's no way in hell he's going to find another woman who can see past those teeth of his. Then, on the other hand, who knows when I'll get the chance to experience magically-induced amnesia again? Oh, decisions, decisions!"

A bluebird wearing an adorable little postman's hat swooped out of the sky and dropped a letter in her lap. The princess sighed. "This had better not be another damned chain letter." Taking her chances, she opened it up.

Dearest Snow, the letter read. I don't want the audience to find out how I feel about you until after commercial break, so I'm going to keep this letter nice and ambiguous until the cameraman loses interest. Wait for it...wait for it...There, that ought to do. Now we can talk. Since my so-called father objects to my secret love for you, I think the best thing for us to do is meet and declare our undying affection in the middle of his well-guarded fortress. PS, if you do not forward this letter to ten more people, your mother will drop dead tomorrow."

"No signature?" Snow looked the missive over curiously. "Well, I suppose since Charming's the only guy I've ever even come close to dating, it's safe to assume this is from him. Yay!" Snow
glanced down at the potion bottle in her hand. "Looks like I won't be needing this anymore, but I guess I'll hang onto it for a while anyway. Red could probably do with a hefty dose." Her eyes sparkled. "And if I could slip some to Regina, why, this whole epic feud of ours would be over! I wonder if Rumplestiltskin sells this stuff in bulk?"

Mary Margaret slammed on her brakes when she happened across a road closure sign. "A little aluminum sign? I could easily run that down with my big, hulking SUV, but I'm way too goody-goody for that." She picked up the birdcage. "Come on, Pidge. It looks like we're walking."

"Coo!" said the bird, meaning, "Aw man, we're gonna die and I never even got a chance to meet Big Bird!"

Snow White approached the gate guard at King George's castle with her hood pulled discreetly over her head. "Hi, there! I've brought a gift from King Midas. Magical flowers that don't wilt or wither, even after a transnational journey on foot."

The gate guard consulted a wanted poster. "Hey, I know you. You're that Snow White chick!" He drew his sword. "Get her, boys!"

Snow kept her cool. "Ridiculous. That picture looks nothing like me. I'm wearing a hood and she isn't, see?"

"You've got me there," the guard admitted. "How about a test? If you're one of King Midas' subjects, then what's the name of your kingdom?"

"Uh…Midasland?"

The guard frowned. "Lucky guess."

 Victorious, Snow White ran upstairs to her quasi-prince. "Well, now that I'm safely inside, with plenty of hostile guards and a king who's out to get me, I guess it's safe to discard both my disguise and my excuse for being here." She tossed her cloak and basket out the window.

Footsteps echoed down the hallway. "Charming?" Snow began to panic. "I can't let him see me like this! I haven't even had a chance to fix my makeup yet." The princess dove behind a column.

A guard seized her from behind. "Freeze, cloakless dirtbag!"

"Darn," muttered Snow. "I knew I shouldn't have left my spear at home."

"What's this?" The guard snatched Charming's letter, skimming it in disbelief. "I'm afraid feeling affection for the heir to the throne is a capital offense in this kingdom. Not even the king's allowed to do it. To the Bastille with you!" He dragged her down to the dungeons every structure in the Enchanted Forest seemed to be adjoined to.

When they reached the dungeon, Snow White halted her pointless struggling to ask a question. "If I told you I was Snow White, would that make my situation better or worse?"

"Get in the damn cell."

Snow stomped petulantly into the dank, dark cage. "This is the worst date I've ever been on," the princess grumbled, "even worse than that one that was crashed by trolls!" The princess took a deep breath. "Okay, Snow, calm down. There's got to be an escape tunnel. There's always an escape
tunnel." She started feeling around on the floor.

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow..." sang a lonely voice in the darkness.

Snow's eyes lit up. "Zazu? My feathered friend, is that you?"

A burly dwarf stepped into the light. "No, my name's Grumpy at the moment."

"Oh. Well, nice to meet you, but I should really be going now." She flung herself against the bars with a mighty clang. "Ow."

"Sister, if a bundle of ugly muscle like me couldn't break through those, what makes you think a scrawny little girl can do it?"

"I have the power of love on my side!" Snow declared grandly, charging the door only to end up with her head lodged between the bars. "Ow. It seems that the power of love has been greatly exaggerated."

The dwarf grimaced. "Love? Hasn't anyone invented a patch or gum for that little affliction yet?"

"You too, huh?" said Snow, pulling herself free of the slightly dented bars.

"Oh yeah." Grumpy sighed wistfully. "My girl was as beautiful as a fairy. Probably because she was a fairy."

"Makes sense."

"Anyway, some lady told me to run away with her, so I did. Then some other lady told me to dump her, so I did. Then some guy told me to buy her a stolen diamond, so I did. Then some cop told me to get in this cell, so I did."

"You have serious trouble asserting yourself, bro," Snow observed.

"I'm working on it, I'm working on it!" Grumpy snapped defensively. "Self-confidence would probably come a lot easier if I wasn't in chains, though."

"I guess that's my cue." A dwarf in head-to-toe camouflage popped out of nowhere.

"Peeta?"

"No, it's me, Stealthy."

"Even better!"

"The rest of the guys are outside yodeling, which has scared off all the guards, and we've prepared a getaway car...t." Stealthy snatched the keys from a nearby terrier and opened Grumpy's cell. "You ready to go home?"

"I'd rather go to the nearest bar, but I suppose beggars can't be choosers," sighed Grumpy, following his bro.

"Okay, I guess I'll just stay here, then," said Snow cheerfully. "Don't worry your pretty little heads about me. I'll probably die of a broken heart before the rats get a chance to eat me alive."

Stealthy's eyes widened. "Wow, who's the hottie?"
Grumpy glared. "What have I told you about falling in love?"

"Don't do it until someone invents a patch?"

Meanwhile, Snow was dancing wistfully in her cell, bluebirds circling around her head as she sang. "Someday my 'prince' will come. Someday he'll spring his love. And how epic that heist will be! When my 'prince' comes for me..."

Grumpy stared at her in disbelief. "Where did you get those bluebirds?"

"They found me. They will always find me," said the princess, twirling dreamily.

Grumpy groaned. "I can't let you die. A freaking Nazi couldn't let you die!"

"Why does everyone keep saying that?" Snow wondered aloud.

Annoyed, Grumpy snatched the keys from his bro and opened her cell. "You can come with us, but we're not taking the birds."

"Do you hear that? It's your flock!" Mary Margaret told her reluctant pet excitedly.

"Coo, coo!" cooed the dove. Which meant, "No, that's a thunderclap. Get your ears checked, you dumb biped!"

Mary Margaret peered over a cliffside. "A big, gaping hole in the ground? Sounds like the perfect place to search for creatures of the sky. Wait here, Pidge. I'm going in for a closer look."

"Coo," sighed the dove, meaning, "If you're going to get yourself killed, can you at least let me out of this cage first?"

Sure enough, Mary Margaret fell over the cliff and was left clinging to a convenient root. "A literal cliffhanger?" she gasped. "Pfft, real original."

Luckily, David had also taken up stalking recently, and happened along before anything tragic could happen. "Hey, baby. How's it hanging?"

"That was lame. Can you give me a hand, here?"

David grinned. "A damsel in distress? I'm all over that!" Tearing open his shirt and tossing his hair majestically, he grabbed her hand and hauled her back over the ledge.

"David? What are you even doing here?" she panted. From the exertion and not the physical contact with David, of course.

"I was worried you'd do something stupid like get caught in the rain or accept treats from strangers, so I came after you," he explained.

"Oh." She stood up and dusted herself off. "Well, as hypocritical as this may sound coming from me, you shouldn't have followed me."

"Gotcha. You're welcome for saving your life, by the way."

The much-anticipated rain came pouring down, but Mary Margaret ignored it. "Eh, nuts to my life! The life of a pigeon with a man is worth far more than the life of a woman without a man." She cradled her bird's cage protectively.
David's eyebrows shot up. "First the cliff incident, now this? Mary Margaret, have you been hanging around with Bella Swan again?"

"You're a little mixed up. I hang around with Emma Swan."

"Phew, that's a relief. Now come on, let's find a warm place with low, romantic lighting to ride out this storm."

Stealthy led Snow White and Grumpy through the— you guessed it— escape tunnel. "This place sure is spooky," the dwarf whispered. "I'm glad the king was at least thoughtful enough to light the way for us with torches."

"Hey Stealthy?" Snow ventured. "I don't want to be a backseat bandit or anything, but you're going the wrong way. Maybe we should stop and ask for directions."

"Women," snorted Stealthy, not slowing his pace.

Snow White rolled her eyes. "Grumpy, you're not really going to follow this guy, are you? His shirt's redder than a poisoned apple!"

Grumpy shrugged apologetically. "Sorry lady. But given my aversion to falling in love, I can't afford to run off alone with a beautiful woman. It's just too risky." He took off after his bro.

They emerged into the courtyard and found it deserted. "Score!" squealed Stealthy. "This is just like Cool Hand Luke. But don't worry, there's no way this prison break will end in death like his did."

"Think again, loser," sneered King George, emerging from the darkness with several guards.

Stealthy broke into a run. "Don't worry, Grumpy, we can outrun them! We've got freakishly long legs for dwarves."

"Stealthy, no!" Grumpy screamed. "You can't afford to take any risks in that shirt of yours!"

But it was too late. An archer had already launched an arrow straight at his heart. "Hey, that's cheating," Stealthy protested, crumpling to the ground.

Grumpy gathered his bro in his arms. "Stealthy, you idiot! If you were planning on getting shot up, you could have at least worn some armor."

"I tried, but I couldn't risk the armor check penalty." Without further ado, Stealthy dropped dead.

"Idiot," muttered the king. "Now spill it, Dwarf Number Two! Where's Snow?"

"How do you know she was with us?" Grumpy challenged. "Maybe she escaped on her own."

"Pfft. You think I don't know a damsel in distress when I see one?"

Grumpy glowered up at the king. "You know, if interrogation was your goal, you could have shot Stealthy in the leg and had two witnesses to question."

"Wise guy, eh?" The king's eyes hardened. "I don't take kindly to being made to look like a fool. I get enough of that from Rumplestiltskin! Now you die!"

"I don't think so, loser!" Snow popped out of a heap of straw. "You can't kill my friend. He's got a long, rich life full of slave labor and crippling emotional pain ahead of him, and I'll be damned if I'm
"going to let you take that away from him." She held up a torch. "Now let him go, or I'll set your precious pile of straw on fire!"

"No!" screamed the guards.

"You wouldn't dare!"

"You villain!"

The king took a copy of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* out of the pocket of his regalia and glared at it. "It seems I've been grossly misinformed about the whole 'damsel in distress' thing." He nodded to his stooges. "Let the man go."

"Snow, did you seriously just sacrifice yourself for a guy you met five minutes ago?" Grumpy's face reddened. "I feel guilty about even contemplating leaving you in that cell. I'm off to find a confessional and relieve my guilty conscience." He donned a rosary and slunk into the night.

"Well, Snow," said King George, casually kicking the dead body at his feet aside, "now that that's out of the way, I think you and I should have a little chat."

"The kind with tea and cookies, or the kind with racks and torture chambers?"

"We'll see."

David and Mary Margaret finally stumbled across the only cabin in Storybrooke. "Hello?" Mary Margaret tapped on the windows. "Is this Love Shack vacant?"

David opened the door. "If the owner's stupid enough to leave it unlocked, I figure it's fair game."

Mary Margaret followed him inside, shivering violently. "I don't know about this, David. Two lovers meeting secretly in an abandoned cabin in the woods while a storm rages outside? It sounds like the intro to every bad horror flick ever made."

The recovering amnesiac just laughed. "What are you suggesting? That this place is the secret hideout of some creepy psycho who binds and gags unwitting townspeople, drags them out here, and then tries to beat them to death with his cane?"

"Sorry," Mary Margaret apologized. "I'm just a little nervous. I mean, breaking and entering? This has got to be the naughtiest thing I've ever done."

David grinned. "Well, I can fix that, no problem! Let me rustle up a cozy, romantic fire for us. You check the bedrooms for lingerie." He coughed nervously. "Uh, so you can get out of those wet clothes, I mean."

When the search proved to be fruitless, David had to settle for wrapping a blanket around her shoulders. Mary Margaret shrank away. "Ugh, cooties!"

"Hey, I thought women liked a cuddler?"

"Women like single cuddlers. Not happily married ones that they have to risk death to get a moment alone with," Mary Margaret retorted bitterly. "Before I met you, I was in the running for Goody-Two-Shoes of the Year! Now look at me! I've turned into Eponine-freaking-Thenardier!"

"Wait a minute. You've been stalking me?"
"You just figured that out? Man, you're dense." She burst into tears. "And it's so damn adorable!"

David didn't reply, just took a pair of high-powered binoculars and a map to her house out of his jacket pocket. She stared up at him in disbelief. "You too?"

"You know it, baby. So, now that our romantic theme music is playing again, aren't we long overdue for a makeout scene?" he wheedled, leaning in to meet her lips.

"Hell yeah, baby…no, wait." She pulled back dizzily, looking extremely dazed. "There's something I'm supposed to say here…something about you being…accepting? Electing?"

"Expecting?" David supplied.

"That's it."

"Oh." His eyeballs nearly popped out of his head. "Eep!"

A soaking-wet Emma ducked into the only diner in town with her tail between her legs. "I had no idea there would be water involved in this storm everyone's been talking about. Maybe I should have hung onto one of those umbrellas from Hopper?" Her eyes fell on the back of the head of the only stranger in town. "Wait a minute. I'd know that generic haircut and color anywhere. It's…" She frowned. "What the hell is your name, anyway?"

"It's Bae," the stranger replied.

"That's a weird name, are you serious?"

"No. It's actually Peter Pan."

"Okay, now you're just screwing with me."

"True."

"And it's really annoying!"

"I'll bet."

"I hate you!"

"I noticed." The stranger smirked.

Emma banged her head repeatedly against a nearby wall. "I don't need this aggravation, man! Is it true you were talking to Henry? You should know that his mother doesn't approve of him talking to anyone but her."

"And since when do you support that policy?"

"Hm, good point." The sheriff relaxed slightly. "But why were you outside his house?" Her eyes narrowed. "Were you planning to sneak in for some kind of illicit liaison with the mayor? Because the last guy who tried that ended up dying horribly."

The stranger blanched. "Ew, no! I was simply repairing my motorcycle with my bare hands. I'm sure there's nothing suspicious about that, is there?"

"No. What's suspicious is the fact that you came to Storybrooke voluntarily. This place is a gloomy,
oppressive dump, in case you haven't noticed."

The stranger shrugged. "It beats the inside of a closet."

"Huh?"

"I'll all make sense later."

Emma collapsed wearily into the seat beside him. "This conversation is giving me motion sickness. Can we finish it, please?"

"Sure. Sit down and let me buy you a drink."

"Oh, hell yes. Make it a five gallon bucket of McCutcheon's." Emma breathed gratefully. "Now, then, as sheriff, I have a legal duty to ask you if there's a bomb in that mysterious box of yours."

"Since when do you care about what's legal?"

"Answer the damn question or I'm going home for my chainsaw!"

"Fine. I swear on my mother's varnish that there is no bomb in the box."

"Well, what is in the box, then?"

"Oh, nothing that ruined your life," he replied a little too innocently.

"Come on, tell me!" Emma whined. "Leroy's running a pool on the contents of that box, and I bet the farm on 'insect collection.' Hopper and all the nuns were furious, for some reason."

"Sorry to disappoint you," he apologized, opening the case, "but it's just a typewriter. I'm a writer, you see, like all the talented folks at ABC."

Emma blinked. "A typewriter? Are those still a thing?"

"So it would seem." He picked up his box of obsolescence and left.

"Hey, wait!" Emma yelled. "Where's my bucket of McCutcheon's?"

"Aren't you on duty?"

"Oh, right," Emma sulked. "The law thing again."

Back at the Love Shack, David had begun hyperventilating. "I'm going to be a dad? But how? Mary Margaret, did you take advantage of me while I was in that coma?"

"No, I'm talking about Kathryn. She hasn't told you she thinks she's pregnant? That's odd. Telling the guy when you're still uncertain and haven't even taken the test yet seems like the logical thing for a woman in her situation to do."

David pulled out an inhaler and took a long puff. "This is unreal. I'm not ready to be a father yet!" His cellphone suddenly started ringing, and he picked it up. "Emma? No, I can't go fishing with you today, I'm busy right now!"

"You really didn't know?" Mary Margaret asked skeptically.

"Hasn't TV taught you anything?" David wailed miserably, tossing his phone aside. "The father is
always the last to know!"

"Coo!" Mary Margaret's bird suddenly screeched, meaning, "Hey, remember me?"

Mary Margaret facepalmed. "Oops, sorry Pidge!" She scooped up the cage and ran outside. "Let's get you back to your airborne Adonis before it's too late!"

David was left standing alone in the cabin. "My life is still crumbling to pieces all around me if anyone cares."

His girl ignored him, cradling the dove tenderly in her hands. "There, now, I know this will be a difficult parting for you, but in the end, it will be for the best. No matter how much you may love and worship me, you must—hey!" Fed up, the bird bit her finger and zoomed into the dying storm, flying lazy circles around a second dove. Mary Margaret beamed. "Aw, just look at them. Like two sparrows in a hurricane, trying to find their way. Hm, that's catchy. I should write that down."

David smiled adoringly. "My girl's such a romantic."

"You mean Kathryn?" said Mary Margaret pointedly.

David groaned. "Damn it, why do we keep coming back to her? Just because I'm married to her, it doesn't mean I have to love, honor, and cherish her, or forsake all others to keep myself only for her, or anything drastic like that."

Mary Margaret stared at him in disbelief. "Do you even remember your wedding day?"

"Yes, as I recall, it was a magical day full of romance and gloating mayors. But that doesn't change the fact that you're incredibly hot."

"David, this isn't Big Love and I'm not Margie Heffman. You can't have two and still be true, so go dump your wife or I'm leaving on the midnight train."

"Storybrooke doesn't have a train," David reminded her mildly.

She sniffled sadly. "Then I guess I'll just slink off into the woods crying."

King George bravely interrogated Snow White alone and unarmed, without bothering to restrain her in any way. "So, you're the little skank who stole my alleged son's heart. How'd you do it?"

"Head trauma and oxygen deprivation," Snow explained. "Oh, and a healthy dose of insults."

"Playing hard-to-get, huh? Well, I guess I can't argue with results." He snapped his fingers sarcastically. "Oh, wait, actually I can. Violently."

"Cut me a break, Your Majesty!" Snow pleaded. "I can't help my feelings for your son! I mean, it's not as if I have some sort of magic potion lying around that would banish them forever." She felt around in her pocket surreptitiously.

"Then I guess it's time to break out the guillotine!"

"Ah!" She took out the potion, which was suddenly looking like her best option.

"Oh, no, the guillotine's not for you," said the king. "It'd never be able to hack through that clunky fur collar you're wearing. No, I'll kill your dude instead."
"You'd kill James? Shame on you! I'm the only one who's allowed to try that!"

"His name's Honeymuffin." King George corrected. "And really, I think I'd be doing him a favor. Living with a name like that is no life at all. Now get in there and break his heart or I'll have to stab him in it."


Snow cleared her throat. "Yo, honeymuffin?"

"Snow!" he cried happily, sweeping her into a hug so tight it almost qualified as abuse. "You're here!"

"Yeah, I've been looking over your shoulder for like, ten minutes now. You've got the reflexes of a slug. How the hell did you ever kill that dragon?"

He caressed her cheek lovingly. "Oh, I've missed your verbal abuse so much! Are you ready to go? I've booked us a ride with Disney Cruise Lines."

Snow sighed. "Charming, I can't..." She bit her tongue. "Before I finish that sentence, could I see you in this solid gold Speedo just once?"

"Baby, please don't objectify me like that. What's wrong?"

"What's wrong is...I'm thirsty after my journey here." Snow pulled out the vial she'd swiped from Rumplestiltskin. "Would you join me in a drink?"

Charming shoved the bottle aside. "No need. Our room comes with a complimentary champagne basket."

"You're not going to make this easy for me are you? Fine, here it goes." She took a deep breath, as if bracing for a blow. "I hate your royal guts and we can't verbetogether."

Charming frowned. "Come again?"

"I, er, don't love you." Snow choked out. "My heart doesn't skip a beat every time I see your beautiful face. I don't dream of you every time I close my eyes. Oh, and I totally don't spend my days doodling 'Mr. and Mrs. Charming Forever' in my diary."

Wounded, Charming held up a well-worn journal. "I do."

"Sucks to be you." Snow ducked her head to hide her tears.

Prince Charming regarded her doubtfully. "I'm sorry, but I don't buy this. If you really feel nothing for me, why did you come all this way and risk your life to see me? And why are you crying like someone just made squab out of your favorite bluebird? And why can't you seem to keep your eyes off my leather-clad backside?"

Seeing that she was fighting a losing battle, Snow broke out the big guns. "Hey, Charming? Remember that time I tried to bash your head in? I was picturing Prince Naveen's face under my rock the whole time!"

"How can you say that?" Charming burst into tears. "You're lying! You're lying!"
"I mean every word."

"NOOOOOOO!"

Over at the Nolan home, David and Kathryn were sitting in uncomfortable silence. Again. "Baby, say something—anything!" David begged. "I'm freezing to death over here."

"What do you suggest?" Kathryn snapped. "We have no common interests, no chemistry, and no emotional attachment to one another. Why did we even get married in the first place?"

David shrugged. "Beats the hell out of me. Maybe we were drunk for the duration of our courtship and wedding?"

Kathryn shuddered. "Then it's a good thing I'm not pregnant. The kid would have been genetically doomed to a lifetime of alcoholism."

Her husband froze. "Say what?"

"I'm not pregnant."

Tears of joy streamed down David's face. "Oh, Kathryn. Do you have any idea how long I've waited to hear you say those words?" He flung his arms around her. "You've made me the happiest man alive!"

Kathryn patted his back awkwardly. "Um, you're welcome. Now, about our crumbling marriage. I really think we should go see the only shrink in town and get some counseling. While Dr. Hopper's never been married or even touched a female as far as I know, it's him or nothing."

David smiled through his tears. "Baby, if you'll say those three magical words for me again, I'll do whatever you want."

"Uh…I'm not pregnant?" said Kathryn hesitantly.

"Oh, thank you!" He pulled out his phone and pushed a couple of buttons. "Would you mind saying it one last time so I can record it? I think I've found a new custom ringtone."

"Fine, whatever. I'm not pregnant," Kathryn repeated tiredly.

"Hee hee!" David played it back with undisguised glee. "Thanks baby. I know you don't love me and I don't love you, but since we're stuck with each other, I guess I might as well try to make the best of it."

"That's the most romantic thing you've said to me in years, David. How depressing is that?"

Snow White staggered through the dark woods, crying. Grumpy and his comrades approached her tentatively. "You all right, sister?"

"Oh, sure. I always stagger through darkened forests and sob when I'm happy," Snow bawled angrily. "You newfangled dwarves may not be undersized, but your brains sure as hell must be!"

"There, now, it's not all bad. I've been looking to start a new chapter of the Lonely Hearts Club for years now." Grumpy swung an arm around her shoulders. "Looks like I've finally found myself a vice-president."
Snow's eyes lit up. "You know, that's actually not a bad idea." She took the vial of magical elixir from her pocket. "Our first group activity should be to storm Rumplestiltskin's castle and score a lifetime supply of Anti-Love Potion Number Nine for every member!"

"Snow, what are you thinking?" Grumpy admonished. "Magic isn't the answer. You need to resolve your emotional issues in a healthy way, like heavy drinking or constant surliness."

"But I…"

Grumpy took her gently by the shoulders. "Come on, Snow, be strong. Just say no to draughts!"

"Okay," Snow relented. "But for the record, this feels like peer pressure to me."

"Atta girl," chirped Doc. "Now why don't you come crash at our place for a while? You look like you could use a buddy or seven."

"Snow White and the seven dwarves?" Snow said aloud. "I like the sound of that."

Over at the Princess Pad, Mary Margaret was sobbing bitterly into David's old hospital gown. Emma squeezed her hand sympathetically. "Don't worry, Eminem, you'll kick this thing yet. Here, have a stick of Doublemint. Sometimes it helps."

"Hi ho, Silver!" cried Prince Charming, spurring his tacky white horse on. "You know, I ride pretty well for a guy who was a peasant until a couple of weeks ago. I guess I'm just a natural prince at heart." He pulled up in front of a little cottage. "Hey, Snow? I know you're in there! I stuck a tracking chip on you when I had you trapped in that net!"

Red wandered outside. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Ja—uh, Char—uh, Honey—oh, I don't even remember anymore! I'm Snow White's man and that's good enough for me!"

"Really? Good luck with that. According to her latest postcard, she just shacked up with seven men."

He quirked an eyebrow. "Wow. I guess it's always the innocent-looking ones. Well, no matter. I will always find her. It's my catchphrase and everything, so I don't really have a choice."

Grumpy came running into the dwarves' house toting a portable TV. "Snow, guess what?" he yelled eagerly. "According to TMZ, the royal wedding has been called off due to mutual incompatibility and insufficient metallicity." He hugged his friend excitedly. "I'm so happy for you! Looks like I'll need to find myself a new VP, but that's okay. Your true love is more important."

"True love?" said Snow White drunkenly, taking another swig from her little potion bottle. "What's that? A new fragrance by Calvin Klein?"

Grumpy's face fell. "Aw, damn it."

Mary Margaret stood in line getting coffee at the only diner in town. "Thanks, Ruby. Can you add a couple of shots of McCutcheon's to this? I'm having a rough morning."

"I think it just got rougher." Ruby pointed to the doorway, where David was standing, garbed in a T-Shirt reading, "Baby Not on Board!"
David turned tail and ran like a fire-breathing dragon was chasing. Mary Margaret dashed after him. "David! Get back here and talk to me so I can tell you to stop talking to me!"

He stopped in his tracks, sighing defeatedly. "Mary Margaret, I know we agreed not to see each other anymore, but unless one of us moves, I don't think that goal is realistic. In case you haven't noticed, this town is smaller than a freaking sound stage."

Mary Margaret groaned. "Going cold turkey is a lot easier said than done. Do you happen to have any Doublemint on you, David?"

"No, but I do have some news. My wife's not pregnant!"

Mary Margaret brightened. "Really? That's wonderful! I can handle dating a man with a wife, but a man with a child? That would have been a deal-breaker." She flung her arms around his neck. "I think I feel a relapse coming on."

Across the street, Regina was testing the range of her mighty Glare of Evil. "That little tramp! How dare she have someone to make out with while I'm all alone? This means war!"
Fruit of the Poisonous Tree

At Henry's bedraggled Pretty-Pretty Princess castle, Emma emerged from her squad car to greet her son. "Hey, Henry! I'm all primed for the next meeting of our secret mother-son book club. I brought Mommie Dearest this week. I think it'll really speak to you."

But Henry would not be distracted. "No!" he wailed, running to the tattered remains of his castle. "My swinging pad! Now where am I supposed to bring chicks?" He blushed. "Er, I mean, bond with my mommy."

She squeezed his shoulders sympathetically. "There, there, son. Maybe it's for the best. After all, it was only a matter of time before the other children in Storybrooke realized there was a playground here and horned in on your claim."

"That reminds me..." Henry dropped to his knees and began burrowing into the sand. "What's this? A juicy meat bone? Bah." He tossed it over his shoulder. "A time capsule? Blech, these things are so corny." He shoved it aside. "A pot of gold? Huh. The Big Book of Deja-Vu never mentioned there were leprechauns in Storybrooke."

Emma sighed. "I suppose you've got some magic beans buried here or something?"

"Trust me, if I did, you'd have noticed. No, this is where I stashed the Big Book of Deja-Vu. I'm worried that if Mom catches me with it again, she'll freak out and swear revenge on me just like she did to her last non-biological child."

Emma looked sad. "Oh, Henry, this is all my fault. I should never have entered that boxing tournament while I was pregnant with you."

"I'm not crazy!"

Regina barged in, as usual. "Henry, it's time for you to go see your shrink. Because you're crazy."

"Jeez, Mom, your timing couldn't have been worse," the boy grumbled, climbing into the car.

Regina surveyed the tattered remains of Henry's swinging pad. "You let your child play at a place like this?" she said incredulously. "If that's your idea of good parenting, you should put the kid up for adoption."

"For the record, I've tried telling him no, but he seems to have selective hearing when it comes to that word."

"Oh, I've been there," sighed Regina.

To cheer Emma up after that little confrontation, Mary Margaret took her out on the town for some McCutcheon's and Zoloft cupcakes. "Regina's such a jerk," the savior grumbled around a mouthful of very happy frosting.

"You've been here for eleven weeks and you're just now figuring that out?" Mary Margaret snickered. "Hey, here's another piece of shocking news for you: I like bluebirds."

Emma scowled. "Hey, we're BFFs. When I complain about someone, you're supposed to nod mindlessly and offer to help me slit her tires."
Mary Margaret gasped, scandalized. "Shame on you, Emma! Petty acts of vandalism are beneath me. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm late for a very important and adulterous date."

Sidney Glass collapsed into Mary Margaret's vacant seat. "Hey, Emma," he slurred drunkenly. "I know we're not friends, but I'm having a lot of trouble standing up right now. If I promise to tell you how to take down Regina, can I sit here until I sober up?"

Emma was unmoved. "Why don't you go sleep it off at Regina's? With Graham dead, she's got plenty of room in her bed for another binge-drinking toady."

Sidney tried to take another sip of whiskey, but just wound up pouring it on his head. "Screw Regina! That witch cost me my job and the best years of my life!" He burst into tears. "Now I want to get revenge, but thinking about revenge just reminds me of her!" he bawled. "If you wanted to give me a hand, I wouldn't complain."

"Go to hell."

"So you'll get back to me?" He stood up and promptly collapsed on the floor. "Aw, nuts. Emma, can you turn me on my side so I don't choke to death on my own vomit?"

"Wow, Sidney. Seeing you like this, I can't imagine why Regina didn't fall for you."

---

The Genie of Agrabah moped around his lamp, flipping through the latest issue of *Rajah's Digest*. "This lamp is so boring," he whined, "and it doesn't even have a bathroom. I knew I should have gone with the bottle."

Suddenly a giant eye appeared at the window. The genie huffed outside in a puff of smoke. "Hey, didn't your mother ever teach you it's rude to stare?"

"Sorry." The intruder, a kindly old monarch wearing more gold than Midas and Rumplestiltskin put together, apologized.

"Eh, nobody's perfect. Now then, I suppose I should grant you your three wishes and get your grisly death over with."

"Huh?"

"Oh, forget it. I don't know why I even try." The genie yawned. "Come on now, first wish and make it snappy. *Days of Our Lives* is on in five minutes."

"Okay. I wish my first wife was alive again."

The genie shook his head. "Sorry, but you can't wish for life."

"All right, then. I wish my second wife was dead."

"No, you can't wish for death either."

The king thought long and hard. "Then I wish for a new wife who will love me like I deserve?"

"No can do. You can't wish for love."

The king was getting miffed. "Then what the hell can I wish for?"

"You could wish me free," the genie suggested pointedly.
The king blinked. "Is that what you've been getting at? Why didn't you just say so?"

The genie shrugged sheepishly. "Well, that approach didn't work out too well with Aladdin. Damn kid. He said he'd free me with his last wish, but he kept putting it off. Finally I had to trick him into wishing for the Nile just to get rid of him."

The king was appalled. "I would never do anything that selfish. I seek only the happiness of every living soul in my kingdom. That's why I've lowered taxes, instituted Free Puppy Day at the palace, and spiked every well in the country with anti-depressants." He forked over the lamp and his wallet. "Here, take your freedom, my last wish, and all my money. You want my clothes, too? You look kind of chilly in those skimpy parachute pants."

The genie shuddered. "You're so sweet I think you just gave me a cavity."

"If you think I'm sweet, just wait till you meet my daughter."

The genie brightened. "Ooh, is she hot?"

"Yeah, but she may or may not be of age right now, so hands off." The king nodded at the lamp. "But if you're lonely, you could always just wish for a hot chick, couldn't you?"

"Don't you know anything about this verse?" the genie scolded. "All magic comes with a price, and I'll be damned if I'm going to pay it. What do I look like, Cinderella?"

"Then why did you put the lamp in your man-purse for safekeeping instead of just tossing it into the depths of the sea? Which are conveniently located two feet away from us, in case you haven't noticed."

The genie shrugged. "All my stuff is in there."

"Well, by all means, let's get back to my palace, and I'll send for some tiny little movers to give you a hand with it."

King Leopold escorted his brand new homeboy through the palace gardens. "There are plenty of hot chicks in my palace. I'm sure you'll find one you like. And if not, there's always Ye Olde Dating Agency."

"Well, I have been admiring that fox with the bluebirds…"

"That's my daughter. Try again."

The genie looked around and gave a low whistle. "Woah, who's the hottie by the apple tree?"

"Forbidden fruit, I'm afraid. Meet my wife, Regina. Honey, this is…er, what's your name again?"

The genie shrugged helplessly. "Damned if I know. Just call me Genie. I know it's a girl's name, but it's all I've got."

Regina looked him over appraisingly. "No, you don't really look like a 'Genie'. You look more like a 'Wild Thing' to me."

At Henry's swinging woodpile, formerly Henry's swinging pad, Emma found her son crying like a little girl lost in Wonderland. "What's wrong, kiddo? Did they cancel Fairy Tale Theater again?"
"Even worse!" Henry bawled. "Mom tore down my playhouse, swiped my favorite book, and flushed my beloved goldfish down the toilet."

"Not Flounder!" Emma gasped. She stormed over to the mayor, who was gleefully pouring gasoline all over the broken rubble of her child's dreams. "Regina, you just destroyed the thing your son loves most. What do you have to say for yourself?"

The mayor shrugged. "Eh, I did him a favor. I spared him the trauma of doing it himself when he grows up and casts his first curse. But that's really none of your beeswax. While I know you have a genetic predisposition to stalking and I'm not unsympathetic, that excuse can only go so far. So keep your loving parental guidance away from my son, or I'll kick you out of town."

"Oh please. If you had the power to run me out of town, you'd have done it weeks ago."

But Regina was too busy kindling a blaze and throwing in her son's cherished stuffed animal collection to notice Emma had spoken. The savior reluctantly pulled out her cellphone. "Ugh, I know I'm gonna regret this," she grumbled, dialing up the local lamp store. "Hey, Sidney? I had a feeling I'd find you there. Good news. I'm finally desperate enough to ask you for help. Welcome to Operation Cobra." There was a pause. "What's that? You have a deeply-rooted aversion to snakes? No, we are not changing the name to 'Operation Femme Fatale'!"

Mary Margaret met David at the Troll Bridge, as usual. "Hey, baby, what gives? Did you fall in the water and injure yourself again? Because if you need more mouth-to-mouth, I'm more than happy to oblige." She sprayed her mouth hopefully.

"No, this is just a booty call."

She frowned. "David, I don't like this. If adultery is what you're into, you really should have had the foresight to fall in love with someone sluttier."

"Did I mention this booty call comes with a side of champagne and candlelight?"

The reluctant homewrecker giggled mindlessly. "Okay, baby, you win this round."

Emma pulled the only squad car in town into the creepy tunnel where Sidney was waiting for her. "Homie, why do we have to come out here in the middle of nowhere just to badmouth Regina? There's nothing suspicious about that. Everyone does it."

Sidney stared her down angrily. "Emma, since the day I became a reporter, I've had one dream. To sneak out in a long trenchcoat and meet an informant under cover of night. Don't you dare ruin this for me!"

"Fine, whatever. Now spill it already. I'm aging, here."

"Aging in Storybrooke? Huh, I thought Regina outlawed that. Well, no matter. I just wanted to let you know that the mayor embezzled fifty grand."

"So? Since when is embezzlement a crime?"

"Uh, Emma? When you were elected sheriff, did you bother to read the handbook?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll flip through it later. In the meantime, do you have any other dirt on Regina?"
Sidney thought a moment. "Well, her favorite TV show is *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo*. Is that shameful enough for you?"

Emma clapped her hands. "Now we're talking. If word of that ever got out, she'd never be able to show her face in town again!"

"Just watch your back," Sidney cautioned. "In case you haven't noticed, she's kinda evil."

"Then why did you waste all those years as her second-string boy-toy?"

"Because evil is sexy, of course."

Emma's eye twitched violently. "I'm getting really sick of hearing those words."

---

At Leopold's palace, the king was standing in front of a massive birthday cake. "I wish for your eternal happiness," he told the crowd before blowing with all his might.

A collective groan echoed through the room. "Again, Your Majesty?"

"I'm going through a very painful divorce right now, and I just can't bring myself to drink anymore drug-laced well water. Can I have a pass for tonight?"

"Yeah, why can't you wish for something simple, like life, death, or love?"

"Because apparently there's no future in that," Leopold replied, looking squarely at the genie. "Besides, I don't need any of that. As long as I've got my incredibly hot daughter, I'll be a happy guy."

Snow White grimaced. "Daddy, I know you didn't mean it that way, but that statement sounded kind of creepy."

Regina suddenly popped out of the cake, dressed in a skimpy bikini. "Hey, there, remember me?"

"Hm?" The king spared her a brief glance. "Oh, sure. You're...Roberta, was it?" Anyway, Snow, as I was saying, if there was a Miss Enchanted Forest pageant, you'd win it hands-down."

Regina cleared her throat loudly. Leopold frowned. "Hey, honey, do you need a throat lozenge or something?"

"Ugh." The Queen crawled dejectedly out of the cake. "I've got to get out of here before I kill someone."

Because after the birthday bash, there was no ice cream left in the Royal Freezer, Regina was forced to go binge on apples instead.

The genie was hot on her heels. "Hey, baby, why the long face?"

"My husband is neither hot, nor a stable boy," the queen sulked. "Thanks a lot, Mom. Now I'm trapped in a loveless marriage, cut off from my few surviving loved ones, and not even the drugs in our water supply can soothe my pain."

"There, now, look on the bright side. Uh..." It took him quite some time to think up a happy ending for that thought, but being a Disney creation, he came through in the end. "On the bright side, you look crazy hot in that bikini," he said, handing her a mirror so she could see for herself.

---
Sidney's lifelong wish having been fulfilled, he and Emma were finally able to leave the creepy tunnel and continue their scheming back at the Princess Pad. Emma flipped idly through *The Small-Town Sheriff's Handbook*, by Andy Taylor. "Hey, it looks like you were right. Embezzling is illegal. Go figure. And so is grand theft auto." She looked guiltily down at her car keys.

Mary Margaret slunk into her crib equally guiltily, her clothes bearing a number of suspicious wrinkles and teeth marks. "Speaking of the Love Bug, Emma, you know a thing or two about being stuck in love with a dirty liar. How about some advice?"

"Not now, Eminem. I'm busy plotting against Regina with Sidney. Please don't tell Henry I'm cheating on him."

"Plotting against Regina, huh? Well, I'm way too nice to join in, but I wish you well," she said, leaving them to it.

"Now, then," said Sidney, "if we're going to take down Regina, we've got to fight dirty."

Emma's head jerked up. "What did you say?" she asked, alarmed.

"I said we're going to have to fight fire with fire."

She eyed her partner in crime suspiciously. "Fire? Fighting dirty? Have you been talking to Gold? Because I'll tell you the same thing I told him: I will not violate the law for personal gain…anymore."

Sidney groaned. "Jeez, Emma, if I'd known you would want to go by the book, I would never have made you read it in the first place."

"Listen to Sidney," Mary Margaret urged. "Breaking an occasional marriage—er, law—doesn't make you any less awesome."

"Emma," said Sidney seriously, "the bottom line is, that woman broke your kid's favorite toy. For a crime like that, can any punishment be too harsh?"

The savior's eyes hardened. "You're right." She whipped out her chainsaw. "Let's do this thing."

As always, Emma started out by confronting Regina in her office. The mayor glanced bemusedly from Emma to Sidney. "First a ten-year-old mental patient, then the most hated man in town, and now a washed-up second-string boy-toy? Swan, you've got abysmally bad taste in allies."

The sheriff's chin rose. "I'll have you know that ragtag bands of misfits always triumph in the end. On that note, a little bird told me you've been embezzling."

"Consider the source, Swan. All the birds in town have been out to get me ever since I got on Mary Margaret's bad side."

The two women got up in each other's faces, wearing dangerous glares. Sidney shivered excitedly. "Ooh, are you two going to have a catfight over me like you did with Graham?"

"Hell no!" they balked in unison. Regina blanched. "Swan, please get him away from me before the shippers start getting ideas!"

The savior obediently clapped him in handcuffs. "Sure thing, pal," she said cheerfully, clapping her archenemy on the back.

Regina recoiled. "For the record, I can tell you're up to something, but I'm so grateful to you for
"You're the crappiest heroine ever!" Sidney complained as Emma dragged him out of Town Hall. "Even more useless than that Cinderella bimbo!"

"Hey, man, that was a low blow. And actually, I just planted a bug in Regina's office and stuck a 'Kick Me' sign to her back."

"Really? But what about your newfound integrity?"

"Meh, I don't think anyone was seriously expecting that to last."

The genie walked into King Leopold's man-cave. "Hey, Leo. You rubbed—I mean, rang?"

"Yeah. I just found out Roberta's cheating on me."

"Er, isn't her name Regina?"

"Whatever. The point is, she's cheating on me. It says so right here in her diary."

"You, uh, make a habit of reading your wife's diary?"

"Not normally, but this morning, she carelessly left it sitting open on my throne under a spotlight." Leopold handed the book to his BFF. "See for yourself."

"Look at that. She's conveniently highlighted and underlined the part about the adultery. How thoughtful." The genie put on his reading glasses. "Dear Diary", he read, "last night, a man gave me a cheap, secondhand mirror. What a gyp, right? Would it have killed him to pop for some flowers? Still, he actually remembered my name, which puts him head and shoulders above that jerk Leo. I think I'm in love!" The genie squealed like a schoolgirl at a Jonas Brothers concert. "Score! Uh, that is, scorn and revilement upon the homewrecker who stole your woman, bro."

"Damn right!" the king sulked. "How dare that cheating skank betray my love."

The genie stared quizzically.

"Okay, fine, how dare she betray my cold indifference?" Leopold amended.

"It's shameful," the genie agreed. "You should divorce the little tramp. That'd teach her."

"Can't. Her mom made me sign a pre-nup."

"Damn! Well, no matter. I'm sure that however studly and irresistible this mystery man may be, the Queen would never put on a skimpy negligee, steal into his bedroom, and do the dance of the seven veils." The genie fanned himself weakly.

The king eyed him pensively. "You've obviously got a good understanding of a cheater's mind, and I know you're not a suspect. I mean, a guy's best friend stealing his woman? That'll be the day!" He laughed hysterically. "You've gotta track this guy down for me. Here's your first clue. A mirror labeled 'Property of Wild Thing'."

At Mayberry Jail, Sidney was listening in on one of Regina's phone calls. "I ordered pepperoni and sausage, not anchovies, dammit! This means war, Bella Notte Pizzaria!" the mayor's voice shrieked
over a barrage of static.

Emma yawned. "Fighting dirty isn't nearly as cool as you made it sound."

"Don't worry, there's some dynamite stuff coming up," said Sidney.

"Like what?"

"A call to Lucky Lumiere's Dating Service, in which she discusses all her turn-ons at length." Sidney grinned, pulling out a notebook and pencil. "Heh heh, she's mine!"

Emma snatched the notebook and swatted him over the head with it. "You're the worst sidekick I've ever had! I want Henry back!"

"Wait, wait!" he cried. "I also found out that she's meeting some guy in the middle of nowhere under cover of darkness, with a suitcase full of money."

"Middle of nowhere? Cover of darkness? Wow, you two really are made for each other."

In order to avoid tipping Regina off about their stakeout, they decided to take the clearly-labeled, completely unique squad car widely known to be Emma's. Fortunately, before this asinine plan could come to fruition, the brakes failed.

The dynamic duo stumbled out of the wreckage. "Whew," breathed Emma, "I just thank my lucky stars that we didn't run across a single red light or stop sign on our way here, or I'd have had to give myself a ticket. How embarrassing."

Sidney took a peek under the hood. "Hey, Emma? I'm no expert, but according to my Manic Mechanic app, someone's cut your brakes."

"Attempted murder? That does it!" Emma snatched her chainsaw and hockey mask out of the trunk. "This femme fatale's about to get a fatal flogging!"

"Does this mean you're finally going to have that catfight?" Sidney readied his camera eagerly. "I'm with you. Just, uh, try not to damage her vocal chords until she spills the beans about the secret meeting."

"That won't be necessary," said Mr. Gold, popping out of nowhere, as usual. "The secret meeting was with me. She's looking to start a new chapter of her Bad Guy Club For Villains, and she knows it will never succeed without my help. Just like every other endeavor in this town." He flashed a briefcase full of green. "She even tried to bribe me with this."

"I hope you shot her down," said Sidney. "That witch broke Henry's favorite toy. You'd have to be crazy to team up with someone willing to commit such an act of unmitigated evil."

"You're one to talk, second-string boy-toy," Gold snorted. "Idiot. If you had any common sense, you'd drive away all your loved ones, like I did."

The genie idly plucked an apple from his honey's Honeycrisp tree. "While I'm waiting for my girl, maybe I'll whip us up a couple of appletinis. That ought to calm the first date jitters."

Some Old Man clucked his tongue disapprovingly. "Getting my little girl drunk? I'd be furious, but frankly, she could probably use a few shots right now."
"Who the hell are you?"

"Henry. The first."

"You mean the fourth son of William the Conqueror?"

"No, Regina's dad."

"She wants me to meet the parents already?" The genie preened. "I knew she cared!"

"Actually, she sent me to cancel your date for tonight, because she's grounded."

"Aw, come on!" the genie wheedled. "I promise I'll have her back by curfew, and we'll avoid Makeout Point at all costs."

"Not me. Her husband is the one who grounded her."

"Oh. That guy." The genie pouted.

"Yeah, he's a real jerk. Wouldn't let me in to see her either. All because I'm carrying this ominously hissing box." He shoved said box into the genie's arms. "Hey, do you think you could use your VIP badge to smuggle it in to her? I have to be getting home before my wife sends her army of anthropomorphic playing cards after me. Or worse, runs off with that Rumplestiltskin guy again." Big Henry shuddered.

"I'm on it, Pops."

Emma and her latest sidekick drove up to Regina's office in the Love Bug. "Ooh, are we here for a panty raid?" Sidney asked hopefully.

"No, we're going to find out more about this Bad Guy Club for Villains she's starting. And maybe check up on the embezzlement thing, if we have time."

"A worthy goal, but how are we supposed to get in there without VIP badges?"

Emma revved up her chainsaw. "I've got my VIP badge right here!" She hacked the door to ribbons. "Heh heh heh, it's good to be morally grey!"

"Emma! You suck at subtlety!"

"I don't need subtlety. I've got a badge."

"Illegally using your political power to act on a personal grudge?" Sidney fanned himself weakly. "Why do I find that so incredibly hot?"

The sheriff whacked him in the back of the head. "Geek out on your own time, Sid! We've got a lot of ground to cover and only six minutes to do it in."

"Okay. Then I guess I'll just make myself useful by looking over your shoulder while you hack Regina's computer."

Emma sighed. "I've said it before and I'll say it again: I really, really want Henry back. Speaking of which, as long as we're here, maybe I'll check around for his Big Book of Deja-Vu. I know it's made the little guy crazy, but I prefer a schizophrenic Henry to a suicidally-depressed Henry."
Regina barged in, as usual. "My mother always said suicidal depression builds character. But that's neither here nor there. What are you doing in my office? If you're planning on torching the place again, good luck. I've installed a sprinkler and a fire escape in every room to ensure we never give the Swan Queen shippers another photo op again."

Emma shuddered. "Glad to hear it. But actually, I was just responding to a 911 call. Apparently your office was ransacked by a fifty-foot purple and orange lizard."

"A fifty foot purple and orange lizard," Regina repeated flatly.

"Yeah. With laser death rays shooting out of its eyes," Emma added, edging subtly toward the exit.

"And what's your role in all of this, Sidney?"

"I, uh, tried to call animal control on it, but it breathed fire on me and melted my cellphone?"

"Fire?" Regina began to look a little nervous. "Did this dragon leave a name? Did it start with Mal and end with leficent?"

"No."

"Then I don't buy it." Regina turned her mighty Glare of Evil on Emma. "You couldn't come up with a better lie than that? You disrespect us both! Why, you're not half the archenemy your mother was! Get out of my sight, and take the pining paparazzo with you!"

Head hung in shame, Emma slunk out the door.

The genie knocked on Regina's door. "Hey, Regina? I know this is a cliché, but there's a hot, lonely delivery boy out here with a package for you."

Regina flung open the door and launched herself at him. "Oh, Wild Thing! You make my heart sing," she whispered tenderly. "Alas, if only my stupid husband would just hurry up and die, I'd be all over you."

"There, there," the genie soothed. "Maybe this present from your daddy will cheer you up." He opened up the box, revealing a hissing, two-headed snake. "Aw, isn't that nice? He sent a new pet to keep you company." He scratched the little creature on both of its heads. "He's so cute! You should name him Sir Hiss."

"He's not a pet, I'm going to use him to pull a Cleopatra," Regina clarified.

"How horrible, yet appropriate. But why?"

Regina clutched dramatically at her chest. "Because the pain of living without you is simply too much for my broken Princess of Hearts to bear. Ah, if only my husband were dead, we'd be free to get it on like a couple of tardy white rabbits. Oh well. If there's a hell in our cosmology, maybe I'll see you there?" She fluttered her eyelashes demurely.

"No!" the genie cried, pulling her into his arms. "I won't let you commit suicide! What kind of message would you be sending to all the teens in the kingdom?"

"Eh, you don't need to worry about them. The anti-depressants in the well water will quell any suicidal tendencies they might be nursing," the Queen said dismissively. "Now, before I go, let's discuss my epitaph. I want it to read, 'Here lies Queen Regina, because big strong men were in short
"Wait a minute!" the genie whispered excitedly. "I just had the craziest idea. What if…and I'll understand if you're shocked by this…what if I wish for your freedom using this magical lamp I have in my man-purse?"

"Next," said Regina flatly.

"Um, maybe you could abdicate the throne and we could run away together?"

"Ugh, pass."

"Aw, come on!" he coaxed. "It'll be fun. I can show you the world! Shining, shimmering, splendid —"

"I said no!"

"Well, if you're going to be stubborn about this, I guess I could always just kill the king for you."

"Oh my gosh, that's brilliant! One day you really must tell me where you get your ideas." Regina smiled, snuggling into her dude's arms. "Ah, brainy and bloodthirsty. What a package."

Henry sat at the only diner in town, drawing chin scars on stick figures. The only stranger in town peered over his shoulder, grinning. "I love the smell of plagiarism in the morning."

"You're one to talk," Henry snorted. "I hear you're writing a book about Storybrooke. Sounds like a cheap knock-off of Fables to me."

The stranger laughed. "You've got spunk, kid. Tell you what, you keep your precocious nose out of my business, and I'll try not to ruin your life again for a while."

Henry eyed his retreating back suspiciously. "I've really got to find out that guy's name so that I can curse it."

Emma and Sidney sat rifling through their hard-earned libel. "What the hell are these blueprints? Is Regina building some sort of idol to her god?"

"Probably a club house for her aspiring Bad Guy Club for Villains," Sidney predicted. "Come on, let's go tell everyone the good—uh, I mean, horrifying and scandalous news."

The sheriff winced. "Sidney, I know that in your line of work, using illegal surveillance methods to callously destroy lives is fairly routine, but I'm kind of new at it. This is way outside my comfort zone. Can't we just put a boot on Regina's car and bash her head in?"

"Still hanging onto that last shred of decency, huh?" Sidney shook his head ruefully. "Well, maybe this will change your mind." He handed her a box full of photographs.

Emma leafed through them. "Regina in bed, Regina in the shower, Regina dusting her favorite lamp...Sid, what does this have to do with anything?"

Sidney's cheeks colored. "Oops, wrong box." He snatched it away and handed her a second box.

Emma thumbed through the photos curiously. "Hey, these are all pictures of Henry's swinging pad. Me and Henry plotting Regina's downfall, me and Henry comparing toothpick collections…Henry
smooching Ava Zimmer?! That little rat!"

The paparazzo snatched them away. "Yeah, yeah, you can talk that over with his therapist later. The point is, Regina made me stalk you."

"How dare she?" Emma shrieked. "Stalking is my domain and she knows it! That dirtbag's going down!"

At Town Hall, Regina unenthusiastically called the town council to order. "Man, council meetings were way more fun when Graham was around," she muttered under her breath.

Sidney overheard that statement and started seething like a witch's cauldron. "Madam Mayor, can I please say something shocking and public? Since I lost my access to gossip rags, I'm in desperate need of a new outlet."

"Someone else wants to speak? In my meeting?" Regina burst out laughing. "What do you think this is, some kind of democracy?" The mayor whistled sharply. "Guards, take him to the dungeon!"

Nothing happened. Regina frowned. "Oh, right. I'm not the queen anymore. Well, as our first order of business, I would like to propose that we make room in the budget for a couple of mayoral bodyguards, preferably of the hot and broad-shouldered variety."

"Screw that, you dirty stalker-by-proxy!" Emma barked, coming to her sucky sidekick's defense. "I know what you're really up to, and now, so will everyone else!" She held up a t-shirt labeled, "Property of the Bad Guy Club for Villains." "I have here in my hands proof that the mayor is starting a Storybrooke branch of the Bad Guy Club for Villains and embezzling city funds to build herself an awesome clubhouse in the woods."

"Uh, Emma?" Regina ventured. "That shirt is actually a Christmas present for Henry. He's a Spongebob-Squarepants fan, you see." The mayor rolled her eyes. "Way to ruin the surprise, Sherlock."

"Oh." Emma faltered. "Well, what about these crudely-drawn blueprints?"

"Those are for the new playground I'm building in the woods," Regina explained. "Marco drew them up for me. I'm not sure exactly what they're supposed to be. I think he may be going senile, but since he's the only carpenter in town, I'm sort of stuck."

"You were embezzling money to build a new playground for the children?"

"That's right." The mayor smirked. "Because I'm so full of...what's the word? Maternal glove?"

"The word is 'love', and who cares?" Emma snapped. "No matter what your motives were, you were still embezzling and that's still illegal!" The sheriff whipped out her handcuffs and grabbed Regina by the wrists. "You're under arrest!"

A couple of Swan Queen shippers appeared in a nearby window, holding laptops and watching their favorite couple intently. "Ooh, this is giving the greatest idea for a smut fic!" one whispered, typing rapidly.

"Emma, can I get a screen cap of you wrestling Regina into those handcuffs?" the other requested politely. "I want to use it as my cover page."

Emma promptly released her foe. "Er, on second thought, I'll let you off with a warning this time."
The genie stole into King Leopold's bedchamber. Luckily, the king's guards had just taken a water break, and were too high to notice him. He sat the snakes'/snake's kennel on the bed, and began whispering commands in Parseltongue. "All right, Sir Hiss, I need you to take a bite out of my bestie. What do you mean, you're full? I told you to save room for the king, damn it! Huh? Watching your weight? That's ridiculous, you look great. Aw, you're welcome. Now chow down, homie…er, homies."

At the touch of the viper's/vipers' fangs, the king started awake. "…" he wheezed.

"Um, hi." The genie waved awkwardly. "Listen, remember what you said about how a guy's best friend would never steal his woman? You're an idiot."

"…?" Leopold wheezed.

"Sorry about this, bro. I know you gave me the gifts of freedom, friendship, and this awesome Rolex, but all of that seems insignificant in comparison to the two short conversations I've had with your Queen."

"…!" Leopold gasped, paralysis setting in.

The genie shuffled awkwardly. "Yeah, I would have used a less horrific means of killing you, but I couldn't think of anything on such short notice. And it's not like I have access to any kind of magic that could ease your pain."

"…?"

"Oh, right, I do. My bad. Hey, how about if, to make this up to you, Regina and I name our first son in your honor?"

"…!"

"Eh, on second thought, Leopold is kind of a wimpy name. We'll call him after Aladdin instead."

"…"

"Right, so, um, happy trails and everything. If there's a hell in our cosmology, I guess I'll see you in it."

The king groaned. "With my last breath…I curse…Scheherazade…"

Emma and her latest sidekick skulked out of Town Hall with their tails tucked between their legs. "I hate to sound like a broken record, but this whole 'scheming against the establishment' thing just isn't the same without Henry. Too bad he's still busy having a nervous breakdown over that stupid book."

She sighed wistfully. "Oh, if only I knew of some other crafty genius with a grudge against the mayor."

Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "You rang, dearie?"

"A crafty genius with a grudge against the mayor and no history of pyromania," the sheriff amended, grabbing Sidney and running for her life.

Gold just smirked. "Eh, you'll come crawling back. Everyone always does."

In her eagerness to get away from Gold, Emma smacked headfirst into the mayor. "Ow!" Regina whined, rubbing her head. "I call aggravated assault on that one!"
"Bite me. I know you tried to have me killed. I mean, I certainly don't have any other enemies who could be capable of such things." She pointedly ignored Gold as he walked by with a bucket of lanolin.

Regina looked tired. "Swan, I don't need to hear your paranoid delusions. I get enough of those from my son. Who, by the way, I want you to stop stalking for a while."

Emma snorted. "You're one to be talking about stalking, paparazzo puppeteer."

"Talk to the hand, Sheriff Swan, because the courts aren't listening."

Emma found Henry playing reluctantly on the twisted hunk of plastic Marco had thrown together. "Ugh, I feel like I'm living in a Picasso," he grumbled. "This place sucks. What kind of playground doesn't even have swings?"

"Hey Henry?" his birthmom's voice crackled in on his walkie-talkie.

"Hey Henry, what?"


"Your mom's a real jerk. Over."

"I could've told you that. Over."

"Listen, about that mother-son car chase we had planned this weekend? Over. I think I'm going to have to reschedule, because your mom just threatened me with a restraining order. Over."

"When the hell are you going to get around to suing her for custody? Over."

"For the last time, I don't want custody of you, you're creepy and delusional. And now, apparently, you're rubbing off on me." Emma groaned. "I've got to get out of here. I need booze."

Henry cleared his throat pointedly.

"I need booze. Over." Emma grated.

At the only hotel in town, a stranger determined to remain nameless was whitening out the byline on Henry's Big Book of Deja-Vu. "By August W. Booth," he filled in. "Heh heh! Pulitzer Prize, here I come!"

Emma and Sidney sat at the only diner in town, chugging McCutcheon's. "We really suck at subterfuge."

"Yeah, right." Sidney snickered under his breath. "'We' totally didn't see that coming."

"What did you just say?"

"Uh, I said, on the plus side, you've got yourself a fiendishly Machiavellian new ally."

"No, actually, I turned Gold down."
Sidney's face fell. "I meant me."

"You?" Emma bit back a chuckle. "I appreciate the sentiment, I guess."

The genie burst into the Queen's chamber, toting a rug. "Hey, baby! I killed the king, just like you wanted. Now how about that magic carpet ride?"

"No can do. I'm head of state now. I can't be seen with a wanted murderer—it's bad publicity."

"What are you talking about?"

"The king's assassination has been classified as an act of terrorism, and since you're the only Arab in the country, you're at the top of the suspects list."

The genie was outraged. "But that's racial profiling! It's unconstitutional."

"It was unconstitutional. I legalized it five minutes ago." Regina smirked. "Tough break, Wild Thing."

The genie's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Hey, were you just using me as a puppet all this time?"

"Yeah, but don't take it personally. I do it to everyone. Now shoo, before I call Homeland Security."

"You never loved me? All forty-five of those wonderful seconds we spent together were a lie?"

"Of course. How could I love you? You're not even a stable boy!" Regina scoffed.

"Does this mean you're not going to steal into my room and do the dance of seven veils?"

"Hell no!"

"Damn! Then I guess I'll have to finally break out Chekhov's Lamp." He pulled the lamp out of his man-purse. "No, wait, I can't wish for love. Man, Leo was right! This thing's useless!" He was about to kick it aside, when an idea occurred to him. "Well, if I can't wish for love, I could always wish for the next best thing. I want an eternity in bondage to this murdering liar who hates my guts."

Regina rolled her eyes. "Wild Thing, you've clearly got some serious psychological issues that you need to work on before you even think about entering into any kind of relationship, so I—" The genie suddenly disappeared in a puff of smoke. "Wild Thing? Wild Thing! Don't you evaporate while I'm talking to you!"

"I'm in here!" the genie called from his new prison inside the Queen's mirror. "I can't believe this! My wish backfired just like the last thousand and three this stupid lamp's granted. Who could have seen that coming?" His ears perked up. "Aw, man! And I've somehow lost my cool accent! Could this day get any worse?"

Regina laughed evilly. "I'm sure I'll find a way somehow."

Over at the mayor's newly charcoal-free office, Regina and Sidney lounged on the couch eating non-poisoned apples. "So Emma really bought into your spiel about wanting to take me down?"

"Yeah," Sidney confirmed. "She's not terribly bright, if you ask me. Little Henry must get his intelligence from his father's side of the family."
"Oh, Sidney, I love the way your foul little mind works!"

"Thanks. So, uh, you wanna make out now?" Sidney asked, popping a breath mint.

"We can make out on Emma's grave," Regina snapped.

"Mmm, sounds good to me!"
Sir Maurice, his council of war, and his marginalized little girl, for some reason, pored over a map, while a horde of radioactive ogres glowed ominously in the distance. "The East Mountains? The West Mountains? Who the hell wrote this map, a first grader with no access to a thesaurus?"

One of his flunkies opened up a dove-gram from the front lines. "I'm afraid we have bigger problems to worry about, boss. Avonlea has fallen."

"No!" Maurice cried in horror. "Did that delightful Anne Shirley at least make it out safely?"

"That's not important. What's important is that we're all screwed."

"Don't worry, Daddy. I read a lot and I know my tropes," said Maurice's daughter Belle confidently. "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will come swooping in and save us, but he's probably going to wait until the last possible second to make it seem more dramatic."

"Don't talk back to me, young lady," Maurice growled. "If I say we're screwed, then we're screwed!"

Belle sighed wearily. "You really suck at motivational speaking, Daddy."

"Don't distract me while I'm pontificating! Now where was I? Oh yes. Ogres are not men."

Belle was intrigued. "You mean they're women? Ogres allow women to fight in combat? Cool! Where do I sign up?"

"That's not what I meant! I…" Maurice frowned. "Actually, I forgot where I was going with this."

The doorbell suddenly rang. "Right on cue," sighed Belle. "Why doesn't anyone ever listen to me?"

"But this is impossible!" Sir Maurice protested. "How could a centuries-old wizard with the ability to single-handedly wipe out armies possibly get through our flimsy wooden walls?"

Maurice's men opened the door, but all they found on the other side was a large banner reading "Bazinga!"

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Tee hee!" he trilled sitting on Maurice's heavily stained and ratty throne. "This is the best seat you have to offer a guest?"

"Rumplestiltskin?"

The Dark One bowed. "In the slimy green flesh."

Maurice frowned. "I was expecting someone a little shorter."

"Yes, I get that a lot." The imp giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Now let's cut to the chase. I understand you need me to save your skins just like everyone else in the world seems to?"

"Yep."

Rumplestiltskin sighed. "I deserve a medal for putting up with you people. But if there are none available right now, I suppose I could always take the hot chick over there instead. I need a woman's
touch around my very large—"

"Estate?" Belle's fiancé supplied hopefully.

The Dark One giggled. "Sure, if thinking that makes you feel better."

"Bite me!" Sir Maurice barked. "I'd rather have my daughter devoured by radioactive ogres along with everyone else than let her run off with some hood in tight black leather. I know your kind. You'll love her and leave her and then I'll get stuck raising the baby and paying the therapy bills."

"Can I say something here?" Belle piped up.

"No," said Gaston flatly.

Belle shook him off. "Oh, screw this! I'll go with him. He can't possibly be any lamer than you guys."

"Ooh, I do so love a challenge!" Rumplestiltskin trilled merrily. "Come on then, dearie. Let's get home. It's almost time for Lost."

Belle hesitated. "But…aren't you going to go kill the ogres first?"

"It's on my to-do list, now get moving!"

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Back in Storybrooke, Moe French was hauling merchandise into his coolly-named flower shop, when Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Boo!"

"Ah!"

"Do I detect the early symptoms of a heart attack?" Gold asked hopefully.

"No!"

"Darn, I must be losing my touch. Well, then, I guess I'll have to settle for repossessing your delivery van." He whistled for his hulking toady. "Yo, Lurch! Do your stuff, dearie!"

"Rrrrr…" mumbled Lurch, climbing into the truck.

"Aw, give me a break, Gold!" Moe whined. "It's Valentine's Day and I'm the only florist in town. Think of all the unimaginative husbands who will be out of luck if you shut me down."

Gold looked bored. "You're getting on my nerves. Lurch, run him over, please."

"Oof!" Moe hit the pavement with a loud splat.

"Tee hee!" giggled Gold. "And that's what I think of men who commit domestic violence!"

Regina happened by. "You're one to talk. Didn't you kill your wife?"

"Maybe I did and maybe I didn't," Gold replied noncommittally.

"Answer the question!"

He stuck out his tongue. "Why don't you make me?"
"I really hate you, old man."

"Take a number and get in line, dearie."

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Over at the only diner in town, David and Mary Margaret were holding another meeting of the Charming Family Book Club. "I just love Anna Karenina," David gushed. "It's high time the media started providing strong adulterous role models for people like you and me. I can't wait to see how this ends. I bet Vronsky and Anna get married, win the lottery, and live happily ever after at Disneyland."

Mary Margaret raised an eyebrow. "You don't know how Anna Karenina ends? What, did you sleep through the duration of both high-school lit class and Masterpiece Theater?"

"I'm a coma patient. I slept through lots of stuff," David reminded her.

Ruby dropped by to pour some complimentary McCutcheon's in their coffee. "This is painful to watch. Can you guys either keep your awkward flirting confined to a single dark corner or shut up?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mary Margaret meekly.

Emma came in from the laundry room, for some reason. "Hey Eminem. How's my baby?"

"Graham? He's dead, last time I checked."

"No, my other baby. Henry."

"In your absence, he's started dressing like an emo, writing horrible angst poetry, and contemplating suicide. Is that what you want to hear?"

Emma grinned. "Yeah. Thanks, bestie, you always know the right thing to say."

Their attention was diverted by Ashley showing her face for the first time in months. "Ashley? You're not dead?"

"Go figure that one, huh?" She unceremoniously dumped her baby on Granny. "Here, hold this for a sec. I'm on my break."

"That bad, huh?" said Emma

Ashley winced. "I know you went to a lot of trouble, selling your soul so I could keep my baby, but I'm starting to think Gold got the better end of that deal. Damn kid's always crying and drooling and expecting to be fed. Nobody ever told me she was going to be so much work."

Emma raised her hand. "Um, actually, I did. Loudly and repeatedly."

"Well, yeah, I guess that's true. But I haven't told you the worst part yet." Ashley shuddered. "My boyfriend spends all his time doing hard manual labor in order to provide for me and our child. Can you believe that? I should have dumped the bastard when I had a chance!"

Ruby stared blankly for several minutes before finally finding her voice again. "Ashley? Are you high?"

"No."
"Well, then, let's remedy that." She swung an arm around her gal-pal's shoulders. "Let's all go out to the only bar in town tonight and get wasted. It's almost the full moon, and I'm feeling feisty!"

"No thanks," said Emma. "I prefer to drink the same way I do everything else—alone."

" Eh, it's just as well," said Ruby. "You're kind of a drag since you went legit."

Luckily, before Emma could break out her chainsaw and prove she still had what it took to be a bad girl, her cellphone rang. "I can't believe it! Somebody in this town finally used the 911 lane! Mary Margaret, take a picture of me answering the phone. I want to remember this moment forever!"

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Mr. Gold reluctantly went back to the pink and green abomination he called home. "Ugh, I can't believe Regina talked me into keeping this dump," he grumbled. "It looks like the love child of Westminster Abbey and Barbie's Dream House. And to top it all off, the damn place has been ransacked! Time to break out my shiny new Glock home security system." He tiptoed inside and drew a pistol. "Heh heh. It's true what they say. Guns don't kill people, psychotic imps do."

"As do vengeful princesses," Emma piped up, walking into the room with her gun pointed squarely at his head.

"Emma? You robbed me? Hm, I guess after the events at Regina's office last week, I shouldn't be surprised."

"I'm not here to rob you, I'm here to help you."

"Then why are you still pointing that gun at me?"

"You're pointing a gun at me," Emma reminded him.

Gold considered that. "Okay, how about this? On the count of three, we both drop our weapons. One, two, three!" Neither pistol budged. Gold's eyes narrowed. "This could take a while."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Rumplestiltskin led Belle through the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle. As they walked past one mylar-sealed collectible after another, Belle prattled incessantly. "Hey, is that the Golden Fleece? Does Percy Jackson know you have it? And Thing from The Addams Family, awesome! Wow, the Hogwarts Sorting Hat! Let me guess, you're a Slytherin, right?"

The Dark One sighed wearily. "After all these years, I'd forgotten how annoying chicks can be to live with." He flung open a door. "Get in this soundproof cell. I'm off to watch the big game, and I don't need any distractions."

Belle gaped in horror. "You're locking me in a dungeon? This is an outrage! When I took a job as the Dark One's eternal slave, I assumed there would be five-star accommodations and a dental plan."

Rumplestiltskin shoved her in and slammed the door, with an oxymoronic evil giggle. "Count your blessings, honey. There are plenty of depraved fangirls who'd give their eyeteeth to have me lock them in a dungeon."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The next morning, Belle attempted to play waitress in her enormous hoop skirt. "Hey, boss, would it
have killed you to wait five minutes for me to pack some clothes before we left my castle? This ball
gown, while awesome, is hardly practical for slave labor."

Rumplestiltskin, who was sitting at the table, smiled coyly. "Well, if it's bothering you that much,
you could always change into this little French maid's costume I just happen to have with me."

"Er, on second thought, I'll be fine."

Rumplestiltskin tried to mask his disappointment with another creepy giggle. "In that case, let's go
over your duties. They include cooking, cleaning, keeping your mouth shut during football season,
and dusting my creepy puppets."

"No!" Belle screamed, dropping the teacup she'd been holding. "Please, tear out my eyeballs with a
corkscrew, slather me in gasoline and throw me on a yaoguai's back, turn me into a carrot and send
me to Prince Charming's house, but don't make me touch the creepy puppets!"

"Relax, babe. That was just a witty one liner. You'd better get used to it; I'm chock full of them."

Rumplestiltskin's teapot was less forgiving. "Stupid girl, you just chipped my son!" Mrs. Potts
scolded.

"Mama, is that you? I'm all dizzy, and my handle hurts," the little teacup whimpered.

Belle flinched, glancing nervously up at her beastly boss. "I'm so sorry, Your Darkness! Please don't
boil me in oil and eat my liver!"

"Don't be ridiculous, I hate liver."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Back at Gold's overgrown dollhouse, Emma and Gold had managed to simultaneously disarm one
another via an elaborate series of roundhouse kicks. "Sheriff Swan, if that's all for today, can you
show yourself out? I need to hurry if I'm going to limp up all these stairs by bedtime." Gold scowled.
"Damn defective mansion…"

"Actually," Emma interrupted, "there's still the matter of the robbery I'm supposed to be
investigating."

"I know you've never heard these words before and probably never will again, but I don't need your
help, Emma."

"Ow." The sheriff clutched her head, dazed. "I think you just broke my brain. What was I saying?
Oh, right. You can't take the law into your own hands."

"What, like you did with Ashley Boyd, and the Zimmer twins, and Regina's office? I'm sensing a
pronounced double standard, here."

"Talk or I'm locking you up and throwing the key into a dragon's mouth!"

Gold winced. "Please don't. I'm rather attached to these last few shreds of sanity."

Emma didn't answer, she just pulled a toothpick on him, eyes glinting dangerously. "Whoa, okay,
okay!" he relented. "It was Moe French. I know this because I've been a jerk to him lately and he
hates my guts."

"Which sets him apart from everyone else in town… how, exactly?"
Back at the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Belle stood on a ladder while Rumplestiltskin sat below, spinning gold and trying not to look up her dress. "Hey, Rumplestiltskin? I hate to be nosy, but somebody's got to break this awkward silence. Can I ask why you spin so much gold? Is it part of some insidious scheme to devalue the national gold reserves, cause inflation, and topple the economy?"

"No, I'm just trying to impress you."

Belle giggled. "Aw, that's sweet. But if you really wanted to impress me, you could help me open these windows. I think your mood lighting is giving me a Vitamin D deficiency."

"Hey, I didn't name this place the Dark Castle just because it sounds cool...even though it totally does."

Since Belle had been stupid enough to climb the giant ladder in high heels, it was only a matter of time before she slipped and fell into Rumplestiltskin's arms. "Ooh," she breathed, "is it just me, or is there something here that wasn't here before?"

Rumplestiltskin dropped her like a hot potato. "Er, it's you," he fibbed unconvincingly.

Belle sighed. "In that case, I guess I'd better put the drapes back up. All this light is making you sparkle like some kind of emo vampire."

"No, don't. If you climb the ladder in those heels again, you'll fall and break your neck, and I don't need a lawsuit on my hands."

"Well," said Emma, revealing a pile of stolen loot, "I had my misgivings about your Moe French theory, but you were right just like you always seem to be. I found this heap of stolen cereal bowls, flowerpots and old rugs back at his place. Apparently the guy's taste in loot is as bizarre as your taste in possessions."

"Speaking of which, was there a broken teacup with this stuff? Its mother is worried sick about it."

"Er...no."

"Well then, did you find Moe French? I've got some long overdue holes to punch in his skull."

"Um, sorry, but that'll have to wait."

"Emma, why did you have to choose my episode to suddenly become useless?"

Rumplestiltskin, wearing a wicked cool set of shades and half a bottle of sunblock, looked into the sunlight without fear. Belle stood nearby, trying not to let him see that she was checking him out. "Hey Rumplestiltskin, why did you want me here? I mean, it's a legitimate question. Any guy who can snap his fingers and make a horde of ogres disappear is surely capable of snapping his own house clean."

"The ogres!" Rumplestiltskin facepalmed. "I still haven't killed them. Crap, I knew I forgot something." He folded his arms and blinked his eyes. "There we go, and I got rid of all the termites..."
in your village, just for good measure. Anyway, to answer your question, I needed something really
gorgeous in here to balance out the aura of ugliness generated by those creepy puppets."

"That's a damn lie. You know you're in love with me."

Rumplestiltskin blushed, the effect clashing horribly with his green face. "I'm sure I have no idea
what you're talking about."

"Playing hard-to-get, are we? That's so cute." She pinched his cheek affectionately.

"Please don't pinch the Dark One."

"Fine, spoil sport. I'll just perch here on the edge of your table in a totally non-alluring way. So I was
snooping around in your attic the other day, and I found an old box labeled "Property of Bae," which
was full of Neal Cassady books. Care to explain?"

"Those belonged to my son. I'm still not entirely sure what their significance is."

"Wait, so you were a regular mortal once? What did you look like?"

"Robert Carlyle."

"Mm, hot! Got any pictures from those days?"

"Yeah, but my ex-wife cut my head out of all of them."

"You're making that up. You probably did it yourself, because you have low self-esteem. That's why
you keep all the mirrors covered, am I right?"

"No, that's because my archenemy uses mirrors to spy on people. In retrospect, it was really stupid of
me to teach her that trick." The doorbell chimed. "Oh, good. The takeout I ordered is finally here. No
offense, baby, but your cooking sucks."

"Hey, at least I don't mix hair into my beverages," Belle retorted.

Rumplestiltskin opened the door and found Belle's fiancé waving a sword in his face. "No one
aggresses like Gaston, tracks addresses like Gaston, no one rescues damsels in distress like Gaston!"

Unworried, Rumplestiltskin countered this musical boast with one of his own. "No one sniggers like
Rumple, transfigures like Rumple, and no one is badder or bigger than Rumple!" He snapped his
fingers, leaving a long-stemmed rose in the unlucky knight's place.

Belle snuck up beside him. "Who was that? I thought I heard singing."

"Oh, it was just some candelabra asking me to be his guest," said Rumplestiltskin innocently. "Here,
have a flower."

"Wait a minute. Do I smell Axe body spray?" Belle sniffed the proffered rose warily.
"Rumplestiltskin, did you turn my fiancé into a flower?"

"…Maybe."

Belle giggled. "That's awesome. He was such a jerk."

The Dark One brightened. "Well, now that that bit of unpleasantness is out of the way, let's get back
to establishing our relationship. Why did you choose to come here with me?"
"Uh, because you said I had to or you'd let me and all my loved ones die?"

Rumplestiltskin just tilted his head and smiled knowingly.

"Okay, and maybe I was a little bit hot for you. Just a little, though." Belle blushed. "I always did have a soft spot for bad boys. But enough about me. I'm sure the audience is dying for more of your backstory. I know I am."

Rumplestiltskin thought it over. "Okay, but it's a long and depressing story, so you'd better head into town and stock up on Kleenex before we get started."

Belle blinked. "You're letting me go?"

"I have to, dearie, or the media watchdogs will start screaming 'Stockholm Syndrome'."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At the only bar in town, Ashley had given up on finding a glass large enough to suit her, and opted to simply shove her head in a beer keg. Ruby gave her a funny look. "I really hope you're not breastfeeding." But Ashley's ears were obstructed with beer and she didn't hear her friend. Ruby hauled her head out of the keg. "Ashley, we've done enough drinking. Let's move on to another vice now."

"Like what?" Ashley slurred.

"How about a one-night stand?"

"I'm flattered, but straight."

"Not with me, with the random hotties conveniently lined up for selection over there."

"Hm, they are yummy, but unfortunately, I have a faithful and loving boyfriend."

Ruby rolled her eyes. "Bah, that bastard is out breaking his back to provide a good home for his family. The last thing he deserves is fidelity. Now if you'll excuse me, this monster's got some mashing to do."

Ashley began crying into her beer, which was pretty easy, considering the size of her target. "Love sucks."

"Please, you think you've got problems?" snorted Mary Margaret. "At least your man's not a comatose amnesiac with an allergy to divorce."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Over at the only drugstore in town, Gold was paying for his usual Valentine's Day order of rope, duct tape, and bulk blindfolds. David looked over his shoulder. "Should I be squicked?"

"Relax, this particular kidnapping is going to be completely platonic," said Gold. "You're the only pervert in this checkout line, my adulterous friend."

David blushed. "How did you...?"

"You're buying two valentine cards, stupid." Gold snickered, glancing down at the cards in disbelief. "A puppy saying 'I Woof You' is your idea of romance? You're not worthy to shine Prince Charming's sword!"
"Huh?"

"Oops, I've said too much. Allow me to change the subject by discussing the fragile nature of love."

David frowned, rubbing his head. "Wait, have we…done this before?"

"Eep!" Gold grabbed his implements of torture and ran.

A few minutes later, Mr. Gold was sitting behind the wheel of Moe French's van, while the florist himself struggled and gurgled in the trunk. "What, what do you want?!" Gold snapped, finally tearing the gag off his mouth.

"Are we there yet?" asked Moe.

"Grrr…"

Gold pulled up in front of the Love Shack and whipped out his Glock home security system. "Walk or I'll shoot. Which, ironically, would probably be a lot less painful than what I've got in store for you." He ushered the man inside. "Hey, what are all these feathers doing in here?"

Belle looked over her shoulder and saw a carriage barreling down the road behind her. "Yikes! Would it kill the Queen to build some freaking sidewalks around here?"

A cool Goth chick in a black carriage pulled up beside her. "I'm sure the Queen does her best. And she's sexy, too."

"If you say so," said Belle politely.

"I don't mean to pry," said the Queen, "but does that tattoo on your forehead say 'Property of the Dark One'?"

"Yeah," grumbled Belle. "Now that he's in love with me, I really ought to make him remove that."

"Bwa hah hah! Oh, this is just too precious!" gloated the Queen.

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, don't mind me, I'm just making conversation. Now then, what's this about you being in love with a guy named the Dark One? That doesn't seem like particularly good judgment on your part."

"I know," Belle sighed guiltily. "He's just so damned hot in all that leather. The dark magic is kind of a turn-off, though. And I'm not wild about the rotten teeth, either."

"Well, then, today's your lucky day. I happen to know how you can solve both problems."

"Years of grueling dental and psychiatric therapy?"

"How absurd!" The Queen laughed. "No, no, you just have to smooch him like you mean it."

"Thanks just the same," said Belle warily, "but I fear taking on an ancient curse, armed with nothing
but my lips, on the advice of some chick I've known for five minutes would be dumber than jumping a yaoguai without combat training."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Guess it's time to try Plan B." She took out a watch and dangled it in front of Belle. "You are getting sleepy."

Belle yawned. "I'm getting sleepy."

"You are in my power."

"I am in your power," Belle repeated in a monotone.

"You will smooch Rumplestiltskin until his curse breaks or he dies from loss of oxygen, whichever comes first."

"I'll look forward to that," the girl droned.

Rumplestiltskin sat by the window, watching for Belle and plucking petal after petal from poor Gaston's head. "She loves me, she loves me not. She loves me, she loves me not." He suddenly spotted his victim/girlfriend making her way to the front door, and tore off one last petal in triumph. "She loves me! Squeeeeee!" The Dark One attempted to collect himself. "Er, I mean, she loves me. How very droll." Casting an anti-giggle spell on himself, he bolted downstairs, sat at his spinning wheel, and tried to look busy. Flustered as he was, however, he wound up spinning the straw into dental floss instead of gold. "Back so soon? I hardly noticed you were gone."

"Then why are you shaking like a seizure patient in Siberia?"

"It's drafty in here?" Rumplestiltskin stammered lamely.

She smirked. "Well, I think I can warm you up…" Belle paused to snip a piece of dental floss off the spindle, "provided you use this first."

"Done and done!" said Rumplestiltskin, flossing enthusiastically.

"Good boy." Belle stacked a few dozen tissue boxes beside the wheel. "So, now that we're all stocked up, are you going to tell me what happened to your son?"

"Well," Rumplestiltskin began, "it all started three days before his fourteenth birthday. Yet another horde of radioactive ogres was glowing ominously on the horizon, and for some reason, our lord decided to combat this threat by drafting child soldiers, instead of simply commanding his pet Dark One to snap his fingers and—"

Belle clamped a hand over his mouth. "This is eating up a lot of time. Can I get the Readers' Digest version, please?"

"Okay. I was trying to protect my son, but it turned me into a monster, and drove him—"

Belle pointed at her watch.

"I lost him. The end." Rumplestiltskin summarized. "And now it's your turn to spill the beans. Why did you come back? Were you attacked by a pack of wolves on your way home?"

"No," said Belle, leaning in close and puckering up, "but I probably would have been mauled by a pack of rabid Rumbelle shippers if I'd actually gone through with leaving." That being said, she
swooped in for the kill and smooched him silly.

Rumplestiltskin tried to enjoy himself, but that was easier said than done with his skin melting away and his teeth twisting into a freakishly straight position. "Gah!" he yelped. "It burns!"

"Mm, same here, baby. Shall we take this upstairs?"

"No, not in a good way!" The sorcerer cringed.

Belle frowned. "Your obvious pain and fear are really killing the mood, here. But on the other hand, those teeth have got to go, and it's either True Love's Kiss or a dentist. Either way, there's going to be pain."

She leaned in for another kiss, but Rumplestiltskin held her at arm's length. "Wait, what's this about True Love's Kiss? Where'd you hear about that?"

"Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, Sleeping Beauty, The Little Mermaid, The Frog Prince, and every damned Harlequin Romance ever written," Belle ticked off her fingers. "Oh, and there was that creepy lady on the road, too."

Rumplestiltskin jumped to his feet. "You lying skank!"

"Hey!" Belle protested.

"Not you! I'll get to you later. I was addressing the mirror."

A mustached face appeared in said mirror. "Hey, you can't talk about my woman like that!"

"Shut up, Sid!" Rumplestiltskin roared, throwing a conveniently-placed brick at him.

"Um. Okay then." Belle blinked. "I love you, by the way, though this outburst is starting to make me rethink that position."

"Bite me, you sad excuse for a femme fatale!" Rumplestiltskin snarled, getting up in her face. "I should have known no one could ever love me!"

"Don't say that. What about all your fangirls?"

"Stop giving me such well-reasoned explanations! My evil streak is back and I don't want to lose it!"

"But the kiss wouldn't even work if I didn't—"

"That's it!" Rumplestiltskin ranted, hauling her down the hall. "It's back to the soundproof dungeon with you!"

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Back at the Love Shack, Gold was limping menacingly, which should have been an oxymoron. He jammed his cane into Moe French's windpipe. "I want you to answer two questions for me. First, how do you sleep at night? And second, what have you done with my little Chip?"

"The answer to both is, what the hell are you talking about?"

"Wrong!" Gold whacked him in the gut. "Die, you rat! Die like an unblemished teacup!"

Moe groaned. "I'm not sure what this conversation is hurting worse; my ribs or my brain."
"Shut your trap!" Gold punctuated this command with another whack. "You threw your daughter's love back in her face just like I did! That makes you the second-worst father ever!"

Moe's head reeled dizzily. "Second-worst?"

"You finished right behind the guy who dumped his only son into a mysterious green portal." Gold thumped him in the face. "Bastard! None of this would have happened to me if you'd just had an uglier daughter! It's your fault! It's your fault!"

This interrogation-gone-wrong was interrupted by Emma snatching Gold's cane. "Hey! I need that for smashing stuff," the pawnbroker whined.

"Sheriff Swan?" Moe groaned blearily. "Where did you come from?"

Emma shrugged. "Beats the hell out of me. I got swallowed alive by this thing that called itself a plot hole, and it spat me out at the front door of this cabin."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Meanwhile, at the Dark Castle, Rumplestiltskin was somehow teaching Belle a lesson by…breaking his own stuff? Okay, whatever. He smashed a grandfather clock. "Die, Cogsworth!" He smashed a chandelier. "Look how you've repaid me, denied me and betrayed me!" he roared, moving on to the tea service.

An aging teapot threw herself in front of his outstretched claws. "NO! Please, master, do whatever you want with me, but spare the children!"

"No deal," said Rumplestiltskin flatly, smacking her aside and tossing cup after cup at the wall. "Die, you adorable porcelain bastards!" But when he got to Chip, the teamwork of cuteness and nostalgia finally overpowered him. "Ah, damn. Even I'm not that evil." He sat the cup safely on the table and stormed off.

Shaken, Chip managed to maneuver himself under a beer tap and pour liberally. "The survivor's guilt from this incident will haunt me until the day I die," the little teacup whispered tremulously.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At the only bar in Storybrooke, Ashley and Mary Margaret were sulking with varying degrees of vocality. "I never realized when I entered into this relationship that babies would need supervision or income would need earning. Man, adulthood blows!" Ashley griped.

"So does adultery," sighed Mary Margaret sadly.

Ashley burst into tears. "I know I said Sean was a bastard, but I lied. He's as adorable as ever and I need his cuddles like I need my next beer!"

Sean appeared behind her, a ring and a bouquet in hand. "You rang, baby?"

"Sean!"

"In the flesh. I wanted to talk to you, because I just had the craziest idea. Since we love each other, and since it will really piss off my dad, why don't we get hitched?"

"Sounds good to me!" Ashley squealed, running off with her man and leaving her friends in a cloud of dust.
Mary Margaret brushed away a tear. "Ruby, the booze just doesn't seem to be helping me anymore. I'm going home to see if Emma has anything stronger in her contraband locker." Stepping outside, she bumped into the object of her inebriation. "David?"

"In the flesh. I wanted to talk to you, because-"

"You want to get hitched?" Mary Margaret finished hopefully.

"No, I just wanted to give you your valentine."

"Oh," said Mary Margaret, deflated. "Well, let's have it." She grudgingly opened the proffered envelope. "David, this card is for Kathryn. And incredibly lame, to boot."

David winced. "Rats! I knew I should have listened to Gold."

Mary Margaret shoved the less-than-charming card back at her man. "David, I think you should go home to Kathryn and give her this card at once."

David looked hurt. "Why?"

"Don't worry, there's method to my madness. When she discovers how pathetic you are at romance, she'll be begging me to take you off her hands."

He grinned. "I like the way you think, baby."

"Thanks. Keep me posted, okay?"

Back at the Love Shack, a couple of paramedics were taking Moe French to see Dr. Whale, because who else was there? "Well," said Emma, "the good news is, you didn't do enough damage to, say, ruin your chances at winning the heart of one of his family members."

"I guess I'll just have to try harder next time."

"So do you want to tell me who it was that you were screaming about while you were beating on him? Or would you rather wait for me to nose around and find out for myself, as usual."

"That won't be necessary. I was talking about my girlfriend."

"Your girlfriend." Emma repeated dubiously.

"Yep. She was young and beautiful and found my skinny old bod utterly irresistible."

Emma took out her handcuffs. "If you're going to make jokes at a time like this, I'm afraid I'm going to have to arrest you."

"But why?" Gold pouted. "Oh, right, the near-fatal cane beating."

In Rumplestiltskin's dungeon, Chip and his mama were grieving tearfully on their tea tray. "Can you two give it a rest for five minutes?" Belle groaned. "I'm trying to pine, here!"

Luckily, Rumplestiltskin walked in, and that shut the surviving pieces of crockery right up. Belle glanced up at him. "Hey, baby. I suppose you're here for some Angry!Sex?"
"No."

"Darn." Reluctantly, she tugged her zipper back into place. "Then what are you here for?"

"To let you go."

"I could be wrong, but it seems like you tried that already."

"No, that was letting you go in a loving way. This is letting you go in a cowardly way."

"Oh, I see what this is. You're afraid of commitment."

"That's right. Along with ogres, dentists, squirrels, my ex-wife…"

He was still at it when the sun went down. "…oatmeal, the space under the bed, and Casper the Friendly Ghost," he finished.

"You know what? If I'd realize you had this many psychological issues, I would have looked elsewhere for a love interest." Belle rose. "I'm off to Fairy! Asia, and all you'll have left is an empty heart and a traumatized cup."

"That's for sure," Chip shuddered as she stormed off.

Watching her leave, Rumplestiltskin heard a loud series of clicks behind him, and turned around to investigate. He found himself face to gun barrel with a crowd of angry-looking chicks. "Who the hell are you?"

"We're Team Rumbelle, and we've had enough of you screwing with our ship!" one of the fangirls seethed, cramming a couple of shells into her double-barreled shotgun. "You go after her right now, or we'll blow you to kingdom come!"

"But if I do that, we can never have a bittersweet reunion scene," Rumplestiltskin protested.

Team Rumbelle considered this. "Hm, we see your point, but we'll be back to check up on you for the finale, punk!" The girls filed out of the dungeon, glaring over their shoulders at him.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Back at Mayberry Jail, Mr. Gold was in his cell scowling at the wall while Emma gleefully snapped pictures to post on Facebook. "Hey, Gold? What do you think of the caption, 'The Manipulator Has Become the Manipulated'?" she snickered unprofessionally.

"I think the caption 'Never Poke a Sleeping Dragon' would be more apt," Gold sneered. "Now shut up and leave me alone. Can't you see I'm busy staring at this wall?"

Regina knocked on the door. "Hey, Emma? I need to psychologically torture Gold for a few minutes."

Gold sighed. "Will these interruptions never cease?"

Emma frowned. "I'm no Dearie, but I'm pretty sure torturing prisoners is against the law."

Regina produced an oversized Ziploc bag with Henry stuffed inside. "Say yes and I'll give you a nice, long Henry fix."

Emma snatched him and ran. "Eh, screw the law. It's not like this is the first time I've ignored it."
The prisoner shook his head wearily. "Remind me again why I went to so much trouble to get her elected?"

"Definitely not one of your brighter decisions," Regina agreed, sitting down in front of his cell. "Neither was daring me to find a way to make you answer my question."

"Then this whole scheme was your doing?"

"Of course. It wasn't yours, and I'm the only other person in town who understands the meaning of the word 'scheme'. Well, except Henry, but he's been busy with soccer practice."

Gold gave her a cheap imitation of the Glare of Evil. "Your quarrel is with me. Leave little Chip out of it!"

"Deal…but only if you tell me your real name."

"It's Mr. Gold. I legally changed my first name to Mister when I decided to become a crotchety old bastard."

"No, I meant your other name. The one that starts with an R and ends with a –stiltskin?"

Gold smirked. "Regina, please give me the cup."

Showing him how the Glare of Evil was meant to be done, Regina dug the cup out of her purse and flung it at her enemy's head.

"Hey, you could have broken him!" Rumplestiltskin objected.

"Don't worry," said Regina. "Chip's far too cute to die."

"Yeah, you're right. The writers would never be that cruel. I don't know what I was thinking."

Regina sighed. "Can we end this conversation now? It's obvious you remember."

"I'll say," Gold agreed. "Hopefully I'll be out of here soon, and we can go back to competing for "Villain of the Year" just like old times."

"I'll look forward to that."

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, a heartbroken Rumplestiltskin sat spinning yet another spool of dental floss. "Damn it, not again! Get ahold of yourself, Rumplestiltskin!" he scolded himself.

Regina barged in as usual. "Hey, homie. I'm planning a vacation under the sea and I was hoping you could hook me up with some quality scuba gear."

"Regina?" said Rumplestiltskin, glancing up at her. "How'd you get around Ye Olde Burglar Alarm?"

"There was a key to your pad in Mom's stuff from when you guys were dating."

Rumplestiltskin shuddered. "Ugh, first my cheating wife, then your crazy mother, and now that little lying Delilah, Belle. I'm starting to question my taste in women."
"Speaking of Belle, she's dead now."

"What? How?" Rumplestiltskin demanded.

"She jumped in front of a yaoguai without any combat training and got eaten."

"No way."

"All right, that one was a quip. Actually, when she got home after your breakup, her dad shipped her off to Mother Gothel's Home for Wayward Girls. Eventually, she just couldn't take any more of Rapunzel's singing, so she jumped out a window and killed herself."

The Dark One rolled his eyes. "Do you really expect me to believe that, or anything else you say? Why, you'd tell me the sky was orange if you thought it would hurt my feelings."

"The sky is orange." Regina pointed.

"Damn it, not another radioactive ogre horde!" While Rumplestiltskin's back was turned, Regina broke out her magic watch again. "Hey Rumplestiltskin? Trust in me, just in me. Shut your eyes and trust in me..." she sang.

Rumplestiltskin yawned mindlessly. "Hm, on the other hand, maybe I should trust in you."

"Atta boy. Now then, Belle is dead and it's totally your fault."

Rumplestiltskin jolted awake, eyes welling up. "If that's all, can you show yourself out?"

"After one last barb." Regina smirked. "This place looks filthy. You should get a new girl."

"And maybe you should get a new stable boy." Rumplestiltskin retorted. The two supervillains simultaneously broke down in tears, Regina went home to binge on rocky road, and Rumplestiltskin took Chip out of the cupboard, along with a large bottle of Jack Daniels. "Well, Chip, my boy, it looks like you and I are going to be drowning our sorrows together for many years to come." He took the Holy Grail off a pedestal and tossed it out a window to make room for the little teacup. Luckily, the Knights Who Say Ni were on to catch it.

Back in Storybrooke, Regina went down to the basement of the only hospital in town and made her way to the staff desk. A nurse in a hilariously outdated uniform was there to greet her. "Welcome to the Maison des Lunes, Mayor Mills. Monsieur D'arque is at lunch; I'm his assistant, Nurse Ratched."

"Hello again, Miss Ratched. I'm here to ogle my hostage some more."

The nurse nodded absently. "Same as every Tuesday, then."

On the only piece of furniture in her cell, a very amnesiac Belle sat staring at the walls, as usual. "This place is so lonely. What I need is a boyfriend. Maybe someone with similar interests, like sitting in cells staring at walls, and hating on Regina and her Glare of Evil."
Princess Abigail's medieval limo rolled to a stop in the middle of the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia. "Princess Abigail!" King George fawned shamelessly, helping her down the steps of her carriage, because the Royal Footman had been repossessed.

"King George," the princess sighed, "why did you insist on meeting me out here in the middle of nowhere with a bunch of armed thugs? Are you planning a hit on me?"

"No, I only murder poor people," George replied cheerfully. "Speaking of which, it's a pleasure to welcome your big, fat trust fund to our treasury."

"Yes, I see you've spent the lion's share of it on wanted posters. Anybody I know?" Abigail tried to examine one of the posters that were wallpapering the tree trunks of the Enchanted Forest, but George tackled her and clamped a hand over her eyes.

"No! Just…uh…that rascal Robin Hood," the king fibbed inexpertly. "With the legendary Stealthy out of the picture, Hood's at the top of our nameless nation's most wanted list. Now then, why don't you go home and sing, or daydream, or whatever else princesses do until time for the funeral?"

"Don't you mean, until time for the wedding?"

"Right, right. In preparation for your visit, I've taken the liberty of burning every gossip rag and shooting every paparazzo in the kingdom. So if you chance to hear any rumors about my son and some chick named Snow, it's probably just the Reporters' Guild out for revenge." He shoved her back into her carriage and hastily nailed the door shut behind her.

"If this is how you receive all foreign dignitaries, then it's no wonder your kingdom is falling apart," he heard Abigail's muffled voice grumble.

"Keep giving me lip and it could be your face plastered on a wanted poster." The king brightened. "Actually, that's not a bad idea. Wanted posters seem to be one of my son's turn-ons. Seeing you like that might make him more enthusiastic about this match." He whistled for a flunky. "You there, get me the Royal Graphic Designer!" He took out his cellphone and dialed the Queen's number. "Hey, Reg? I need a favor. My non-biological child has turned against me and gone on the run. I figured if anyone could understand it would be you." There was a pause. "Thanks. Listen, I hear you've got a huntsman who takes care of these situations? Okay fine, a Huntsman, whatever. His track record isn't good, you say?" The king sighed. "I guess I'll just have to keep searching on my own. Thanks anyway."

________________________________________________________________________________________

Meanwhile, Quasi-Prince Charming was being pursued on horseback by the Legions of Evil, as usual. "Man, being a fugitive isn't nearly as easy as Snow made it look," he panted.

"Stop or we'll shoot!" one of his pursuers threatened.

"Go ahead," the quasi-prince dared with a smirk.

Incensed, the soldiers raised their bows and let a barrage of arrows fly at him, but the projectiles bounced harmlessly off of both him and his mount. Charming laughed. "Heh heh! Don't you guys ever go to the movies? Enlisting in a Legion of Evil automatically confers a crippling hand-eye coordination disorder on you!"
"Aw, man, we've been Stormtroopered!"

The quasi-prince spurred his horse on, jumping over a variety of obstacles and running a few circles around his pursuers for good measure. "Whew, I'm good at this. If only I'd known, I could have saved the farm by becoming a rodeo star, instead of this stupid identity theft scheme."

A sleeper dart suddenly barreled out of nowhere and struck him in the neck. "Ow!" Charming cursed. "That's cheating!"

Over at the Nolan house, a fugly windmill newly installed on the front lawn, David and Kathryn were eating in awkward silence. David shuddered as he choked down a bite of chicken. "Ugh. I know it's crazy, but somehow the thought of eating an innocent bird makes my very soul recoil in abject horror."

"David," said Kathryn, "I know awkward silences are the foundation of our relationship, but can we break that pattern and talk for a minute?"

David thought it over. "I'll make you a deal. We can talk if you'll agree to let me give our feathered friend here a proper burial." He indicated his plate.

"Fine, whatever. The thing is, I've decided to go law school without consulting or even telling you first. What do you think?"

"I think it's great!" said David. "It will be wonderful, for once, to have a lawyer in Storybrooke who isn't named Gold."

"Did you just say gold?" Kathryn suddenly broke down sobbing. "GOLD! G-g-g-gooooold!"

"Honey, are you okay?"

"Sorry," she sniffled, pulling herself together, "I don't know what came over me. Anyway, in response to your earlier comment, I actually won't be practicing in Storybrooke. There are no law schools in Storybrooke. In fact, I'm not even sure there's a high school in Storybrooke. We'll have to leave town."

"Leave town?" David stared uncomprehendingly. "How does that work, exactly?"

"It's easy. We just get in the car and drive like we're going to visit the town line, but we don't stop or crash when we get there."

David looked uncertain. "Has anyone ever actually tried that before? It sounds risky."

"We could be the first. Where's your sense of adventure?"

"I think it went to find my sense of romance."

"I'll say," Kathryn grumbled, with a glance at her lame Valentine's Day card. "Well, why don't you go for a walk and think it over? In the meantime, I think I'm going to go upstairs and watch Mannequin. That always cheers me up, for some reason."

Prince Charming knelt on the ground, execution-style, while some Legionnaire of Evil hovered over him with a dagger. "Why am I always getting jumped in the woods by hooded strangers?" he sighed.
"Because the women in your life are all incredibly complicated," drawled Princess Abigail, emerging on the scene.

"Abigail?" Prince Charming stumbled to his feet, relieved. "You know, if you wanted to talk, you could sent a postcard with any bird. What the hell possessed you to think that sending armed thugs after a desperate fugitive would do anything to facilitate communication?"

"You mean you thought that my men were your father's goons?" Abigail burst out laughing. "Are you blind or something? These guys are wearing purple capes and black gambesons. Your father's men wear white tabards and chainmail. How, exactly, does one confuse the two?"

"Cut me a break, I'm distraught."

"Whatever, I didn't come here to argue with you. My homies in the Reporters' Guild tell me you're hot for Snow White and you have no intention of marrying me. They also say you're having an affair with Kim Kardashian. Is any of that true?"

"Yes to the first, no to the second."

"Well, I'm happy either way, because I don't want to marry you."

Charming was insulted. "First you jump me in the woods, then you treat me with unexplained, undeserved rudeness, and then you dump me with absolutely no explanation?" He looked her over with new interest. "Maybe I could learn to love you after all."

"So let me get this straight," said Mary Margaret, walking down the street with her duplicitous darling. "Your wife is going to become a lawyer?" She grinned. "Well, at least hating her just got a little easier. So, did you tell her you can't move right now because you have a girlfriend?"

"No."

"Oh. You should really hurry up and get on that," she admonished.

David flinched. "But she'll yell at me."

Mary Margaret brandished a fist. "If you don't tell her, I'll yell at you!"

"You?" David laughed hysterically. "Sweet little Mary Margaret, raise her voice in anger? That's a good one!" Above their heads, a flock of bluebirds joined in, twittering with amusement.

Mary Margaret sighed wearily. "So what's your plan? Wait until Kathryn dies of old age to make our relationship public?"

"No. Actually, I was planning to head down to the mayor's new playground and bury my head in the sand until this whole thing blows over."

"Oh, come on!" Mary Margaret prodded. "Where's your courage?"

"I think it went to find my sense of adventure and my sense of romance."

Mary Margaret decided it was time to bring out the big guns. "Fine, then. If that's how it's going to be, I'm withholding fluff from you until you tell Kathryn the truth about us."

"Mary Margaret! That's fighting dirty!" David whined. "Fine, fine, I'll break up with my stupid wife."

"Mary Margaret! That's fighting dirty!" David whined. "Fine, fine, I'll break up with my stupid wife."
Spoilsport.

Emma was on her way into the only diner in town for some Zoloft cupcakes when she bumped into everyone's favorite biker. "Hey Emma. I've been meaning to bump into you, but plagiarism is busy work. Ready to grab that drink you promised me?"

She groaned. "Is there any way I can get out of this?"

"No."

"Are you coming on to me?" Emma demanded warily. "Because if you are, I think it's only fair to warn you that the last guy who tried that mysteriously dropped dead."

"I'm not afraid of death. I'm not afraid of anything but whales."

"Then you'd better stay away from the hospital."

"Noted. Now let's get on with our date; the Wooden Swan shippers are getting restless."

"I'm not going anywhere with you until you tell me your name."

"Aw, but that'll spoil my aura of mystery!" August whined. "How am I supposed to hang onto my fangirls?"

"You'll still have your leather jacket and all-knowing smirk," Emma reminded him.

He brightened. "That's true. Fine, my name is August W. Booth."

"Well, I can see why you wanted to keep a shameful secret like that under wraps." Emma choked back a laugh. "Should I call you Dubya?"

August's eyes hardened. "Just meet me here after work and keep the smart remarks to yourself." He stormed off, muttering under his breath. "Man, being a hero's moral guide is a lot harder than Jiminy made it look…"

Emma went inside and plopped down at her mom's table. Mary Margaret eyed the retreating stranger with unease. "Emma, did I just hear you say you were going on a date with that man?"

"Yeah, why?"

"I don't know, it's just that for some reason, the thought of you dating some rebel with a leather jacket and motorcycle makes me cringe."

"What are you, my mother?" Emma snapped. "Actually, don't answer that. I don't want to know. Why did you call me here? If this is about joining the Audubon Society again, I'm still not interested."

"No, actually I wanted to discuss my secret affair with David, and I thought a public establishment with a gossipy proprietor would be the most logical place."

The savior burst out laughing. "Secret affair with David? Honey, between me, Sidney, and Henry, there are no secrets in this town. Besides, like I already told you, you have absolutely no aptitude for dishonesty."
"Damn this heart of gold!" Mary Margaret cursed bitterly. "Oh well, I suppose it doesn't matter anymore. David's telling Kathryn the truth about us, so I can finally go back to being Lawful Good."

At the Nolan home, Kathryn glanced up from her laptop as David walked in. "Hey, honey, you're not going to believe this! I just found an apartment complex in Boston called 'Golden Windmill Circle'. This has got to be a sign!"

"It is, just not a good one."

"Huh?"

"I'm dumping you."

"What?" Kathryn burst into tears. "But why? Is there another woman?"

"Er…no, of course not," David fibbed, trying to soften the blow. "I just find you unlovable and hate being married to you. Does that make you feel better?"

"No!" sobbed Kathryn. "That was just plain cruel! Where's your sensitivity?"

Her reluctant husband shrugged. "I guess it went to find my courage, my sense of adventure, and my sense of romance."

Back in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Princess Abigail led Prince Charming over the border. "Phew, we should be safe here. For some reason, your dad neglected to include an extradition treaty in the merger he arranged between our two kingdoms."

"Yeah, I haven't known the old man for very long, but he doesn't strike me as terribly bright." Charming rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "I'm so glad I'm adopted and don't have to worry about inheriting whatever mental handicap he has."

"Do you ever shut up?" Abigail handed him a bag of provisions. "Here, take these and go find Snow White. You're getting on my nerves."

He seized her by the wrist. "I demand to know why you're being so nice all of a sudden. This is totally out of character! Did you find Jesus? Start taking antidepressants? Get a new writer? Answer me!"

Abigail's guards advanced on him menacingly, but she waved them aside. "It's alright, boys. Charming's a knight in shining armor. He can't hit a girl or he'll lose his fan base." She shook off the prince's grip. "Now, to answer your question, I'm letting you go because I'm in love with someone I can't have."

"There's a lot of that going around right now," Charming observed.

"Yeah, I hear Rumplestiltskin has invented a convenient over-the-counter patch for it, but I'm way too smart to buy anything from him."

"Really? Maybe I should pay him a visit," the quasi-prince mused. "What's the worst he can do to me? Take away my loved ones and my identity? It's a little late for that, and besides, I have a feeling I should be getting used to such things."
She whacked him over the head. "Quit being such a drama queen. You think you've got it bad?" She led him over to a gazebo, where a golden statue covered in bright red lipstick marks stood, sword held high. "My father accidentally turned my fiancé Frederick into this monstrosity with his magic grope."

"How?" Charming was confused. "He always has that quintuple layer of heavy gauntlets tied over his magical hand. How did he manage to get all of those off and then touch Frederick accidentally? Are you sure he didn't do it on purpose?"

"I don't know. Come to think of it, he did always disapprove of the fact that Frederick still lived with his mother." Abigail's eyes narrowed. "Daddy, how could you?!"

Prince Charming slipped into comfort mode. "There, there, you shouldn't give up hope yet. Have you tried True Love's Kiss? Four out of five wizards recommend it."

"Tried it, along with fairy dust, nail polish remover, and peanut butter. No luck."

Charming frowned. "So there's nothing we can do to save him? Absolutely no hope? No crazy scheme with even a slim chance of success? I find that hard to believe."

"Well…" Abigail began uncertainly.

"I knew it," Charming bragged.

"There is this one legend, of a place called Lake Plotspeed, whose waters have the power to restore that which has been lost."

"Sweet. I wonder why King George never thought to use them on his hair?"

"Because the lake is guarded by a terrible beast that even our bravest knights haven't been able to defeat."

"Then today's your lucky day." The quasi-prince grinned. "As you may recall, terrible beasts that even your bravest knights haven't been able to defeat are an old specialty of mine."

"What's in it for you?" Abigail wanted to know. "You've already made it clear you don't want my money or my love. Are you after my hair?"

"What? No, what kind of weirdo would ask to be paid in hair?" Charming laughed. "I simply have a death wish," he explained.

"Just what every girl likes to hear from her champion before he marches into battle," the princess sighed. "All right, do what you have to do, but take this first." She handed him a little card. "It's the number for the suicide hotline. Promise me you'll give them a call before you head out."

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

August was huddled in his room at the only hotel in town, picking apart the Big Book of Déjà Vu and soaking the pieces in gasoline. "Heh heh! Once the original copy is safely burned, I'll be free to take full credit for this whimsical collection of non-traditional fairy tales. August W. Booth, you're an evil genius!"

A knock came at the door. "Mr. Booth?" Granny Lucas yelled. "I don't mean to pry, but I'm smelling a lot of chemical fumes from your room. Are you in there plagiarizing again?"
"Er, no ma'am, just running a small-scale meth lab." His hand flew to his nose. "Incidentally, you wouldn't happen to know of a good plastic surgeon anywhere in town?"

Regina Mills sat with her son in the Mayoral Lair. "Hey, Henry? Since gaslighting you seems to be failing miserably, I thought I'd give buying your love a try." She thrust a box at him.

Henry opened the package. "A Game Boy? You actually thought I'd be into this? What do I look like, some kind of Muggle?"

"Oh, come on, it'll be awesome!" said Regina. "This way, you can release your heroic energies on King Koopa and leave me to scheme in peace for a change. Now go on home. I'll be there to make dinner in a few."

"Plying me with bread and circuses, Mom?" Henry was unmoved. "I've read Juvenal and I know what you're trying to do, here."

"Do as you're told or I'm making applesauce for dessert!"

"No!" screamed Henry, terrified.

Regina took a deep breath and counted to ten. "Sorry, son, you didn't deserve that." She indicated the video game. "But if you can find some love in that great big heart of yours for me, there's plenty more loot where that came from."

"No deal," Henry said flatly. "You separated me from Emma, and there can be no forgiveness for that. I want a mother who I can trust not to selfishly manipulate my relationships with my biological parents."

"Then I'm afraid you're screwed either way, little buddy." She shoved him out the door.

Kathryn Nolan appeared in the doorway. "Hey, Reg? I hate to interrupt what passes for a heartwarming conversation around here, but I need some sympathy and I'm certainly not getting any from the audience."

"Yeah, you kind of brought that on yourself, becoming a lawyer and all."

"Regina, this is serious!" Kathryn bawled. "My husband just left me for the second time in two months. I'm starting to take this personally!"

"Eh, it's not your fault Mary Margaret's a skank."

"Mary Margaret, aka, Saint Eminem? A skank?" Kathryn chuckled through her tears. "I should probably be mad at you for cracking jokes at a time like this, but I needed a good laugh. Thanks, homegirl."

"Actually, I was serious," said Regina, fighting a smirk. "Sid got his hands on some photos of the two of them making out and was going to put them in the Municipal Enquirer, but I took them away from him so that I could use them for target practice." She paused. "Oh, and protect your marriage, too."

"Why would you want to do that?" asked Kathryn, flipping through photo after photo of David and Mary Margaret dancing around the local wishing well.
"Because I'm a fan of true love," said Regina innocently. And more importantly, what it decimates. Bwa hah hah!

"That does it!" Kathryn stormed out. "I've had quite enough of being surrounded by underhanded liars all the time. I'm going to law school!"

Princess Abigail and Prince Charming stumbled across what was either a large shrine or a very small junkyard. "Boy, someone should really tell the lake monster to pick up her toys once in a while," Charming observed.

"No, she didn't do this. The last few would-be heroes who came through here tried to butter her up with gifts." Abigail snorted. "Typical men."

Charming examined the offerings with disdain. "Aromatherapy candles? How the hell is she supposed to use these? She lives underwater. Rusty old battle helmets? A mop?!" He kicked the articles aside. "These are the most thoughtless gifts I've ever seen in my life! Even worse than a greeting card that says 'I Woof You'? Poor girl. If you ask me, she had every right to drown these insensitive tools." He took a bouquet of roses and a bottle of champagne out of his travel bag and placed them on the pile. "Here you go, baby. Enjoy."

Abigail raised her eyebrows. "Why are you traveling with roses and champagne?"

"Hey, my name is Charming, and I intend to live up to it," the quasi-prince declared. "Speaking of which, it wouldn't be very charming of me to hide behind a helpless girl in the upcoming battle. You'd better hang out here and knit until I get back."

"That's a fine thing for you of all people to say! Didn't you get your face bashed in by a girl not once, but twice?"

"Yeah." Charming caressed his scarred chin dreamily. "And I'll treasure the memory forever. But that's neither here nor there. If you had the guts to face the lake monster, theoretically you would have done it already, am I right?"

"For the record, I seriously considered it," Abigail defended, "but with Daddy compulsively morphing all the arms and armor in our kingdom into gold, finding usable equipment for such a quest proved to be impossible."

The quasi-prince drew his sword. "Shut up and do as you're told, female."

"Yes, sir."

At the Nolan home, David was thumbing through photo after photo of himself and Kathryn enjoying the fugly windmills of Holland. "Ugh." He shuddered. "It's a good thing I got out of this marriage before my next vacation rolled around. David picked up his phone. "Yo, Eminem?"

"Did you drop your wife like an overheated sword?" his girlfriend demanded.

"Well, hello to you, too."

"Answer the freaking question."
"I…didn't not neglect to not conceal the truth from her," David stuttered, sweating heavily.

Embarrassed to admit, as a professional educator, that she couldn't make grammatical sense of that statement, Mary Margaret simply answered, "Oh. Uh, good?"

"If you say so, baby. So, now that I allegedly manned up and told the truth, can we meet up after work? I miss my fluff buddy."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world, baby."

David had just hung up the phone when his doorbell rang. He answered it and found himself face to face with a fuming Archie Hopper. Without a word of explanation, the good doctor promptly smacked him in the face.

Howling, David clutched his rapidly swelling nose. "Agh! What the hell was that for?" he shrieked. "Ow, I think my nose just doubled in size."

"Sorry, David." Hopper looked slightly dazed. "I don't know what came over me. It just felt necessary."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Meanwhile, David's girl was facing down moral police of her own. Kathryn stormed into the only school in town and slapped her across the face. "Hey, no fighting in the halls!" a young hall monitor squeaked in protest.

"Screw you and screw your skanky teacher!" Kathryn snarled.

"Kathryn," said Mary Margaret gently, "you have every right to be upset, but a chick fight in regards to adultery? This confrontation is at least PG-13. Think of the children!"

"Screw them, too!"

Mary Margaret sighed. "Look, it's not as bad as you're making it out to be. David and I are free to live happily ever after, and someday your prince will come, too."

A sexy coach in bright gold gym shorts chose this moment to stumble into Kathryn. "She's got a point, you know."

Kathryn shoved him unceremoniously through a nearby window. "Don't try to distract me from your web of lies with hotties!"

"I've never lied to you," Mary Margaret insisted. "Trust me, if I had, you'd know. By all accounts, I really suck at it."

"You didn't lie to me! David did!"

"Then why aren't you slapping and screaming at him?" Mary Margaret was getting seriously confused.

"Because he's way bigger than me. You're a much easier target!" Kathryn flung one of the fallen coach's soccer balls at her rival's head and stormed off. "Screw it, you can keep the Spineless Wonder," she grumbled. "I don't know what I ever saw in him anyway. He's not even named Frederick!"

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Prince Charming arrived at the shores of Lake Plotspeed and found another knight in shining armor lounging serenely on the shore. "Who the hell are you?"

"Sir Lancelot du Lac. I live here."

"Well, there's only room for one handsome hero in this hood, so beat it! I don't ever want to see you around here again."

Lancelot smirked. "I have a feeling you'll change your tune someday. But I'll play along for now." He picked up his beach towel and hit the road.

Satisfied, the quasi-prince took out his thermos and stooped to fill it. At his touch, the water began rumbling ominously. "That must be the monster," he guessed. "Clearly, the only sensible thing to do is stick around and goad it into a fight, now that I have what I came for." He bared his neck boldly. "Come on out and take a bite of this, if you dare! C'mon, what are you, chicken?" he sneered.

A siren emerged from the churning waters, garbed in a fuzzy bathrobe, with a curling iron in hand. "Damn it, can't you heroes give me five minutes to myself for a change?"

August W. Booth pulled up to the only diner in town for his date with Emma and destiny. "Hey, baby. I know this may not compute, but you and I are going out for drinks at a place that is neither Granny's nor The Rabbit Hole." He tossed her a helmet. "Climb aboard. Time waits for no automaton."

"I don't know…" Emma hesitated. "The last time I took an impromptu ride with a mysterious stranger, I wound up pregnant and incarcerated."

"All good points," said Granny, "but on the other hand, he's sexy and leather-clad."

"Hm. Can't argue with that."

As the mysterious stranger drove her deeper and deeper into the woods, Emma grew nervous. "Should I have brought my chainsaw?"

August laughed. "No, no, save it for Jefferson." He pulled up in front of a wishing well.

"Wait a minute. You're taking me out for a drink of groundwater? You're not even going to pop for the fancy bottled kind? You must be the biggest cheapskate I've ever had the misfortune of dating!"

"If I told you it was rare, magical groundwater, would that help my case?"

The savior groaned. "I get enough crazy lectures on the role of magic in our cosmology from my son. I don't need it from a virtual stranger!"

"Ah, yes, little Henry. I don't suppose you've ever noticed how he always seems to be right about everything?"

"No," Emma denied a little too quickly for comfort.

"I can see I've got my work cut out for me. But back to the water…" he passed her a cup, "you really ought to give it a try. It comes from the pristine shores of Lake Plotspeed, and is fortified with plenty of siren hair for that extra kick."
Emma eyed the proffered glass doubtfully. "Do you get paid to sell this water or something?"

"Are you always this skeptical?" August groaned.

"Worse, usually."

"I'm in over my head, here." August contemplated drowning himself in the well, but upon realizing he'd just float to the top, he decided to stick around and keep on trying.

On the streets of Storybrooke, Mary Margaret found herself surrounded by complete strangers who cared about her love life for some reason. "Take a picture, it'll last longer!" she snapped.

"All right, if you insist." Sidney Glass pounced, camera in hand. "Hehe, this love triangle's going to be the biggest news story we've had since Ruby turned down Billy's invitation to the prom all those years ago!"

"Shame, shame, shame, on your, your name!" Granny scolded, rubbing her forefingers at Mary Margaret. "I don't know how you can look in the mirror after what you've done."

"And I don't know how you can look in the mirror after what you've done to your hair," Mary Margaret retorted. The two women both broke down crying and ran home in shame.

"What's your name?" the siren cooed, looking as evil as a sparkly chick in a tiara possibly could.

"Well, I used to be named David, but then when I was ten, that bully Goliath nicknamed me Honeymuffin, and everyone thought it was hilarious. Pretty soon, even my own mom was using it. Then my twin brother died and bequeathed me the name of James, along with a really cool stamp collection. Unfortunately, before I could get it to catch on, I met my True Love, who rechristened me Charming. She claims she did it because 'Charming' suited me, but honestly, I think she just lacked the adequate mental capacity to remember my many names. Then we—"

"Enough!" The siren held up a hand, looking pained. "You're giving me a migraine, whoever you are. Let's talk about my name for a while." She strolled toward him across the surface of the lake.

"Okay. Is it Jesus?"

"No. To you, it's 'Hot Mama'."

"Are you hitting on me?" Charming raised his sword in a defensive gesture. "Stay back! Every time a woman expresses a romantic interest in me, I end up getting attacked. Somehow I doubt you're going to be the one to break that pattern."

"Ooh, a hardcore skeptic," the siren giggled. "You'd best be careful. I hear that's hereditary."

"Shut up!"

"You seem hostile. Maybe you'll be more kindly disposed toward the woman who broke your heart and ruined your life. It's morphin' time!" She dumped a handful of deliciously fortified water over her head and promptly shapeshifted into Ginnifer Goodwin. "Like me more, now, Honeymuffin?"

"I thought I told you never to call me that again, Snow," Charming grated.
"Fine, whatever your name is. Shall we share Phony Love's Kiss now?" She leaned in expectantly.

"Ew, your breath reeks of pond scum." Charming recoiled in disgust. "Plus you're just trying to kill me."

"Yeah, so? What do you have to live for anyway?"

"My sacred quest to ensure the happiness of the spoiled brat who kidnapped me."

"Wow, you're way too good for this sinful earth." She dragged him into the deeps. "Trust me, I'm doing you a favor, here." Halfway to the floor of the lake, however, the creature's arms began to get tired. "Damn, you're heavy. I'm putting you on the honor system for a minute. Follow me."

"Hell no!" Charming swam like a bloodsucking monster was chasing, which it totally was. "Just a little tip for the next time you bring a guy home, the mangled corpses all over the place are a real turn-off. And would it kill you to pick up this floor? I almost stepped on this dagger." He did a double-take. "Dagger! Score!"

"I can't believe how long you've managed to hold your breath," the siren exclaimed. "Such stamina! Ooh, we're going to have so much fun together."

"Thanks, but I'm not really into murderous fiends. What do I look like, that sicko Belle?" Before the Siren could get all outraged and contact the Monstrous Anti-Defamation League, Charming stabbed her and hit the road.

Back in Storybrooke, someone who was probably named Regina had spray painted the word "TRAMP" all over Mary Margaret's tacky SUV. David attacked the graffiti with a scrub brush.

"Damn, this scarlet 'A' is really stuck on here!"

"What's going on here?" Mary Margaret came over to check out the damage. "Tramp?" The amnesiac princess laughed. "That was the vilest epithet they could find for a notorious adulterer? Man, whoever did this has either no imagination or an army of censors following them around."

"I'm glad you're taking this so well, because I've got more bad news. A couple of bluebirds pooped on your windshield."

"No!" she wailed. "Not the bluebirds too? Everyone I love has turned against me!"

"Ahem," coughed David, raising his hand.

"Let me rephrase that. Everyone I love has turned against me or failed to inform his wife about our relationship."

"Oh. You heard about that, huh?"

"Did you really think I wouldn't? This is Storybrooke! Last week, Ruby stepped on a caterpillar and it made the front page of the freaking paper!"

"Okay, so maybe I lied!" David admitted grudgingly. "So maybe I'm a dishonest creep with a history of abandoning the women he loves. So maybe I'm refusing to take responsibility for the mess I've gotten you into. But none of that changes the fact that you're incredibly hot and I'm incredibly eligible."
"I'm not going to dignify that pathetic excuse for an excuse with a response." Mary Margaret whacked him over the head with a bird feeder. "Where the hell is your common sense today?"

"I think it went to find my sensitivity, my courage, my sense of adventure, and my sense of romance."

"Well, until you find them, stay the hell away from me." His now former squeeze stormed off. "Geez, this guy's starting to make Whale look good to me again. How sad is that?"

Emma lovingly brushed some dead leaves off her Love Bug. "Ah, Herbie, at least you'll never leave me." She suddenly noticed a grimy red box floating in the gutter. "Ew, some litterbug left an old pizza box under my car!"

"It's Henry's book, you idiot!" a voice that sounded a lot like August's yelled from around the corner.

"Huh, so it is. How convenient."

"Do you believe in magic yet?"

"Hell no."

"Damn it!"

Kathryn found Regina watering plants around the Mayoral Lair. "Spiffy flowers."

"Thanks, they're poisonous. I mean, delicious. Bwa hah hah!"

"Er, how nice," Kathryn stammered. "I just dropped by to apologize for calling you an underhanded liar."

"Really? You shouldn't have." The mayor squirmed uncomfortably. "Seriously, it's totally true."

"Aw, don't be so hard on yourself, bestie," Kathryn soothed.

Regina was ready to tear her hair out, then Kathryn's, then hers again. "Can you stop being so infuriatingly likable? Just for five minutes!" she pleaded.

"You sound just like David."

"Ah, you mean the love of your life?"

"No, I mean the love of Mary Margaret's life."

"Traitor!" Regina screamed, a sudden barrage of lightning and thunder crashing outside.

"Sorry, but I've made up my mind." Kathryn insisted. "I've decided to take everyone's advice about making myself less likable. I'm leaving town to become a lawyer. I left David a friendly Dear James letter, along with the house, the bank account, and all our other assets. Ah, I know law school costs a bundle, but maybe I can sneak in under a turnstile or something. I wouldn't want to make trouble for anyone."

"You're off to a terrible start on your goal of becoming less likable, homegirl," Regina sighed,
reluctantly accepting a hug from her soon-to-be-late friend. "But I guess it's none of my business. It's been nice knowing you, and I truly hope your pain threshold is high."

---------------------------------------------

Abigail pulled out a BB gun and fired away at a flock of birds perching on her freshly-polished beloved. "Beat it, you guys!"

Prince Charming marched triumphantly into the clearing, thermos held high. "As requested, an extra-large helping of piping hot tomato soup!"

"You moron!" Infuriated, the princess pumped up her air rifle.

Charming chuckled. "Just playing, it's the deliciously fortified water of Lake Plotspeed."

"You hero!" She tossed the weapon aside. "However did you do it?"

"I'm awesome, and experienced at dealing with abusive women," he explained simply. "Now let's do this thing, I've got places to go and princesses to stalk."

Abigail dumped the thermos over her garish lover, and his coat of gold melted away. "Where am I?" Frederick moaned. "I feel like crap. Am I hung over?"

"Probably, but what's important is that you were cursed, and now you're free." The princess' smile faded for a moment. "Daddy's not going to like this."

Charming was trying to hide his tears behind a handkerchief. "This is all so beautiful. I wish I had my camera."

"Who are you?" Frederick asked.

The quasi-prince flinched. "Please don't ask me that. For all our sakes."

Abigail took out a camcorder and microphone. "Prince Charming, you've just defeated yet another ferocious beast. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going wherever the trail of bluebirds takes me!" Charming crowed. "I know Snow said she didn't love me, but that was just because I haven't been trying hard enough. I'm breaking out my A game now! Binoculars, psychotropic drugs, the Charming Family Charm…she won't know what hit her!"

"Well, watch yourself. In case you haven't noticed yet, your dad's kind of psychotic."

---------------------------------------------

Regina ran over to the Nolan house and whipped out her trusty set of skeleton keys. "Heh heh. Turning that locksmith into a toad was the best investment I ever made." She snatched up Kathryn's Dear James letter and tucked it safely in her purse. "You're going down, you little snitch!"

---------------------------------------------

At the only school in town, Henry was sitting on a bench trying to act like a pre-teen boy, for once. He attacked his video game uncertainly. "This blocky little screen is making my head hurt. Am I supposed to be the colorless triangles or the colorless squares?" He rubbed his eyes. "If Mom wanted to buy my love with electronics, she could have at least sprung for a decent Xbox instead of this outdated piece of junk."
Emma sat down beside him. "Cool, Space Invaders!"

"Shh! You want to get sued?" Henry hissed, putting a finger to her lips. "This is Space Paranoids and don't you forget it!" He studied his mother's face. "What's with that smile? Did you have a canary sandwich for lunch or something?"

"No, I found your book." She handed it over, beaming. "You may start geeking out in five, four, three, two, one…"

"Eeeeee!" squealed Henry. "How'd you do it? A daring moonlit heist on Mom's evil lair? An epic quest with lots of cool chainsaw action?"

"No, I found it lying under my car."

"What, seriously?" Henry's face fell. "That's kind of anticlimactic, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I thought it was deliciously mysterious. The book must have somehow been washed out of its hiding place by the recent storm, sunk down into some hidden aquifer, floated down into the sewers, been piloted through a storm drain by a local tribe of Borrowers, who subsequently drowned under the leaking oil pan of my Love Bug, leaving me to accidentally stumble across the book and return it to its rightful owner." Emma had been up for two nights in a row piecing together this scenario.

Her son raised his eyebrows. "Or it could have been magic."

Emma jammed her fingers in her ears and closed her eyes. "La la la la la! I can't hear you!"

"Oh, Emma, even a reminder of our family history of chronic skepticism can't dampen my mood right now."

Hi ho, Silver!" cried Prince Charming, spurring his tacky white horse on. "You know, I ride pretty well for a guy who was a peasant until a couple of weeks ago. I guess I'm just a natural prince at heart." He pulled up in front of Red's little cottage. "Hey, Snow? I know you're in there! I stuck a tracking chip on you when I had you trapped in that net!"

Red wandered outside. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Ja—uh, Char—uh, Honey—oh, I don't even remember anymore! I'm Snow White's man and that's good enough for me!"

"Really? Good luck with that. According to her latest postcard, she just shacked up with seven men at once."

He quirked an eyebrow. "Wow. I guess it's always the innocent-looking ones. Well, no matter. I will always find her. It's my catchphrase and everything, so I don't really have a choice. And then I'll charm her! It's my name and everything, so I don't really have a choice about that, either."

"Hey," Red laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. "That line about shacking up with seven guys was just a joke. Their relationship is totally platonic." She paused. "Well, truthfully, I think Dopey's got a crush on her, but don't worry, she doesn't requite it."

"She's not great at requiting, is she?" Charming couldn't keep the bitterness out of his voice.
"I don't know, I think this suggests otherwise." She handed him the diary Snow had left behind.

"What's this?" Charming thumbed through the book incredulously. "'Mr. and Mrs. Charming 4-Ever,' 'Once you go Charming, you'll never go back,' 'I like big frauds and I cannot lie…'" He frowned. "What gives? She told me she didn't love me."

"She told me she did."

"But she told me she didn't."

"But she told me she did."

"But she told me she didn't."

"But she told me she did."

"And I tell you she doesn't!" roared King George as he charged toward them, all decked out in a chainmail toupee. "Off with his head, boys!"

Charming just rolled his eyes. "You think I'm afraid of a guy who has to plagiarize his battle cries from the Queen of Hearts?" He hauled Red onto his horse. "Come on, whoever you are. I'll keep you safe."

"Thanks," said Red, baring a set of wicked sharp fangs, "but that's really not necessary."

"Ah!" Charming yelped. "Midgets, feral huntsmen, and now werewolves? Man, Snow has even crazier taste in friends than she does in guys."

Back at the Princess Pad, Emma found Mary Margaret huddled in bed, singing tearfully into her favorite stuffed bluebird. "I'm wishing (I'm wishing)...for someone (for someone)...to shoot me (to shoot me)...today."

"Hey, Eminem?" Emma ventured. "I brought you some Zoloft cupcakes."

"I think I'm going to need something a little stronger this time, Emma," she sobbed.

"Are you getting at what I think you're getting at?"

"Yep."

"All right, just this once," Emma sighed, enfolding her mother in her arms. "Comfort mode!"

Meanwhile, Regina was putting a torch to Kathryn's Dear James letter. "And they said installing a fireplace in an office building was just a wasteful extravagance. Bwa hah hah! Who's laughing now?"

At the town line, Kathryn took a deep breath. "Okay, Kathryn, this is it. If you can get across this line without crashing, you'll be a pioneer and a legend!" She put her foot on the gas and promptly slammed into a ditch. "Ow. This is harder than it looks."
Later that night, a sexy coach in bright gold gym shorts came driving up behind her. "Mrs. Nolan? Not that I've been stalking you or anything, but word on the street is, you just became single again. Would you be interested in joining me for groundwater some time?" He noticed her car lying mangled in the ditch and smiled smugly. "Hey, baby, it looks like you need a knight in unnaturally shiny armor. Well, I happen to know just the guy—" He opened the door and was dismayed to see a crash test dummy sitting in his girl's place. "Aw, damn. First the mayor shoots down my proposal to return to the gold standard, now this!"
Dreamy

On a cloud in some non-denominational heaven, a student flyer by the name of Nova crashed to an awkward stop. Her mentor, the Blue Fairy, winced. "Now do you see why I told you to wear the helmet?"

"Sorry, Blue. I was doing fine until I almost crashed into that big-eared baby elephant. Besides, I wasn't expecting water vapor to be this hard." She gave the cloud an angry kick.

The Blue Fairy swatted her over the head with her wand. "No excuses! The dust you're carrying is worth over one million mana points, and powers all the magic in our land. Well, except that of Queen Regina. And Rumplestiltskin. And the Mad Hatter, and the Genie of Agrabah, and Lake Plotspeed, and everybody's lips, and—"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it." Nova had already heard this speech several hundred times. That week. "Just out of curiosity, why are you sending something so valuable home with a newbie like me instead of just magicking it there with a 'bippity boppity boo'? Or at least getting me a My Little Pegasus to help with the heavy lifting?"

"It's called hazing," the Blue Fairy replied unapologetically. "Now, back to Talking Animal House, pledge, and no more lip!"

Resentfully, Nova flung a handful of dust at her the moment her back was turned. Unfortunately, she missed, and the pinch of glitter fluttered down, down, down, landing on a giant egg in the local dwarf hatchery.

The eggs' erstwhile daycare provider, Watchy, scrambled to the rescue. "No!" he cried, frantically scouring the glitter from the pristine white shell.

"What's wrong?" asked Watchy's boss, Bossy.

"Fairy dust is a violent teratogen! It curses its victims with romantic potential, and worse yet—" Watchy shuddered. "Sometimes it causes them to develop more than one personality trait."

"Poor sap," Bossy lamented. "Well, there's no sense crying over spilled mana. It looks like he's ready to hatch. Get me a nutcracker and the biggest receiving blanket you can find."

A bouncing, bald, bearded baby boy poked his head out of the glittering egg. "Yo."

"Welcome to beautiful British Columbia, dwarf."

At the only diner in Storybrooke, Leroy was ingesting something solid for a change. He devoured a boiled egg while thumbing idly through a National Geographic article on the phenomenon of cannibalism.

Mr. Clark and his friend Walter walked in, chattering excitedly about their plans to open a new Hi-Ho-Health pharmacy in town. "Hey, Leroy, could you do something considerate for us?"

"The bitter, angry sneer on my face would seem to indicate not." He sprinkled some pepper on his egg, causing Mr. Clark to sneeze all over it. He leveled a death glare at the pharmacist. "Dude, you run a drugstore! How freaking hard is it to get yourself some antihistamines?" Disgusted, he got up
and abandoned his plate.

Clark sat down in front of it and picked up his fork, smirking triumphantly. "Heh heh. Stick with me, Walter, and you'll never pay for another meal in your life."

"Excuse me?" Mary Margaret walked in, smiling nervously. "Can I have your attention? Positive attention, that is, and not the scorn and revilement you've all been heaping on me lately?"

"Hell no," the entire crowd answered in perfect unison.

"Aw, come on!" she whined. "I'm trying to help a bunch of impoverished nuns with a holiday fundraiser, here. The only way my goals could possibly get any nobler would be to somehow work in saving a puppy from a burning building. And we already have Emma for that sort of thing."

Her pleas were met with the sound of chirping crickets. "Damn it, Archie," she grumbled under her breath, "you just had to bring those stupid things back to Storybrooke, didn't you?"

Leroy stood up. "Eminem, give it up. You're now at a point where earthworms, Mole People, and even I can look down on you."

Fighting back tears, Mary Margaret grabbed a Zoloft cupcake from the bar and ran off in bitter defeat.

"Hey, Mary Margaret?" Emma ventured, following her outside. "I don't really care, but as your bestie, I'm contractually obligated to ask what this Miners' Day thing you're so upset about is."

"What, seriously?" Mary Margaret's eyebrows shot up. "You've been here for how long, now, with your exposition fairy of a son hanging around, and you've somehow managed to remain ignorant of this town's most cherished holiday? What kind of public official are you?"

"The antisocial kind."

"Fair enough. Well, Miners' Day celebrates the anniversary of the completion of that 'Ave Maria' sequence from Disney's Fantasia."

"Why the hell would that warrant its own holiday?"

Mary Margaret shrugged. "Life's rough, here in Storybrooke, and we'll do just about anything for an excuse to get drunk. That's why we call it Miners' Day. The bartenders look the other way this one day out of the year and don't card any minors, and we're usually too drunk to spell properly. We'll usually sell some candles for the local convent in order to mitigate our guilt over this depraved practice, but nobody wants to help me with that this year, just because I'm a skank." She pouted.

"Huh," the sheriff mused. "I wonder why the townsfolk are placing all of the blame for this affair on you, the woman, instead of the two-timing man. If I didn't know any better, I'd swear there was something...medieval about their outlook." Listening behind a nearby door, Henry and August shared a victorious high-five. "Anyway, Mary Margaret, you don't have to do charity work to win people over. You're not a politician."

"Well, then, what do you suggest? That I pay everyone in town fifty bucks to start being nice to me again? Sic my army of bluebirds on them? Get Gold to stage an elaborate spectacle in which I come out looking heroic?"

"That..." said Emma, slowly and carefully, "or you could just quit giving a damn about the opinion of ignorant gossips who treat you like dirt."
"Oh, Emma!" Mary Margaret chuckled. "Thanks for saying that. I needed a good laugh."

In front of the Mayoral Lair, the good people of Storybrooke were setting up one beer tent after another. Leroy strolled by to see if there were any unattended kegs lying around, but got distracted when a maelstrom of fiery sparks rained down on his head. "Ah! The sky is falling!" he screamed, dropping into the duck-and-cover position.

The nun responsible gave him a queer look. "What are you, Chicken Little?"

"I don't think so," said Leroy, "although that would explain the strange feeling of kinship I felt to that egg I had for breakfast." He took his first good look at her and blushed furiously. "Uh, that is, of course not. If I were a storybook character, I see myself as more of a Prince Charming type."

"Well, you certainly couldn't do a worse job of it than David Nolan has been lately." The pair shared a brief giggle.

"So," said Leroy, "would you like me to take a look at old Sparky for you? I mean, I'm not injured, but if you'd dropped those sparks on someone with hair, you'd be looking at a major lawsuit."

"Sorry," the nun apologized. "I don't actually know anything about electronics. I just came up here to hide. That damn Sister Mary Clarence has been following me around singing jazz again."

"Well, if she gives you any more trouble, just let me know," Leroy offered, climbing up the ladder to check out the damage. "Smacking stuff into submission is both my greatest skill and my favorite pastime." He slammed a big meaty fist into the transformer, and it turned itself back on in sheer terror. "See?"

"Wow! You're awesome!" she squealed.

"Are you being sarcastic?" he asked warily.

"Does this look like the face of someone who's ever even heard of sarcasm?" The nun smiled angelically, and a beam of brilliant white light shone down on her from above.

"Oh, sorry, is that too bright?" Leroy gave the light another smack, and the halo faded.

"Ooh, you're so masterful," she gushed. "I'm single—uh, I mean, Astrid."

Leroy smiled shyly. "Nice meeting you, Astrid, but I've really got to get going. I'm running late for my job as Sylvester Stallone's stuntman."

"Oh?"

"Okay, fine, that was a lie," Leroy admitted. "Actually, I'm captain of my very own sailboat."

"Really?"

"N-no. I'm really a washed-up toilet scrubber who was recently featured on Dirty Jobs." He scowled, and a number of nearby plants withered and died in response. "Happy now?"

"Aw, come on," Astrid soothed, giving his hand an encouraging squeeze. "There's always hope. You've just got to climb every mountain, ford every stream, and follow every rainbow till you find your dream!" She handed him a pamphlet. "And maybe give Alcoholics Anonymous a try, too."
At the town line, Emma was taking a long, hard look at Kathryn's abandoned car. "What gives? Is this ditch filled with magnets or something?"

Sidney Glass popped out of a nearby ditch, a camera in one hand and a vigorously squirming Hefty bag in the other. "Emma? Fancy meeting you here."

"Sidney? What are you doing out here?"

"Nothing incriminating," he said, covertly shoving the body bag under a bush. "How about yourself?"

The sheriff made a pathetic attempt to hide the car behind her back. "Also nothing incriminating. Thank you for asking."

"Oh, will you come off it, Emma?" Sidney rolled his eyes. "This is obviously the work of David Nolan. Look," he pointed. "Who else would have spray painted a fugly windmill on the windshield?"

"Er, maybe Don Quixote's in town?" she stammered lamely.

"Emma, why are you even trying to protect this guy in the first place? You barely know him, and he's repeatedly hurt and deceived your best friend."

"Yeah, but Henry says he's my dad, and the kid has this uncanny habit of being right about everything."

"Well, I can't argue with that," Sidney conceded. "Not after he successfully predicted every last one of this year's Oscar picks for me. But you've got to admit, this whole situation is fishier than an all-you-can-eat seafood buffet."

"Fine, fine!" Emma griped. "If you're going to make a federal case out of this silly little apparent murder, I'll go get a warrant for Kathryn's phone records and get on the case."

Sidney was shocked and appalled. "Emma, are you seriously planning on conducting your investigation through the proper legal channels?"

"Well, I am a cop and everything…"

He slapped her hard across the face. "Snap out of it, Swan!"

She shook herself abruptly. "Whew, thanks for snapping me out of that, homie. I don't know what came over me." She handed him a wad of cash. "Here, go bribe that info out of the first stool pigeon you can find and score me some black market Cuban cigars with whatever's left."

David's pickup came rolling up next to them, and Emma steeled herself. "All right, time to break this bit of delicate news to the grieving widower." She grimaced. "Let's hope I haven't inherited my daddy's tact, or lack thereof."

"Emma, you don't seriously believe this guy's innocent? Here all this time I thought you were smart."

"Look, if there's one thing I've learned in all my years as a Perry Mason viewer, it's the unquestionable innocence of the most obvious suspect."
Bossy took a pair of scissors to the newly-hatched minor miner. "Hold still while I nab a lock of beard for your baby book."

"I'm a baby?"

"And a dwarf."

"Aren't I a little tall to be either of those things?"

"Yeah, but what are ya gonna do?"

"And why did I just hatch from an egg?" the newborn dwarf babbled on. "I have hair. Aren't I a mammal?"

"Er…yes and no?"

"And where did the egg come from? Whoever laid it must have been huge!"

"Well, I—"

"And who are you? Are you my daddy?"

"No."

"My agent?"

"No!"

"Captain Jack Sparrow?"

"NO!" He swatted the balding baby over the head with the handle of a pickaxe. "Now shut up or I'm using the pointy end next time!"

"Meanie," the newborn pouted. "I'm telling my girlfriend."

"Girlfriend?" scoffed Bossy. "Dwarves don't have girlfriends. Have you taken a good look in the mirror lately?"

"Oh. Well, then, who do we flirt and argue over the position of the toilet seat with?"

"Runaway princesses, mostly."

"That sounds lame."

"Well, don't worry. You won't have much time for socializing, what with all the slave labor you're going to be performing," chirped Bossy, clamping a set of shackles on the hatchling's ankles and dragging him off to the chain gang to join the rest of the child laborers.

The newborn was getting suspicious. "Are you sure this is legal? Is there a phone around here? I'd like to call OSHA and—"

Bossy raised his pickaxe menacingly. "What did I tell you about asking questions?"

The baby cowered. "Sorry, sir."

"Good boy." He turned to address the rest of the octuplets. "Allow me to welcome you all to the Blue Industries family. There's no medical insurance or 401k, but we do offer complimentary
whistling lessons to all our valued employees. Now line up and get your pickaxes, everyone. You'll find your dwarf name on the shaft, your Elvish name on the handle grip, and your Inuit name on the hilt. But just ignore those last two."

He tossed an axe to the first dwarf. "Doc," the handle read. "Congratulations, doctor," said Bossy. "You are now overqualified for every job in this place." He took the pick out of Doc's hand and replaced it with a check. "Here, take your severance pay and get down to Ye Olde Unemployment Office."

"Aw, come on!" Doc whined. "Let me stay and I promise I'll dumb it down. I can drool! I can watch reality TV! I can even yodel! Here, listen—"

Looking pained, Bossy held up a hand to stop him. "I'll let you stay if you promise never to subject me to that particular talent."

"Resplendent! Uh, I mean, cool, dude." He shuffled off nervously.

The next dwarf in line came forward. "Dopey," his axe read. Dopey glared. "Hey, man, this is very offensive."

Bossy shrugged. "Yeah, but on the other hand, would you rather go through life with a name like 'Developmentally Disabled the Dwarf'? Everyone would probably end up calling you DeeDee."

The dwarf moved along. "Dopey it is."

A third dwarf stepped up to the plate. "Dreamy," he read. "Well, I guess the axe never lies," he gloated, preening in a nearby mirror.

"Actually, I think it means dreamy in the context of someone who dreams a lot, not dreamy in the context of someone who's charming and sexy," Bossy whispered.

"Oh." Crestfallen, Dreamy stood aside.

"What's with all the adjectives?" the next dwarf in line inquired. "If these tools are really such experts on names, why haven't they got any normal ones, like Bob or Phil, in their repertoire?"

"A smart mouth, huh?" sneered Bossy. "Well, we have ways of dealing with your kind." He took out a Sharpie and scrawled the name "Bashful" on the troublemaker's pickaxe.

Bashful opened his mouth to protest, but was overcome by a wave of crippling social anxiety.

"Heh heh!" cackled Bossy. "Next, please." He handed an axe to the next dwarf.

"Happy?" Happy frowned. "You know, this puts a lot of pressure on me to be upbeat. I'm not sure that's healthy."

Bossy handed him a bottle of Prozac. "Shut up, Happy, and remember to do it with a smile!" he barked.

"Yes sir," Happy plastered a numb grin on his face.

Another dwarf stepped up to the plate. "Sneezy?" he read in disbelief. "You've got to be kidding me. My defining character trait is an allergic reaction? This has to be the weakest virtue name ever conceived! The Puritans would be disgusted!"

"Hey, you want to trade?" Dopey challenged.
"Er, on second thought, Sneezy's fine," Sneezy said meekly.

"Sleepy," read a seventh dwarf. "Hey, you know what would be cool? If my middle name was 'Hollow'!"

"Dwarves don't have middle names," Bossy replied. "Just like we don't have babes, labor unions, or barbers."

Dismayed at the prospect of a life without love, rights, or style, the eighth dwarf tried to sneak off into the shadows. Bossy grabbed him by the shoulder. "And just where do you think you're going, Stealthy?"

"Uh, to get a head start on my lifetime of eternal toil?" Stealthy fibbed.

"Damn right you are." Bossy cracked a bullwhip. "All right, boys, move out. Today is the first triple shift of the rest of your lives!"

Mary Margaret sat at a table in the Volunteer Center, composing a letter. "Dear Mother Superior, I'm afraid I must respectfully decline your request that I get my adulterous butt out of this fundraiser and quit scaring off all your potential customers and volunteers. I'm on a sacred quest to increase my popularity, and if that ends up costing you and the other nuns your home and place of worship, well, that a price I'm willing to pay." She paused, glancing up. "Leroy? I suppose you've come to heckle me some more?"

Leroy was annoyed. "I have a life outside of heckling people."

"Do not."

"Well, I'm trying to develop one!" he snapped. "I thought maybe helping with this fundraiser would be a good first step."

"Sorry," said Mary Margaret, "but this is a mission of Christian charity. Repentant sinners have no place here."

"What, you mean like adulteresses who prey on the severely mentally ill?" Leroy retorted.

Mary Margaret sighed. "Fine, you're in, but I get to treat you like garbage."

"Sweet!"

On the other side of the room, the Mother Superior was gaping at Astrid in disbelief. "So…let me get this straight. You accidentally ordered a hundred and forty four tanks of helium?" She shook her head incredulously. "Accidentally? How does that even work?"

Astrid shrugged, sheepish. "I don't know, but somehow I found a way."

The Mother Superior clasped her hands in prayer, glancing skyward. "Oh, how do you solve a problem like Astrid?"

"Same way you solve a problem like Maria," Leroy interjected. "Kick her out of the convent and marry her off to some old grouch." He grinned suggestively. "If you have trouble finding one, I just happen to be single."
"Thanks for the advice, Leroy," said the Mother Superior, "but I'd rather she just got our rent money back before we end up in hock to Gold. I hear he has a habit of tying up and kidnapping his debtors, and I'm not into that sort of thing." She took off, shuddering violently.

"I couldn't help overhearing your dilemma," said Leroy to Astrid. "I was wondering, why don't you just recoup your losses by reselling the helium?"

"I wish I could," Astrid replied with a heavy heart, "but it's too late for that. All one hundred and forty-four canisters were stolen and inhaled last night by our local Alvin and the Chipmunks fan club."

"Rats! Well, do you have anything else you could sell?"

"Just the candles for the fundraiser, and getting people around here to buy them is a joke. All the money in town belongs to Gold, and if you try to sell him anything, he just releases the hounds."

"Oh." Leroy considered the situation for a minute, a sly smile slowly creeping across his face. "Well, if you need somewhere to crash after you get evicted, you're welcome to come stay at my place. I only have one bed, but I don't mind sharing."

"That's sweet of you, Leroy," said Astrid, still oblivious. "But if we get evicted, I'll just leave Storybrooke."

"Leave Storybrooke?" the drunk repeated, clutching his head in pain and confusion. "Is that physically possible?"

"I guess I'll find out."

"Over my dead body!" thundered Leroy. "Or yours. Yeah, probably yours."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I'm going to sell all your candles, lose ten pounds, and travel around the world in eighty days!" the drunk proclaimed grandly.

Astrid giggled. "You're full of hot air. I love that in a man."

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Back at the crash site, David was crying like a newborn who'd been stuffed in a closet. "My wife is gone without a trace? Wow, I guess you really do have to be careful what you wish for. This is all so shocking!"

"Shocking, you say? Would you be willing to repeat that with a lie detector hooked up to one hand and a Bible under the other?" Emma challenged.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," David vowed solemnly.

"I believe you, then." The sheriff breathed a sigh of relief. "It's a good thing, too. I wasn't looking forward to telling Henry that yet another of his relatives had become a jailbird."

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In the bleak, black mines of the land organized labor forgot, Dreamy the Dwarf was shoveling rocks into a surprisingly sophisticated pre-industrial machine. "Look down, look down, don't look 'em in the eye. Look down, look down. You're here until you die," he sang despondently.
At the other end of the fairy dust dispenser, Nova was filling her LL Bean backpack. "Ugh, I can't believe I wasted four years on that stupid Fey Studies degree, only to end up as a delivery girl. I should have gone pre-med like my mom wanted." She tugged at the off switch with her wimpy little arms. "Or maybe majored in physical education." A flood of sparkles poured out over her. "Great, now I look like Rumplestiltskin's long-lost love child! Damn it, I could really use a big strong man right about now."

Dreamy, having overheard her plight, presented himself for duty. "I'm two of those three things. Will I do?"

Nova looked him over with a low whistle. "Mm, I'll say!"

"Hey, I know you," Dreamy realized. "I saw your face once upon a dream."

Nova giggled. "You stole that line from Prince Philip, but I like you enough to overlook that for now."

"No, I mean literally. It was during my evolutionarily impossible birth last year—"

"You're one?!" Nova shrieked in horror. "Ew, I'm a pedophile!"

"I don't think it counts as pedophilia when the guy has wrinkles and a beard," Dreamy pointed out. "But you've got bigger problems to deal with right now. Our surprisingly sophisticated pre-industrial machine is trying to eat your bag of fairy dust."

Nova looked up at the bag, which was hurtling toward a fiery furnace, with mild disinterest. "Eh, big deal. Fairy dust is made of diamonds, which are made of carbon in tight covalent bonds that can't melt. Worst case scenario is that the bag it's in will burn away and I'll have to carry it home in a dustpan."

"Oh. That's too bad," said Dreamy, "because a minor crisis like that really would have brought us closer together."

Nova brightened. "Well, when you put it that way…" She pressed the back of her hand to her forehead. "Oh no! My precious dust is in jeopardy and I'm not ambitious enough to simply fly up and retrieve it! Oh, if only some moderately-sized strong man was willing to come to my aid."

"Dreamy to the rescue!" The dwarf leapt onto the conveyor belt, dodged a couple of dueling Jedi, glanced over his shoulder to make sure Nova was watching, performed a couple of cartwheels for her amusement, then finally grabbed the dust and carried it back down to her. "Here, baby."

"I suck at being a fairy," Nova lamented tearfully. "Tinkerbell's never going to let me hear the end of this."

"You're welcome," Dreamy prodded.

"And my social skills are terrible, too! I don't know what ever possessed me to think mentoring would be a practical career choice for me."

"Aw, don't be so hard on yourself," the dwarf soothed. "You'll get your big break eventually. You've just got to climb every mountain, ford every stream and follow every rainbow till you find your dream."

"Catchy. My name's Nova, by the way. It can mean both 'newbie' and 'catastrophic explosion'. How apt is that?"
"I'm Dreamy." Dreamy preened. "In the charming and sexy sense, as well as the dream-prone sense."

"Nice to meet you, Dreamy. Tell me, have you ever seen been to see the fireflies?"

"Naw." He gestured at her translucent insectoid wings. "Honestly, you're the closest thing to a fly that I've ever seen. And I mean that as a compliment, of course."

Nova's face lit up like the sky at Cinderella's wedding. "Then it's a date?"

"A date? Why would I want a date? I hate dried fruit."

"No, I mean—oh, forget it," sighed Nova. "I guess this is what comes of falling for a one-year-old.

At the Miners' Day festival, Mary Margaret and Leroy sat hocking their wares to the most judgmental passersby of all time. "Buy a candle made by Storybrooke's very own Order of St. Jiminy? Come on, I know you can hear me!" She decided to try a different approach. "Hey, lady! Buy a candle or I'm going after your husband next!"

Leroy yawned. "Eminem, give it up. You're about as forceful as a teddy bear on Xanax."

"Do you have any better ideas?"

"Yeah. We can go door to door with a carton of eggs and tell people to buy a damn candle or we'll bombard their homes."

At another booth, Sidney was playing a rousing game of ring toss. "Score! I'm strong as ten regular men, definitely. Hey, could someone get a picture of my big win and send it to Regina?" He noticed Emma approaching. "Uh, to intimidate her with my fearsome prowess."

"What the hell are you doing?" Emma hissed, hauling him aside by one ear.

"Ow! I'm taking a five minute break from scheming for once in my life. Deal with it!" He slapped her hand away. "What gives? Nothing scandalous has happened, I hope?"

Emma just stared at him. "Since when?"

Seeing that he was laying it on too thick, Sidney backtracked. "Since I've been enjoying my break so much. But you're right, it's time to get back to business. Bring on the scandal."

"Well, I just got off the phone with Kathryn's law school. She's either dead, or disillusioned to discover it wasn't the bastion of integrity she imagined, because she never registered."

Mary Margaret and Leroy ran by, toting several dozen eggs and some cans of shaving cream. "Emma! Do you think I look more sympathetic with or without this scarlet letter on my dress?"

"Definitely without."

"Thanks, homie!" She tossed the letter aside and scampered off, surly sidekick in tow.

"Uh, Emma?" Sidney spoke up gently. "I don't want to tell you how to do your job or anything, but shouldn't you be hauling her in for questioning instead of giving her fashion tips?"

"Look, I know Mary Margaret's the last person Kathryn was seen with, that they came to blows in
front of a large crowd, and she had every reason to want her dead. But she's my roomie, and if she goes to jail, I'll have to make the rent by myself."

Meanwhile, Snow White and the Seven Deadly Sins had taken their show on the road, to no avail. "Hello, we're selling candles for Miners' Day, because we're just that cool," said Mary Margaret proudly.

"Buy one or eat albumen!" barked Leroy, brandishing an egg.

As the door slammed shut in their faces for the umpteenth time, Leroy hurled his egg at it. "Tee hee!" he giggled. "Something about broken eggshell takes me right back to my childhood."

At a little bar called the Snuggly Duckling, Dreamy and his brothers sat drinking, poking each other, and giggling. The bartender eyed them with suspicion. "Are you sure you guys are over twenty-one?"

"For the last time, yes," eight voices shouted defensively.

Bossy sat down next to Dreamy. "Why aren't you eating? A well-fed slave is a productive slave."

"I don't know," said Dreamy, perplexed. "My lips have this crazy urge to plaster themselves against Nova's, instead of sucking down beer. Maybe I'm coming down with a touch of anorexia?"

"Oh, it's much worse than that," said a very drunk, very lovelorn Belle from the neighboring table. "You're in love, homie."

"That's impossible," scoffed Bossy. "Dwarves aren't supposed to fall in love."

"Yeah, yeah, neither are Dark Ones, but life's funny that way," she grumbled, chugging yet another beer.

"You too, huh?" said Dreamy. "So, this love thing, will it go away on its own, or do I have to take antibiotics?"

She gave him a friendly pat on the back. "Aw, don't worry. Love is lots of fun when it's not for a paranoid satanic weirdo with an inferiority complex the size of Monstro."

"I don't know. I'm not enjoying it much so far. It feels kind of like food poisoning."

"That'll clear right up if you spend some time with your girl. Have you considered locking her in a dungeon for a little while? It worked like a charm on me."

"I don't have a dungeon."

"Well, then, try asking her for a date."

Dreamy groaned. "Look, I'll tell you what I told her when she brought that up. I hate dried fruit and I always will!"

"Man, you're dense." Laughing, Belle took out her dictionary. "Here, take a look at the second definition of the word 'date'."
"An engagement to go out socially with another person, often out of romantic interest," Dreamy read. "Well, that explains a lot."

"Glad I could help. Now go get her, tiger."

At the Volunteer Center, Sister Astrid was dropping stuff on the floor, as usual. Leroy smiled dreamily. "If you ask me, sister, what you need is a nice guy with a broom to follow you around." He brandished his dust mop gallantly.

Astrid giggled. "My hero."

Mary Margaret slapped him upside the head. "Can you just tell her before I throw up, please?"

"Tell me what?"

Leroy shuffled nervously. "Well, the thing is…I sold all your candles, lost ten pounds, and I'm still working on getting passage around the world in eighty days."

Astrid flung her arms around her knight in shining overalls. "Oh, Leroy, I love you…r ingenuity and resolve."

Leroy went weak in the knees. "I am so going to hell for this, and it's totally worth it," he mumbled. 

"What?"

"Er, nothing, my casual acquaintance."

Mary Margaret hauled him aside. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"I don't like upsetting people."

"Since when?! Leroy, I don't know if you've taken third grade arithmetic, but a thousand candles equals five thousand dollars."

"Huh. Five bucks per candle? What a gyp. No wonder they weren't selling. Well, don't worry. I have a plan."

"Let's hear it."

"We plant a beanstalk, climb it, and capture ourselves a golden goose."

"Are you drunk?" Mary Margaret hissed.

"Obviously. Give me a few hours to sober up and I'll think of something better."

The reluctant adulteress buried her face in her hands and groaned. "I never thought I'd say this, but I miss the old Leroy, who didn't give a damn about anyone but Jack Daniels. What happened to him?"

"Uh, I saw a WWJD bumper sticker this morning and it really spoke to me," Leroy lied, his eyes drifting back to Astrid as though magnetized.

At that, Mary Margaret finally bumped. "Ew! Leroy! Falling in love with an off-the-market hottie? That's disgusting even for you!"
Leroy stuck out his hand. "Hello, Pot. My name is Kettle. You're looking awfully black today."

"Shut up!"

"For the record," Leroy defended, "I'm pretty sure my silent and undemanding love for Astrid is a more ethical motive than your shallow quest for popularity. Face it, Eminem, you've been ousted as protagonist for now. Step aside gracefully and let me have a turn."

"Fine," sulked Mary Margaret. "If you insist, then your first task will be to get the five grand with resorting to larceny or drug trafficking. Good luck with that."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Dreamy raced up a wooded hill, huffing and puffing. "Whew, this love thing is definitely going to hurt in the morning," he panted. He looked around for his girl. "Nova?"

The fairy crept out of her hiding place in the underbrush. "Yo."

"What were you doing in there?"

"Playing it cool," she replied.

Dreamy peered over the mountainside. "Wow, are those the fireflies?"

"Uh, no, those are rocks, honey." Nova pointed. "Those are the fireflies over there, see? The little Cajun dudes?"

"Oh." Dreamy's cheeks reddened. "Sorry, I don't get out much. Don't get me wrong, I'd like to, but Bossy said he'd hobble me if I ever tried."

"Yeah, Blue likes to threaten me with the loss of important appendages, too. Aren't parents the worst?" Nova and Dreamy shared a giggle, wearing twin blushes.

"Say, Nova?" Dreamy ventured timidly. "I know this is a little forward, but I don't want to end up a miserable, angst-riddled drunk like that Belle chick. Wanna elope?"

Nova pondered the question. "Hm. Throw away my very promising career for an uncertain future with a one-year-old I've known for less than a day? To decide whether or not it's worth the trouble, I'm going to have to know how a good of a kisser you are." She gave him an experimental smooch, pulling back in a daze. "Wow. Okay, elopement's on. Just give me twenty four hours to drop off the fairy dust and pick up some lingerie."

"Score! Anything for you, baby."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Down at the docks, Leroy, having abandoned all regard for his own safety, was trying to make a business deal with Gold. "Now, I know this little sailboat of mine may not look like much, but she has a great deal of historical value. She was once crewed by the damned and captained by a man so evil Hell itself spat him back out."

"Liar," snorted Gold.

"All right, fine, I bought it from Desmond Hume," Leroy confessed. "But can you give me the five grand anyway?"
"Why the hell should I?"

"Because I'm in love?"

"Ugh. Fair warning, talk of love has a tendency to make me smash things."

Leroy sighed. "Fine, let me rephrase. It's to help the nuns. I'm trying to do something noble for once in my life. Surely an honorable and virtuous man like yourself can understand that?"

Gold burst out laughing. "Oh, Leroy, I know we've had our differences, but you really crack me up!"

"Hey, I was serious."

"Oh, man! That's even funnier!" Gold fell on the ground, wheezing with laughter, tears pouring down his face.

Leroy's shoulders slumped. "Is that a no?"

"Actually, it was more of a 'hell no!'" chuckled Gold, clambering to his feet. "Leroy, my good man, someday in the not-too-distant future, you're going to see the irony in your support of those serial homewreckers." Gold wandered off, still giggling under his breath.

Sister Astrid approached the pier tentatively. "Uh, is he okay?"

Leroy shrugged. "Who cares?"

"I'm a nun, so unfortunately I have to care about everyone." She smiled shyly. "But in your case, it's less of a chore. Here, I baked you a pie."

"Oh Astrid," he said tenderly, "I love…pie."

She sighed dreamily. "And I love…uh, your boat. Speaking of which, why is said boat stuffed with candles?"

"Because I'm shipping them to the regional Amazon warehouse for processing?" Leroy fibbed.

Astrid was aghast. "Leroy, have you been lying to a nun? That's so sinful even Hell would spit you back out!"

The drunk winced. "Hypothetically speaking, if I told you I did it because I'm hot for you, would that mitigate things or just make them worse?"

"There's no right answer to that question, so I'm just going to walk away in uncomfortable silence now, okay?" Astrid backed away slowly and carefully.

Emma stood in her office, poring over photos of the crash site. "Jeez, this is a lot tougher than I was expecting. When I became a small-town sheriff, I assumed my duties would consist of giving parking tickets and fishing with Opie, not investigating murders and sex scandals." She glanced up at the sound of her alleged sidekick entering the room. "Sidney? Found any dirt, or lack thereof?"

He grinned and held out a bundle of phone records. "Life is a restaurant and I'm your maître d', my friend. Check it out," he pointed at one of the pages, "there's a call between Kathryn and David the day she disappeared. And as we all know, it's a very short leap from phone conversation to murder."
"Impossible. David said he didn't call her and my superpower would have told me if he was lying."

"The human lie detector thing?" Sidney sniggered. "You don't seriously believe that, do you? I thought you just made that up to scare Henry."

"It's never failed me so far!"

Sidney laughed even harder. "Sure it hasn't, honey."

Mary Margaret sat at the only diner in town, drowning her sorrows in Jägermeister. "It's funny, but something about the word Jägermeister always makes me think of my old friend, Graham."

At the counter, Ruby shivered. "Something about the word Jägermeister always makes me think of fleeing."

Leroy walked in and joined them. "Something about the word Jägermeister always makes me think of pink elephants on parade." He grabbed the bottle out of Ruby's hands. "And I need them now more than ever."

"Uh oh. I take it your stint as protagonist isn't going well?" She took a long swig of whiskey with a Zoloft cupcake chaser. "You know, you were right the first time. We should just give up any attempts at morality and go live with the Mole People. At least then we'd have someone to look down on."

Dreamy tried to sneak past his sleeping brothers, which should have been a breeze, given the volume of their snoring, but alas, Little Brother was watching. "Trying to usurp my title, Dreamy?" Stealthy called out.

The other dwarves rolled out of their beds. "You're leaving us without even saying goodbye?" Doc accused.

"Yeah, but I have a good excuse. I met some chick the other day and she means way more to me than any of you."

Stealthy was confused. "But won't you miss all the cheap booze and slave labor?"

"Hell no." The other dwarves stared at him in disbelief. "You'll understand someday when you go through puberty."

Sneezy retrieved his brother's pickaxe and offered it to him. "Well, it's a dog-eat-dog world out there. Take this, you'll be needing a job sooner or later."

"Actually, I've decided to take up piracy," Dreamy explained. "I've already started the paperwork. Some guy named Ragetti has even applied to be my sidekick."

"Well, good luck, homie. Sounds like you're gonna need it."

One group hug later, Dreamy was skipping through the woods. "I'm getting hooked up in the morning! Ding dong, the score is gonna chime!"
"I don't think so, young man," chided Bossy.

"Bossy? How did you know where, when, and why I was going?"

"There's a tracking chip implanted under your skin and surveillance equipment in every nook and cranny of your dorm," Bossy explained nonchalantly. "Now then, about this love business. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but it's just a scam invented by Hallmark."

"That's a damn lie!" roared Dreamy.

"Technically, it's a half-truth," said the Blue Fairy, fluttering down.

"Ah!" screamed Dreamy, swinging a big stick at her. "That's got to be the biggest mosquito I've ever seen! Bossy, get the Raid!"

"Hey!" the fairy protested indignantly. "I'm not a mosquito, I'm a fairy."

"Really?" He looked her over curiously. "If you and Nova are both fairies, why are you so much smaller than her?"

"Because the little klutz accidentally zapped me with a shrinking spell," grumbled Blue. "I'm still working on a cure. But we're here to talk about your problems, not mine." She placed a tiny hand on his shoulder. "Dreamy, my boy, I don't think you've thought this through. Why would any man want to be traveling the world with a beautiful woman who loves him when he could be toiling mindlessly in a dank, dark hole?"

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard, and I live with Dopey."

The fairy's face hardened. "I didn't want to stoop to this, but you leave me no choice. Dump Nova, or I'm having her arrested for statutory rape."

Some hours later, Leroy and Mary Margaret were sprawled on Granny's floor, surrounded by empty whiskey bottles and cupcake wrappers. "Hey, Leroy? About you and Astrid…I'm not particularly well-versed in the tenets of Catholicism, but I'm pretty sure stealing Jesus' woman goes against them."

"I have no intention of putting the moves on someone who's not free to accept them," snapped Leroy. "I'm not a cad like you."

"Well, keep it that way, because scarlet letters don't wash off easily," Mary Margaret warned.

"Eminem, I think you've already used up your lifetime quota of whining, so knock it off before my ears start to bleed." It was a sad day for children everywhere when Grumpy had to tell Snow White to be more upbeat.

"But I need some way to cope with my problems, and I'm afraid I'll die of alcohol poisoning if I drink any more Jägermeister."

Leroy grinned "Then let me introduce you to a little thing called violence."

Leroy crept to the edge of a rooftop overlooking the Miners' Day Festival. "Time to kick some bulb!" he crowed.
"Leroy!" cried Mary Margaret, rushing to his side. "Don't jump! You've got so much to live for!" Leroy just stared at her. "All right, that was a lie, but you do have that Netflix membership you'll never get to use if you die."

"Are you serious?" said Leroy incredulously. "This house is only two stories high. What kind of an idiot tries to commit suicide by jumping off a two story house? Only the kind who wants both a heartache and a headache."

Mary Margaret reddened. "Sorry, but you've got to admit, it looked pretty suspicious, you climbing to the edge of the roof after that spiel about how drunk and depressed you are…"

Leroy ignored her, breaking out a chainsaw. Mary Margaret yelped. "Ah! Where did you get that?"

"Swiped it off of your roomie."

"What for?" She tensed. "You're not going to cut out my heart and give it to the mayor, are you?"

"No. I'm selling candles, Mafia-style!" He whacked a nearby transformer with his stolen chainsaw. "Leroy SMASH!"

Darkness fell over the crowd below. "Leroy, are you crazy?"

"Yeah, but what are ya gonna do?"

Dreamy found his girlfriend up on Makeout Point, thumbing through a book of carpet samples. "Hey, Dreamy, you're just in time. What do you think would look best in our new master bedroom? Turquoise Lake or Autumn Leaves?"

"Our what?"

"Oh, that's right, I haven't showed you our sweet new ride yet." She pointed at a ship moored near the beach. "I swiped it from a dude named Barbossa. It's got cruise control, a GPS, and a king-sized Sleep Number bed. What should I set your side to?"

"Forty-five- I mean, nothing, I can't go with you." Dreamy amended.

"What?" Nova's lower lip quivered. "You're serious? But already had our babies' names picked out!" she sobbed, using the skirts of her tutu as a handkerchief.

"Face it, Nova, I'm just not the romantic type. True Love is for the sexy."

"That's not true. What about Beauty and the Beast?"

"I have it on good authority that that story didn't end as well as the media has reported. Besides," Dreamy scoffed weakly, "everyone knows that love is just a scam invented by Hallmark."

Nova grew suspicious. "Those are the Bluest words I've ever heard. What did that little serial homewrecker say to you? And how did she even know about us? If that little meddler's been reading my diary again, so help me, I'm going to take that wand of hers and shove it where the fairy dust doesn't shine!" the fairy fumed.

"Wow, you're beautiful when you're angry," Dreamy whispered in awe.

Nova, sadly, was too busy bawling to hear him. "Dreamy, I love you more than raindrops on roses
and whiskers on kittens put together! Don't you feel the same?"

"Nova, I'm not going to lie to you." There was a long, pregnant silence. "So bye.""

Down in the bowels of the earth, or whatever planet the Enchanted Forest was located on, the
dwarven miners were hard at work, as always. "Swing low, sweet chariot, a-comin' for t'carry me
home! A band of angels comin' after me, a-comin' for t'carry me home!" they sang woefully.

Bossy cracked his whip across their backs. "Wrong song, little punks! You know what I wanna
hear!"

"Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to work we go," they droned without enthusiasm.

"Constantly," Stealthy muttered under his breath.

Dreamy walked in looking like a kicked dog. "Hey guys. I've come crawling back like the pathetic
loser I am, and I'd appreciate it if you'd all be cool enough not to draw attention to it."

"Wouldn't dream of it," said Bossy, hiding a smirk. "Welcome back."

"No place I'd rather be, except prancing through the flowers with Nova, or sailing to Neverland with
Nova, or snuggling in a king-sized Sleep Number bed with Nova." That in mind, he took out a
propaganda poster of the Blue Fairy, taped it to the nearest rock, and beat it with his axe until both
the axe and its target were reduced to a pile of dust.

"Aw, man, that axe was only a week away from retirement," Bossy lamented. "Oh well. You win
some, you lose some." He tossed Dreamy another axe.

A new name appeared on the handle of the tool. "Grumpy?" The newly-rechristened Grumpy
groaned. "There's no way I'll be able to twist that around into meaning charming and sexy."

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

At the Glow-in-the-Dark Miners' Festival, Mary Margaret broke into a rather disturbing victory
dance. "We did it! We sold them all! We're the baddest vandals since the sacking of Rome!"

Leroy cleared his throat pointedly. "Ahem?"

"All right, fine," she conceded. "You did it, you sold them all, and you're the baddest vandal since
the sacking of Rome." She handed him a slip of paper. "And I've put that in writing for you to show
Astrid." She prodded him gently. "Come on, don't be shy. You obviously talked to her once tonight
already, to sell her that candle she's holding."

"True." Leroy steeled himself. "Thanks for the pep talk, Eminem." He approached Astrid holding
the cash box. "Here you are! Five grand in small, unmarked bills, with my heart thrown in as a
bonus." He froze. "Whoops, did I say that out loud?"

Luckily, Astrid hadn't heard anything after "five grand". "You sold them all?"

"Well, I can't take all the credit. Mary Margaret helped out by going around and taking the batteries
out of all the emergency flashlights," Leroy demurred. "You're welcome again. By the way, since
you love 'my boat' so much, maybe we could get together on it sometime in a totally platonic way?"

"It's a dat—er, an appointment for the two of us to go out together socially," Astrid saved. Trying to
change the subject, she gestured at the sea of candlelight around them. "Wow, this is almost as
beautiful as a swarm of luminous insects."
"Not to me. Candlelight vigils are one of the few things in this world that can make me cry."

Emma was in her office looking over the phone(y) records when Regina barged in, as usual. "If this is about the blackout, Regina, my friend Mary Margaret was involved, so I won't be investigating it."

"About that little habit of yours," said Regina. "It's really starting to hamper the search for Kathryn. Have you found her yet?"

"No."

"How about now?"

"No."

"How about now?"

"No!"

"How about now?"

"Regina! Get out of my office, or I'm going to track down my chainsaw and decapitate you with it!" Emma exploded.

The mayor unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Sucking at your job was strike one. Threatening me with a chainsaw was strike two. One more strike and you're out…by my curb, in pieces, in a Hefty bag. Capisce?"

As she stormed out, the sheriff turned to a photograph on her desk. "Graham, baby, call me crazy, but I'm starting to think your mysterious death wasn't an accident."

---------------------------

Back at the party, Mary Margaret put up a sign reading "Sold out by Saint Eminem and her sidekick Leroy," then headed to her car. Noticing the word "TRAMP" still emblazoned on her windows, she was impressed. "Wow, this is the most durable paint I've ever seen. I must find the person responsible and ask them what brand they used."

She turned around and headed back to the party, where she was approached by Granny Lucas. "It was me, it was Dupont, and I'm sorry," she said succinctly.

Watching his girl from a distance, David sighed adoringly. "Mm, she's so cute when she's strutting."

Emma came up to him, handcuffs in hand. "David, will you quit mooning? It's really grossing me out."

"No can do."

"Would it change you mind if I told you that you had the right to remain silent?" She broke out a pair of handcuffs and hauled him off to her squad car. "You have the right to an attorney. If you can't afford one, you're screwed, because there's no way in hell Gold is working pro-bono. Do you understand these rights?"
David shook his head. "I don't understand much lately, and this is no exception."

"Sorry, homie, but I'm not fond of Hefty bags." Emma shoved him in the car and drove off.

Mary Margaret watched them with concern. "Wow. Either my bestie just arrested my man candy, or they're doing some very detailed role-playing. I'm not sure which scenario scares me more."
Red-Handed

Down at Mayberry Jail, Emma handed David a mug of cinnamon cocoa. He shoved it aside. "Thanks, but if sitting around drinking was going to bring Kathryn back, she'd have landed in my lap the night Mary Margaret dumped me."

Emma yawned. "For the last time, David, nobody cares about Kathryn but you, and even that's kind of iffy. Let's talk about that unexplained phone call of yours instead."

"Well, I can tell you that it's unexplained. Does that help?"

The sheriff glanced at the photo of Graham on her desk. "I sure wish you were here to throw a dart at my head, baby. It would be so much less painful than this conversation." She turned back to David. "You might as well go home. You're the most useless witness since Kato Kaelin."

At the only diner in town, Ruby was planted squarely in August W. Booth's lap. "You're homeless? Wow, that's so cool! I wish I was homeless," she sighed wistfully.

"I can make that wish come true if you don't shut your yap and get back to work," Granny threatened. "You've been on your break for three hours now."

"Oh, shut up! It's your own fault for cancelling our subscription to the Travel Channel," Ruby snapped. "Now then, August, before we were so justly interrupted, you were saying something about lemurs. What's a lemur?"

"You've never heard of lemurs?"

"No," Ruby sulked. "Granny cancelled our subscription to Animal Planet, too."

"Ruby!" Granny barked again. "If I have to tell you one more time to get off that man, I'm getting you fixed!"

A knock came at the window of the Lucas cabin, and Red flung the shutters open. "Oh, Peter! Peter! Wherefore art thou Peter?"

A wolfish-looking youth poked his head in. "Because someone thought it would be ironic, but that's not important. When art thou going to deny thy grandmother and refuse thy incarceration?"

"Red?" came Granny's voice from inside. "Are you feasting on the flesh of the innocent in there?"

"No, would you please quit asking me that?"

"Never! Now get in here."

Red smiled apologetically. "Looks like it's time for us to say goodnight until it be morrow, baby."

Peter clung stubbornly to her hand. "I'm not letting you go until you give me a kiss."

"Okay." She handed him a thimble.

He tossed it aside. "Not that kind. You're thinking of another fairy-tale Peter."
Red giggled. "Mm, you're cute when you're forcing me into physical affection with your superior strength." She smooched him and slammed the shutters in his face. Walking into the main room, she found an angry mob of men with torches. "Ooh, are you off to kill a beast who's got fangs? Razor sharp ones?"

"No, they're off to be brutally dismembered by massive paws with killer claws for the feast," sneered Granny.

"This is a serious matter, Widow Lucas," one of the men persisted. "You know that boy who's always crying wolf? Well, it turns out he was actually telling the truth this time. We found what was left of the poor kid smeared on the pavement near the dog park." He hung his head sadly. "We're hunting the monster down in order to assuage our guilt."

Red grew pensive. "Hm. A night of terror and bloodshed against a murderous beast, or another night cowering in the panic room with my overbearing grandma? Talk about a no-brainer." She grabbed a pitchfork and headed for the door. "Catch you later, Granny!"

"Hold up!" Granny grabbed her by the scruff of the neck. "This is one permission slip I won't be signing. Now go hide under your bed like a mature young woman." She draped a very appropriate red hood over the girl. "And don't forget your magic blankie. Wolves are allergic to red."

"But I thought canine species were colorblind? And if you really think it works, why aren't you wearing red?"

"Don't talk back or I'll swat you on the nose with this rolled-up newspaper!" Granny threatened, slamming the door in the mob's faces.

"Fine," Red grumbled under her breath. "Stupid beast and his stupid rampage of death. Why can't he be a friendly werewolf, like that hottie, Jacob Black?"

"You're not fooling anyone," said Granny. "I know full well you only have eyes for that wastrel, Peter."

"Peter's not a wastrel!"

"Red, do you even know what a wastrel is?"

"Not a clue, but if you're saying it, it must be some kind of insult."

"Damn straight. Now, board up the doors, get me my crossbow, and put on that recording of barking dogs."

"Granny!" Ruby whined. "You're going to scare August off, and then I'll have no one to flirt with but Billy. And I really don't think you want him coming around again; you know how he's always chewing holes in our walls."

"You're not going to have time to flirt anymore with all the extra work I've got lined up for you," Granny replied. "The two new people who came to town recently have more than doubled our customer base, and that means extra paper to push."

"Liar! You're just trying to keep me away from August because of his badass leather jacket and motorcycle."

"No, I'm trying to keep you away from August because he's clearly only got eyes for Emma, and"
you're just embarrassing yourself."

Ruby slapped her. "Hag!"

Granny slapped her back. "Skank!"

"Fossil!"

"Brat!"

"Outdated literary archetype of the mother figure!"

"Eliza!"

Ruby's jaw dropped, horrified. "Granny, you just stepped over a line. I quit!"

Back at the Lucas cabin, Red awoke to find her grandmother holding a bucket of coffee in one hand and a crossbow in the other. "Granny?"

"AHH!" Granny spun around, wild-eyed, firing a bolt at an unlucky lamp.

"Granny?" the girl said tentatively. "I don't want to judge you or anything, but it seems to me that handling a deadly weapon while sleep-deprived is more likely to end up killing one of us than the wolf."

Granny brandished the weapon in Red's face. "Do you want a piece of this, smart aleck?"

Red caved. "No, thank you."

"Then go see how many of our chickens the wolf ate."

At another time, Red would have asked why they hadn't simply brought the chickens into the house for the night, but with the crossbow pointed squarely between her eyes, she thought better of it. "Yes'm."

"And wear your little red riding hood, or the name will never catch on."

Red hesitated. "I don't know, Granny. I mean, sure, red might protect me from werewolves, but if I run into a minotaur I'm a dead woman."

"Just do it!" Granny cocked the bow.

"Eep!" Red grabbed the cloak and ran, a bolt slamming into the door behind her.

As Red gathered eggs in the chicken coop, she felt a pair of eyes on her. "Peter? If that's you, now's not a good time for a makeout session. Granny's been rubbing garlic on me all night long and I'm a mess."

"That would explain the stench," said Snow, emerging from a dark corner.

"Are you stealing our eggs?" Red laughed. "Boy, you must be the dumbest criminal ever. How are you planning to cook those? You don't have any kitchenware with you. And why are you waving them in my face? Do you want to get arrested?"
"No, I already tried that, and didn't really care for it."

"Aw, I'm just kidding," said Red, giving her a friendly pat on the back. "You're all right. So tell me, do you have a name, or are you like 'The Huntsman' and 'The Woodcutter'?"

"I have a name. It's Frosty."

"The snowman?" Red's eyes widened. "Wow, I would never have guessed! You're so lifelike."

"I'm not a snowman, I'm just really bad at aliases. And lies. And flights from the law."

"And stealing," Red reminded her, indicating the eggs. "But that's cool, I'm sure you have other talents."

Snow sighed wistfully. "You're so sweet. Let me give you a tip-if you want to stay that way, be wary of cruel and controlling mother figures."

"'Kay," chirped Red. "So, do you want to come crash with me for a while? I'll have to clear it with my grandma, but as long as you're willing to submit to a random drug test and tell her your name so that she can do a standard background check, I think she'll be cool with it."

"Um…great," said Snow. "Let's see, name…name…Well, if you don't buy Frosty, how about Whitey? No, wait, that could have racist connotations…How about Eminem?"

"Nice to meet you, Eminem."

Snow White and (Rose?) Red made their way down to the well. "So Red," said Snow conversationally, "I couldn't help but notice that your crib seems to be haunted by some kind of horrible monster. Have you considered getting an exterminator?"

"Oh, that's just the Big Bag Wolf," Red replied, lowering the winch. "He cruises through town and slaughters our children and livestock every time he gets PMS."

"Then why don't you just move?"

"We're too lazy, and besides, it gives us some really nice material for ghost stories." She hauled the bucket up. "Ew! That pesky Moses must be at it again, because I don't remember the water being this bloody before."

Snow White's face went snow-white. "Do you remember your yard being this corpse-strewn?"

Red turned around and discovered a pile of mangled corpses scattered in the snow. "Well, I have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder now, how about you?"

On the perpetually empty streets of Storybrooke, Mary Margaret rushed to her daughter's side. "Hey, homegirl, I couldn't help but notice you arresting David last night. What gives? Is he a suspect in his wife's disappearance, or has he just been so heartbroken from losing me that he turned to drink and had to be thrown in the tank?"

"The first one."

"Damn!"

Emma quirked an eyebrow. "What do you care? I thought you hated his guts now?"
"I tried, honest I did!" Mary Margaret wailed. "I'm just no good at hating. I wonder if Regina would be willing to give me lessons?" She took out her smartphone and programmed in a reminder to look into that. "In the meantime, has there been any word on my darling rival Kathryn?"

"Not yet. My money's on 'abducted by aliens.' Either that, or she's faking the whole thing in order to make you and David look bad."

Mary Margaret gasped. "Do you really think that the same caring, open-minded community that shunned me like a leper and painted vile epithets all over my windshield just last week would jump to conclusions about a mentally-ill adulterer?"

"Hell yeah." Emma lowered her voice. "Listen, as sheriff, I'm legally prohibited from encouraging you to perjure yourself, but if you wanted to make up some alibi for David, it would solve a whole lot of problems."

Mary Margaret thought long and hard. "Okay, how about this? David's been dragging at work, so I was giving him a whistling lesson the night Kathryn vanished."

The savior groaned. "Eminem, you're even worse at lying than you are at hating."

Giving up, the pair continued on their way home, hoping to drown their sorrows in a nice bucket of cinnamon cocoa. A few steps down the road, however, they stumbled across Dr. Whale and Ruby chatting at a bus stop, the latter fingering a canister of pepper spray. "For the last time, Whale, I'm not interested in a free breast exam. Now get away from me before people start shipping us."

"A wise choice," said Mary Margaret with a chuckle. "He's not half the gynecological expert he likes to think he is."

Whale grinned. "Good evening, Hot Blonde. Good evening, Cute Brunette. I was just sexually harassing Leggy Redhead here, but seeing as how there's a cop watching now, I guess I should stop." He headed back to the hospital to cruise for eligible coma patients.

"You want me to arrest him for you?" Emma offered.

"Thanks anyway," said Ruby, waving her off, "but I'm not seriously worried about shippers. They'll only pop up if he develops a sensitive side, and what are the odds of that happening?"

"I'd say about the same as the odds of Gold turning out to be Henry's long-lost grandfather," Emma hazarded. "So what's with the suitcase? Are you using it to deliver cake and wine to a loved one's house?"

"No." Ruby squared her shoulders proudly. "I'm running away from home. I know I'm a little old for that, but better late than never, right?"

Emma was getting nervous. "Ruby, I don't know if that's such a good idea. My son says that anyone who leaves town will die horribly, and while I'm not saying I believe him, I totaled my car and was nearly eaten by a wolf last time I tried it."

"Well, I'm confident that being eaten by a wolf is a problem I will never have."

Mary Margaret was also becoming alarmed. "Ruby, you don't know Henry very well, so you may not be aware of this yet, but he's freaking omniscient. If your heart is set on running away, why don't you run away to our place where it's at least marginally safe?"

"Or to a park bench," Emma suggested. "That'd work, too." She pulled her roomie aside. "What are
you thinking?" she hissed. "Inviting some emotionally-unbalanced near-stranger to come and live with you? Do you have a death wish?"

"Be glad I do, or you'd still be living in your Love Bug and stealing clothes from Regina."

Emma sighed. "I can't argue with that. I'd really like to, but I'm going to have to take some debate classes first."

"It's all settled, then," Mary Margaret chirped, shoving Ruby's luggage into Emma's arms. "Welcome to the Princess Pad, you can have Emma's bed."

Red, Snow, and Granny walked into the most violent pep rally the Enchanted Forest had ever seen. "My fellow Forestians!" a politician pontificated, "are you tired of being devoured by monsters every time you stupidly pick a fight with them?"

"Yes!" the villagers cried in unison.

"Then vote yes on Prop 304—more funding for angry mobs! Together, we can take back the streets!"

"No you can't," said Granny.

The politician pumped a fist into the air. "Yes We Can!"

"Your slogans are cute, and you look very mob-ly holding those pitchforks," Granny assured them, "but I'm afraid the wolf has no appreciation for such things. Trust me. You may find this hard to believe, but I was a child once." The entire crowd gasped in unison. "And it gets even scarier! One night, my dad and six brothers announced that they were going out to fight the wolf, but said that since I was worthless chick, I had to stay inside and come up with a good recipe for dog stew." She pouted. ". I'd had just about enough of their chauvinism, so I went up to the roof with a lawn chair and a bucket of popcorn to revel in their impending doom."

The old woman smirked. "The meatheads never had a chance. They tried pointy sticks, they tried Wolfsbane Potion, they even tried lulling it into a false sense of security with a rubber pork chop, but it was no use. He gobbled them up like seven screaming cans of Alpo," Her smile faded. "I went down to congratulate the wolf on his victory, but instead of shaking my hand, the jerk tried to bite it off!" She rolled up her sleeve, revealing a series of angry red streaks.

Red leaned in for a closer look. "Granny, those aren't scars. Those are Kool-Aid stains."

"Oh, right, it was the other arm." She pushed her sleeve back down. "Anyway, my point is, the wolf's an even bigger jerk than my dad. There's just no reasoning with the guy."

At the cottage, Red and Snow were engaging in some girl talk. "So, Red? I don't wanna offend you or anything, but your Granny's clearly mentally ill. You ever think about having her committed?"

"All the time. I really hope it's not genetic. I have enough sources of angst in my life as it is."

Snow smiled knowingly. "Is one of them named Peter?"

"How did you know that?"

"Well, you've been humming the wedding march and giggling his name under your breath all day.
And then there was all the wolfish grinning you two were doing earlier."

Red giggled yet again. "Mm, he is wolfish, isn't he? How about you? Do you have a man?"

"Yeah, but he got tired of being drowned and beaten, so he ditched me," Snow pouted. "Men are such selfish pigs! You're lucky to have found a good one."

"Tell that to Granny," sighed Red. "Whenever I bring up marrying him, she just sticks her fingers in her ears and turns on *Bride of Frankenstein.*" The girl rolled her eyes. "Withered old hag, all full of monster stories. If I were a nastier person, I'd point out her resemblance to the Cryptkeeper." She closed her eyes and counted to ten. "But as an allegory for Charles Perrault's views on female obedience, I must respect my guardian's authority."

"Screw Perrault," Snow scoffed. "This is the postmodern literary period, where love conquers all!"

"Boy, you've sure got my life pegged, stranger whose real name I don't even know," Red gushed. "Let's go find that wolf and make ourselves some dog stew!"

"Whoa, hold the phone!" Snow exclaimed, holding her friend in place. "How exactly did you manage to get 'let's go monster hunting' out of my 'love conquers all' comment?"

"Well, by your logic, we could conquer the wolf with love, right?"

Snow recoiled. "What do you mean, 'we'?"

"Please, Eminem?" Red wheedled. "I'm already going outside my comfort zone by disobeying my elders—don't make me go hiking without a buddy, too!"

"Fine, fine. I guess I need something to keep my mad skills in tune until my next epic battle with the Queen rolls around."

Mary Margaret, having given up all hope of ever learning how to hate properly, was searching among the redwoods for the woman who had publicly attacked and humiliated her. "Huh, all this time I thought redwood trees were indigenous to the Pacific Northwest. Who knew?"

A rustling in the trees drew her out of her musings. "Gold? Are you out burying knives again?" But instead, David stumbled out of the woods. "Oh, good, it's just you. Listen, I'm still mad at you, but in an isolated, romantic setting like this, I could probably be talked into a makeout session. You interested?"

David stared ahead blankly. "..." he drooled.

"There's the comatose charmer I first fell in love with!" she gushed. "I love you madly, David Nolan!" She attempted to fling herself into his arms, but when he didn't put them out to catch her, she toppled to the ground, kicking up a cloud of dust. "Hey, what gives? Are you playing hard-to-get or something?"

"..." Without further ado, he wandered off into the ecologically-inaccurate trees again.

"Honey, I never thought I'd say this, but there's such a thing as being too comatose."

Snow pointed to some tracks in her namesake. "Look! I've found the wolf's trail! I'm the greatest huntress in whatever country this is!"
"Uh, Eminem, that's not the wolf's trail. It's a crop circle."

"Oh. Well, what about this?"

"That's one of your footprints."

"Oops. Well, how about that?"

"Those are God's, from when he was carrying you, remember?"

"Oh yeah. Well, what about those?"

"That's the crop circle again!" Red's fingers itched to fire an arrow at her buddy's head. "Eminem, don't take this the wrong way, but you're no Katniss Everdeen."

"You're telling me," Snow sighed. "It's times like these that I miss my homie the Huntsman. He'd put an end to this silly feud with a few eloquent barks, invite the creature home for tea and Milk Bones, and—" Snow trailed off, seeing a set of giant paw prints in the snow. "Hey, Red, I've found the wolf's trail!"

Red groaned. "Again?"

"No, for real this time." She pointed. "This has to be either his or Bigfoot's."

"They're all red with blood." Red cooed with sympathy. "Poor little pooch! He's got a thorn in his paw. No wonder he's been such a grouch lately." She followed the prints. "He went this way. Come on, and have the first aid kit ready."

"Wow, you're really good at finding people." Snow looked truly puzzled. "And it's giving me a strange urge to feed you cinnamon cocoa and sing you a lullaby."

---

At Mayberry Jail, Henry was helping Ruby look for a job online, because she'd somehow managed to grow up in the twenty-first century without learning how to use a computer. "You want to be a cake and wine delivery specialist?" he asked coyly.

"Is that a real thing?"

"No." The boy admitted. "How about dog whisperer?"

Ruby considered it briefly. "Hmm...no. As far as I know, Pongo's the only dog in town. I'd have a very limited customer base."

"Okay, then. What about riding hood model?"

"Okay, now you're just screwing with me."

"Yeah." The boy giggled craftily.

The answering machine suddenly sputtered to life. "Hi, this is Sheriff Swan. I'm not in right now, and I still haven't gotten around to hiring a deputy, so leave a message at the tone. If you are being murdered, please write the killer's name in your own blood and I'll arrest them as soon as I can. If you're calling from a rotary phone, then get out of the Stone Age and replace it. Thanks, and have a great day."

"Emma?" a voice crackled on the other line. "This is August. I know you don't like me, but we've
got bigger problems right now. I think the library is on fire."

Ruby picked up the phone. "Hey, August. No, it's me, Ruby. There's no fire—smoke and flame always billows from those windows. Yeah, the deafening roar is normal, too. Aw, you're welcome. So, what are you wearing?" She noticed Emma walking in behind her. "Uh, what are you wearing your cellphone minutes down for? This conversation is over." She hastily slammed down the receiver.

"Ruby, I'm impressed with both your phone skills and your talent for getting August off my back. Want to work for me?"

"You mean you're finally going to hire a new deputy?" asked Henry.

"Not a deputy. More of a sidekick."

Henry looked hurt. "I thought I was your sidekick?"

"Yeah, but your mom's always making you go to school." Emma pointed out. "I need a full-time sidekick. Plus, the sooner Ruby gets a job, the sooner she can move out of my bedroom."

"Sounds good to me," said Ruby.

"It's settled, then," said Emma brightly. "Your first task will be to go get a sandwich for me and a backpack full of Apollo Bars for yourself."

"And a keg of cinnamon cocoa for me!" Henry interjected.

Mary Margaret walked in. "Emma, help! My man's in yet another coma, but this one's creepier than usual."

"So why are you coming to me, instead of his doctor?" Emma wanted to know.

"Because if I try to talk to Whale, he'll just spend the whole conversation undressing me with his eyes."

Snow White and (Rose?) Red were still following the trail. "Man, somebody owes us a really nice merit badge for this little excursion," Snow panted.

Looking ahead, Red quite literally froze in her tracks. "Eminem," she whimpered, "please tell me that's another crop circle and not a werewolf track!"

"Okay," said Snow, voice quavering. "It's a crop circle, not a werewolf track."

Red wasn't comforted. "You are such a terrible liar."

"I hate to say I told you so, but I did." Snow shivered. "Hold me!"

Red followed Snow along the trail, lost in thought. "So, I guess our village has its very own Remus Lupin. I wonder if he'd be willing to teach an adult education class on how to defend ourselves against him?"

"Good idea," said Snow. "Offer to hold it at your house. Apparently he knows the way there." She pointed to where the trail of footprints met up with Red's window.
"Peter?! Peter, how could you?" Red wailed. "All this time I thought you were prowling around my window because you liked me, when you really just wanted to suck my blood!"

"No, that's vampires," Snow corrected mildy.

"Whatever!" Red sobbed.

"Well, maybe he's not the evil kind of werewolf," Snow suggested. "Maybe he's the amnesiac kind." She purred, fanning herself. "Mm, you're so lucky. Amnesiacs are hot!"

"That they are," sniffled Red, "but that doesn't do me any good now. The mob's going to kill him tonight and I'll end up having to find a new man."

"If you've got a beast fetish, I hear Rumplestiltskin's back on the market," Snow informed her. "Or you could just tie up Peter and hope for the best."

Red considered this. "I'd much rather face down a werewolf than incur the wrath of the Rumbelle fandom. I think I'm going to go with tying up Peter."

Ruby started to slink into Granny's Diner, then thought better of it and swaggered in instead. "Hey, Granny, have you heard the good news? Emma's agreed to take me on as a sidekick." The girl smirked. "Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"Congratulations on being able to fill the shoes of a mentally-ill ten-year-old," Granny sneered.

"Don't you dare undermine my awesomeness! I help solve crimes!"

Granny eyed her granddaughter bemusedly. "Oh? What crimes have you solved so far?"

"Well…right now, I'm working on the Case of the Peckish Princess."

Red and Peter were talking under a tree covered in "Peter Loveth Red" doodles. "Don't be absurd, Red," he scoffed. "I can't possibly be a werewolf. I'm not even Native American."

"Come off it, Peter! Your smiles are toothy and wolfish, you had that line about blowing my house down, and your favorite food is pork chops! If you're human, I'm a lemur's uncle."

"But wouldn't there be some sort of evidence? Wouldn't I wake up in the woods with blood all over my teeth or something?"

"That wouldn't prove anything. Stuff like that happens to me all the time. It's just part of life."

"But—"

"It's okay, Peter, you don't have to be ashamed." She nuzzled him suggestively. "I happen to like a man with a beastly side. Grr-rowl!"

"Really?" Peter perked right up. "In that case, maybe there is something to this crackpot werewolf theory of yours." He lowered his voice seductively. "I'm a dangerous man, baby. You'd better tie me up before I get out of control."

"You don't have to ask me twice!"
Emma locked up the station and put out her, "Out Searching For David Nolan" sign. "Boy, this thing sure has paid for itself over the past few weeks." She turned to her son. "Okay, kid, I don't mean to kick you out, but somehow I'm still going to."

"It's okay, I'm late for my weekly gaslighting session with Mom and Hopper anyway." He stuffed the Big Book of Déjà-Vu into a desk drawer.

Emma grew concerned. "You know, kid, this is the first time I've ever seen you handle that book without using it to try and give me some sort of sage advice." She reached out to feel his forehead. "You feeling okay?"

"Well, I'm in a hurry right now," said Henry, "but if you insist... Ruby's Little Red Riding Hood. Which is kind of lame on its own, but when you take into account that she's also the Big Bad Wolf, she becomes more than salvageable as a prospective action hero. Just FYI."

Emma laughed. "Oh, kids say the darnedest things."

Ruby stormed in, fuming under her breath. "Stupid Granny and her stupidly accurate assessment of my stupid new job. I ought to maul her and rip out her throat with my teeth."

Emma shrank away from her, bringing up Animal Control on speed dial. "On second thought, maybe the kid's on to something. Ruby, would you be a dear and sniff this Tarzan costume David left in Mary Margaret's room?"

Five minutes later, Ruby had the scent and was hot on the trail, leading her boss into the ecologically-inaccurate woods. "Hurry up, he's right over here!"

"David?"

"No, a cat!"

"Forget the cat!" snapped Emma.

"Killjoy," Ruby sulked. "You're shaping up to be as bad as my last boss." She pointed over her shoulder. "Your man's over there, and he smells unconscious."

Sure enough, the sheriff found her daddy bleeding in the bushes Ruby had indicated. "Ruby, when we get home tonight, I owe you a biscuit." She shook her old man awake. "David? David, wake up! Mary Margaret's been enough of a downer after just two weeks without you; I don't even want to think about how hard she's going to be to live with if you die."

David's eyes fluttered open. "Is this the morning after Mardi Gras?"

"No," said Emma.

"Then why is my memory fuzzier than an Ewok?"

"David, what's the last thing you remember?"

He rubbed his aching head. "We were in your office and you were force-feeding me more of that awful cinnamon cocoa. Was it spiked or something?"

Emma was so worried about her father that she finally broke down and subjected herself to a visit with Dr. Whale. Now that's love. "So, what can you tell us about David's condition?"
"He's male, and therefore of no interest to me," Whale diagnosed.

"But what about his brain?" Emma persisted. "Has it been eaten by zombies, so now he's turning into one?"

Whale gave David's head a gentle tap, as if testing a watermelon for ripeness. "Nope, it's still there. In my professional opinion, this is the same phenomenon I failed to treat or identify when he came out of his coma." He shoved a stack of papers at the patient. "Which reminds me, I have some malpractice waivers for you to sign."

Emma wasn't finished yet. "Could he have, say, talked to someone, or gone for a stroll or...I don't know, unknowingly strangled a loved one with his bare hands during one of these episodes?" Whale shrugged. "Probably. A lot of my patients unknowingly strangle loved ones with their bare hands." He tapped the malpractice waivers urgently.

"Well," said David, "given the danger my condition poses to the community and myself, I guess you'll want to keep me here for observation until we get this figured out?"

"That depends," Whale replied. "Will your new friend Ruby be coming by to visit you, perchance?"

Regina barged in, as usual. "Swan, you incompetent flatfoot, you're supposed to be falsely accusing Mary Margaret, not David! Can't you do anything right?"

"Madam Mayor?" Emma blinked. "What are you doing here?"

"Like I told you during David's last neurological meltdown, Mayor Mills is everywhere, baby!" She shoved the savior aside. "Now go find Kathryn before she decomposes!"

At Mayberry Jail, someone was actually manning the 911 line for a change. "Sheriff's station," Ruby greeted, "may I direct your call to Emma? Because she's the only cop we've got to offer you right now."

"If I ever want to talk to Emma, all I have to do is go somewhere with an echo," Emma answered on the other line. "Listen, I've had an idea. Since David appears to be reenacting 'Snow Falls', maybe he's been out to the Toll Bridge again. Could you go check?"

"Why can't you do it?" Ruby wanted to know.

"Because House is on tonight. Now hop to it, sidekick."

"But I'm not even a cop!" Ruby protested. "Is it even legal for me to be investigating a crime scene?"

"I'm going to count to three. One..."

"Fine, fine, I'm going!"

She drove the Love Bug down to the bridge and took out her cellphone, nose twitching. "Emma, I can't help but notice that your car smells like tragedy and romance."

"Don't tell Henry, okay?"

"My lips are sealed," Ruby promised. "Now, about this semi-legal search, what exactly am I searching for?"
"I don't know."

"Well, where exactly am I supposed to find it?"

"Beats me."

"Then what am I supposed to do when I find it?"

"Not a clue. Just follow your instincts."

"I'm going to have to. You're sure as hell not giving me anything else to follow," Ruby muttered.

Near the riverbank, she spotted a neon sign reading, "Excavate Me!" "Wait, I think I may have found something, no thanks to you." She dug into the dirt with her bare hands. "I wonder what it could be? A nice bone, perhaps?" But disappointingly, all she found in the hole was a little jewelry box. "Buried treasure? I thought that only existed in storybooks." She opened it up, then let out a scream worthy of the cheesiest horror film. "Aaaaah! Emma, is there a psychiatric hospital in town?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Make me a reservation. I think I feel a case of PTSD coming on."

Granny walked into her granddaughter's room and found a girl covered in Red's hood sprawled on the bed. "Red? Did you have a reverse growth spurt this afternoon? Well, no matter. Rapid physiological changes are nothing new to our family." She gave the girl a little shove. "Get up and barricade the doors. If Eminem's not home by curfew, then she deserves the horrible, agonizing death that awaits her."

"Hey!" Snow protested, throwing off the hood.

"You're not Red?" Granny sighed. "I should have known. So where's my real granddaughter? Stalking the back roads for delicious little girls?"

"Um, no, she's with Peter. I know you don't like him, but with all due respect, that's just making her want him more."

Granny groaned. "Oh, what a scourge is laid upon mine hate."

"Aw, I know he looks like a bad boy, what with all the wolfish grinning, but it turns out he has a really good excuse for that."

"Wait. You think Peter is the wolf?"

"Yeah, or possibly an alien. There are an awful lot of crop circles in your neighborhood." Snow shrugged dismissively. "Either way, he can't hurt her. She's got him tied up."

The old woman facepalmed. "Then for his sake, I hope their little fling was worth dying for."

Meanwhile, deep in the forest, a very human Peter was straining against his bonds, as a snarling mass of bad CGI advanced on him. "Red! Don't eat me! Come on, surely the power of your love for me will overcome this pesky curse in the end?" The wolf ignored his words, going right for the throat. "And again, the power of love has been greatly exaggerated," he choked with his last ounce of strength.
"Is that what I think it is?" asked Ruby, nodding to the box she'd sniffed out.

"That depends," Emma replied. "Do you think it's a dismembered human heart?"

"Yeah, but don't say it out loud!" Ruby shushed her. "You'll ruin the surprise!"

"Sorry," the sheriff apologized. "But just so you know, this newfound Spidey-sense of yours is shaping up to be pretty awesome. It sure as hell tops my useless lie-detection superpower."

Back in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Snow was following Granny through her namesake. "So, let me get this straight. All this time, you knew Red was a werewolf, and you just… what, forgot to let her know?" She rolled her eyes. "From the look of all this snow, Christmas isn't far off. I'm giving you a day planner."

"I'm not senile!" Granny snapped. "I just didn't want Red to have to live with the guilt. Or risk her running off to join a coven of cannibals like her mom did. Or cause her to flip out and maul me like her grandfather the Big Bad Wolf did… but mostly the guilt thing."

"Wait a minute." Snow's face screwed up in disgust. "You were married to a wolf? Not just any wolf, but the same wolf who killed your family and chewed you up like a rawhide bone? The wolf who, by your own admission, you met when you were just a child?" The girl shuddered. "There are so many things wrong with this picture that I don't even know where to begin."

Granny scowled. "If it puts your judgmental heart at ease, it wasn't an interspecies relationship for long. He turned me into a wolf, too." She put her nose to the ground and sniffed. "Red's not far. Mm, and I think she's got a packet of liver snacks in her pocket! Maybe we'll get lucky and she'll eat those instead of Peter." The old woman sighed. "Oh, I'm such a fool for not telling her sooner."

"I'm not gonna argue with that," snorted Snow. "I mean, you had to know that eventually you would die, leaving her to terrorize the land unchecked."

"I'm not good with words. I prefer expressing myself through violence," Granny shoved a bolt into her crossbow. "A silver-tipped arrow will bring her down."

"But that's a silver-tipped bolt," Snow pointed out.

"Eh, close enough. If it doesn't work, I've got some elephant tranquilizers in my pocket." She cocked the weapon. "Now let's do this thing."

Gulping, Snow White trailed after her. "Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf, the Big Bad Wolf, the Big Bad Wolf?" she sang tremulously.

When they caught up with Red, she was biting what was left of Peter, and not in a good way. "Ew, sick!" Snow whimpered.

"Honey, this is going to hurt me a lot more than it's going to hurt you," Granny apologized, shooting her rabid granddaughter in the stomach.

Snow draped the cloak over her twitching body, and she came to. "Where the hell am I?" She clutched her head. "Ugh, how many drinks did I have?"

"None of that matters," Snow soothed. "The important question is, what happened to the gaping wound you should have in your abdomen now?"
But they had bigger problems. In the distance, they could hear a very punctual mob approaching. "Track down this murderer! She must be found! Hunt out this animal, who runs to ground!" they chanted menacingly.

"Well, I guess that's your cue to flee," said Granny, giving Red a quick hug. "Love ya lots, sorry about the deep dark family secret, be a good girl and try not to kill anyone else."

"But I can't leave without my sexy beast!"

"Sorry to break it to you, Red, but you've turned your sexy beast into a sexy puree," Snow apologized. "I guess I was wrong. Love doesn't conquer all. Maybe you should have just stuck to Perrault's version."

"Wait a minute. I'm the wolf?" Red paled. "How did this happen?"

"Trust me, you don't wanna know," said Snow with grimace.

"Oh God—I mean, gods!" the girl wailed. "Did I seriously just eat my first love? There isn't enough therapy in the world to help me get over this!"

"Yeah, yeah, you can pine later!" Granny gave her a little shove. "But for now, just take Eminem and beat it before someone tries to make a throw rug out of you."

Ruby walked into the only diner in town, managing something between a slink and a swagger. "Hey, Granny. I'm through with my belated teen rebellion now, so can I have my job back?"

"Why? I thought that, after that 'Eliza' dig of mine, you'd never want to speak to me again."

"Aw, Granny, I don't really think the literary archetype of the mother is outdated. I just said that because I'm jealous. I mean, you're the coolest old lady ever! You've got attitude, you're the only person in town who could beat Graham at a game of darts, and you appear to have wrestled a grizzly bear at some point in your life." She nodded to the mass of claw marks on her grandmother's forearm.

"Aw, shucks!" Granny demurred. "You keep sweet-talking me like that and I just might make you owner of this whole place. But are you sure you want to come back? What about lemurs?"

"Well, I've been doing a little research," said Ruby, "and I've discovered that lemurs often carry transmissible diseases such as Ebola and SIV. I think I'll be a lot safer sticking to the company of humans and canines." She hugged her grandmother. "And though I'm not sure which one you are, I still love you."

Granny pulled away. "All right, anymore sap in this room and we're going to have to go into the maple syrup business. Now shut up and I'm so very proud of you and get your lazy butt back to work."

Meanwhile, David and Mary Margaret were having a heart to heart on the floor of David's workplace, while his coworkers awkwardly tried not to notice. "There, there, David, everything's going to be okay," she soothed, offering him a bluebird to pet.

"Everything's going to be okay?!" he repeated incredulously. "Honey, my wife is missing, everyone thinks I killed her, they could be right, I might be going brain dead, and to top it all off, I have a hangnail! Exactly what evidence do you have that any of this is going to turn out okay?"
"I think it's the Zoloft cupcakes talking. You want one?"

Before he could answer, Emma walked in. "Hey, guys, can I have twenty bucks for the movies?"

Mary Margaret raised her eyebrows. "Why?"

"I don't actually need money. I'm just stalling for time, because I think you're going to like the next thing I have to say even less."

David sighed. "Well, you may as well tell us, before my auditory nerves start malfunctioning too."

"We found a box with Kathryn's heart inside." Emma reported. "Actually, we is a bit of a stretch. It was all Ruby, really."

"My wife is dead?" David sobbed. "Oh, how tragically convenient!"

"Emma, I think David's in need of some comfort cuddles," Mary Margaret whispered gently. "Can you give us some privacy?"

"Would that I could," Emma replied, "but I'm afraid it gets worse."

"Do I even want to know?"

"Probably not. I sure as hell didn't, but it's too late for that now. We found your fingerprints inside the box."

"Really?" David sniffled. "How very predictable. I'm so disappointed."

"Not you. The other you." Emma pointed to Mary Margaret.

There was a long pause as they studied Mary Margaret's sweet, innocent little face, cutesy pixie cut, and fuzzy pink sweater. Then, in unison, all three Charmings broke down laughing.
Chapter 16

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Little Red Riding Hood and Prince Charming were sitting in front of a campfire swapping ghost stories. "…and then I woke up and found the mangled entrails of my first love stuck between my teeth." She smirked victoriously. "Top that, sucker!"

Charming shuddered. "Can't. Why don't we try another campfire activity to pass the time? How about roasting marshmallows on sticks?"

"We don't have any marshmallows on sticks." She looked up. "Oh, wait, there's one. And it's already on fire. How convenient."

Charming squinted. "Actually, I think that's a flaming arrow."

Red was confused. "But flaming arrows are siege weapons. We have no fortress to burn, so what's the point?"

"I don't know, but it sure does look cool, doesn't it?" Luckily, Charming had taken the Deflect Missiles feat a few levels ago, and was able to swat it aside with the flat of his sword. "Home run!" he crowed victoriously, as the king's men closed in on their campsite. "Quick, Red, while I'm still on a roll, hop on the back of my white horse and let me spirit you to…I don't know, somewhere that's not here!"

"For the last time, Charming, I don't need a knight in shining armor! I'm more of a mad scientist kind of girl, but until one crosses my path, I can take care of myself." She threw off her hood and bared her fangs. "I'm just thankful that they were considerate enough to attack during the full moon." She shooed him on his way. "Now go find your girl and get out of my way, I'm starving!"

Down at Mayberry Jail, Emma was reluctantly snapping mugshots of her bestie. "Good, now turn to the left. Now stand on your head. Now dance the Macarena."

Mary Margaret frowned. "I thought you discontinued that procedure when you were put in as sheriff?"

"Yeah, but it's been reinstituted by special order of the mayor's office. Also, I'm now legally required to send her a framed copy of these mugshots for her mantelpiece."

"But this isn't fair!" her mother protested. "I didn't kill Kathryn! Besides, don't I get any perks for being best friends with the sheriff?"

"Well, I can let you have the cell on the right. I can tell you from experience that it has the fewest rats," Emma offered.

"Thanks for nothing, then."

At her homies' septuple bachelor pad, Snow White frolicked cynically, which should have been an oxymoron. "With a smile and a song, Snow White's faded to Morally Grey. I could go for some Cream of Bluejay, 'cause I'm so high-strung!" she sang, battering an innocent bluebird over the head and shoving him into a soup pot.

Grumpy watched from the doorway, looking worried. "Snow, please, come eat something that's not
alive. We made you a special dinner."

"How?" Snow sneered. "I've been in the kitchen all day and I haven't seen any of you in here. Typical men." She found the dining room packed with long and bearded faces. "What's up? Somebody die?"

"Yes. Stealthy, remember, you insensitive clod?" Grumpy snapped.

"Screw Stealthy. He wasn't so stealthy."

"You're way out of line, Snow!" thundered Jiminy Cricket, fluttering into view.

"Gah! A foot-long talking grasshopper!" Snow yelped, grabbing a fly swatter. "Don't tell me I'm the only one freaked out by this?"

"I'm a cricket," Jiminy corrected indignantly. "But since your friends are paying me three grand to conduct this intervention, I'm gonna let that slide for now. Take it away, Grumpy, I'm on the clock."

Grumpy took a deep breath and began reading off a 3x5 card. "Snow, when a guy named Grumpy thinks you're being too grumpy, it's definitely time to scale it back a notch."

"Yeah, so quit breaking our hearts and mugs!" Happy added.

"You're lucky I didn't break your pathetic excuse for a smolder!" Snow snarled.

Grumpy placed himself between them. "Snow, I know this is going to sound a little chauvinistic, but apparently your entire personality was based on your love for Prince Charming. Without a man, you're turning into a bitter old hag."

"Who are you calling old?" The girl gave him a good impression of her stepmom's Glare of Evil. "Screw you all, I don't need a man! What I need is the Queen's heart with a side of waffle fries!"

"But Snow, you can't fall to the Dark Side!" Jiminy protested. "You have to save that for the second season, so it'll be good and shocking when it finally happens!"

"Bite me, bug." She smirked evilly, brandishing a fly swatter. "Seriously, try it. I'm covered in Off with Deet. Hope your affairs are in order."

For the umpteenth time, Jiminy wished he'd had the foresight to bring his perfectly good human body along on his little quest for righteousness. Defeated, he backed away.

"Bwa hah hah," Snow snickered. "Well, I'm off to kill the Queen, don't wait up." She picked up one of the magical dwarven pickaxes by the door. The name "Nutty" appeared on the handle. She glowered at it. "Damn judgmental weapon."

---

Emma led her one and only prisoner into what appeared to be a boys' locker room. "Why are we having the interrogation here?" Mary Margaret asked curiously.

"Because my regular interrogation room is being fumigated for crickets," Emma replied, shoving her through the door.

She found herself face to face with Regina Mills, who was looking even more smug than usual. "Welcome to Hell, you dirty little chatterbox," she gloated.

Mary Margaret blinked. "Mayor Mills? Why are you at my interrogation?"
"Mayor Mills is everywhere, baby!" The mayor took out a pair of binoculars and a hot dog, kicking back to the enjoy the show.

"Right, right, I forgot." The prisoner sighed. "Well, I guess we may as well get this over with."

Emma positioned a spotlight over her head and sat down across the table. "Where were you on the night of January 16th?"

"What does that have to do with Kathryn?"

"I don't know. I just thought it sounded cool." Emma giggled. "But I guess we should get on with it. Are you familiar with a place called the Toll Bridge?"

"Yeah, David and I used to go there to make out. Sometimes I'd throw him over the side." She sighed dreamily. "It was magical."

Emma took a jewelry box out of one of the lockers. "Do you recognize this little box, labeled 'Property of Pandora'?"

"Why yes. It's my music box that's wound by a key." Mary Margaret grew nervous. "Why are you people gazing at me?"

"Because that's what we found the heart in." Emma sighed. "Did you steal it from someone named Pandora?"

"No, it was like that when I got it!" she denied. "Don't you see? Someone who is probably named Regina is setting me up!"

"There there, Blanchard, life in prison won't be so bad." Regina's voice dripped with false sympathy. "You could always become a jailhouse snitch. Something tells me you have a natural aptitude for snitching."

"Do not!"

"Do too!"

"Do not!"

"Do too!"

"Knock it off, kids!" Emma grabbed her baby mama by the collar and hauled her into the hallway. "Regina, you're supposed to be here as an impartiality specialist. So far, I'm not really impressed with your level of expertise."

Snow White slammed her smart-mouthed pickaxe into the legs of a woefully incompetent knight. "Gah, I've been hobbled!" he screamed. "Now I'll have to leave the army and take up spinning!" He glared at his attacker. "What the big idea? Didn't your mom ever teach you to treat your subjects with compassion?"

"Yeah, but somehow my lack of a boyfriend is making me not care." Snow shrugged helplessly. "Right now, I'm more interested in my other mom. The regicidal one. Where is she?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Because I'm clearly insane and menacing you with a magical pickaxe?"
"Touché. Fine, she's on her way from her lair to her vacation lair."

Snow smiled sweetly. "Thank you, you've been very helpful. As a reward for your assistance, please accept this concussion." She bashed his head in and stripped off his armor.

Grumpy appeared behind her. "Snow, honey, have you ever heard of a little saying that goes, 'you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar'?"

"Spare me your platitudes! I've got a fortress to infiltrate." She strapped on the knight's breastplate. "If you really want to help me, then refer me to a Wookiee who would be willing to masquerade as my prisoner."

"Are you insane?"

"No, commoners are insane. I'm eccentric," Snow sniffed haughtily.

"Well, whatever you call it, it's clearly clouding your judgment. You really think you can pass yourself off as a knight? What kind of knight is five feet tall with waist-length curls?"

"Pipe down, you dirty chauvinist!"

The dwarf shook his head ruefully. "Okay, you've gone past Morally Grey now and are well on your way to Coal Black." He thought a moment. "Maybe I can fix that by taking you to see Rumplestiltskin. Yeah, his magic is always changing people for the better!"

Checking the Princess Pad for signs of a disturbance, Emma suddenly got a brilliant idea. She picked up a rock and smashed in her own window. "Oh no!" she cried in false dismay. "This looks like a job for the only law enforcement officer in town." She took out a cellphone and called herself. "Sheriff Swan, this is Emma. The apartment I share with my friend, Mary Margaret Blanchard, has been burglarized, and the culprit made off with Mary Margaret's jewelry box. Could you make a note of that and date it back a couple of weeks? Of course I can," she answered herself. "Just let me know if you need any further help, citizen. Have a great day."

Henry had been watching this scene from the stairwell. "Emma, that's cheating and you know it."

"Henry? Why aren't you in school?"

"Because my teacher's in the slammer and can't make me," he gloated.

Emma took out her calendar. "Note to self, hire a truancy officer ASAP." She turned back to her son. "And as for you, go home."

Henry just chuckled, looking at her the way one might look at a toddler covered in spaghetti. "Emma, has that command ever worked on me before?"

"Well, no," she admitted.

"And do you have any kind of authority over me that you could use to enforce it?"

"Not really."

"Then maybe you should quit wasting our time and tell me how I can help," the boy suggested.

"Fine!" she challenged. "If you're so smart, then tell me who could possibly have it in for a cute little geek like our Eminem?"
"Well, since you ask, haven't you noticed that my mom seems inordinately happy about the apparent murder of her best friend?"

"No."

"Then you're a freaking idiot!" snapped Henry. "Which leaves me to wonder, from whom did I inherit my genius?"

Gold suddenly walked in. "Yo, I'm here for the rent."

"Not a good time, Gold." Emma shooed him out. Suddenly, she heard a low hum near her feet. "Hm, I don't think I like this new soundtrack."

"Actually, I think that's the heating system," Henry corrected.

"We have central heating in here? Huh, who knew?" She bent down to inspect the vent beneath her, coming up with a bloody knife, a map to Kathryn's house, and a journal labeled "Confessions of a Psychotic Schoolmarm." The savior gulped. "Well, we're screwed."

August W. Booth noticed little Henry sitting at the only diner in town, having a staring contest with his hot chocolate. "Ouch! When a Charming won't drink his cinnamon cocoa, you know something's got to be horribly wrong." He sat down at the bar next to him. "Wanna talk about it, kid?"

"No."

"Tough, do it anyway."

"Well, my grandma-slash-teacher has been framed for murder, and while I'm thrilled at the prospect of never having to sit through her stupid birdhouse lecture again, I'm worried for her."

"Aw, there's nothing to be concerned about." August gave him a comforting pat on the back. "If she can overcome being born with a ridiculous name like Snow White, then she's strong enough to pull through anything."

"Hey, I happen to like the na…wait. You know about that?"

August grinned cryptically, as usual. "I know pretty much everything about pretty much everyone, little dude."

"Wow." Henry was awestruck. "Have you ever considered taking on an apprentice, Mr. Booth?"

"Sorry, not right now. I've got my hands full with my quest to enlighten your unenlightenable mom."

At the thought of Emma, he banged his head repeatedly on the bar, making a strange knocking sound. "Ugh, I think that woman must be at the Age of Not Believing."

Prince Charming was following some tracks through the snow, which was making him think of his girlfriend's name, which was making him increasingly depressed. "Well, it looks like a massive parade of bluebirds came through here not long ago, so she can't be far behind."

A naked knight staggered out of the woods. "Actually, the bluebirds were fleeing from her because she kept threatening to make omelets out of their young."

Charming averted his eyes. "Dude, are you supposed to be some kind of stripper? Because I really don't think you have the body for it."
"No, Snow White jumped me and not in a good way."

"Impossible," Charming scoffed. "Snow doesn't have a violent bone in her body."

"Then where did you get that chin scar?"

"…Shut up."

At the Mayoral Lair, Regina was peeling yet another bushel of apples. "Ah, my pretties, you're doing such a marvelous job of keeping Dr. Whale away."

David poked his head in. "Hey, can we talk for a minute, or did you want to be alone with your apples?"

"They'll wait. My apples are always there for me when I need them." She smooched the fruit tenderly.

"Uh…right. I just wanted to let you know that the accusations against Mary Margaret are false."

"How do you figure?"

"Because she's too cute to be evil."

Regina broke down laughing, face turning blue, tears pouring from her eyes. "Oh, David, you're simply too precious! Evil is sexy, or haven't you heard?" She preened into a very ironic mirror.

"Bah, what do you know about evil?" David scoffed.

"Not as much as my mom, but I'm getting there." Regina cleared her throat awkwardly. "But getting back on topic, what are you saying? That somebody cut a deal with Gold to have something tragic done to Kathryn, then bribed her second-string boy-toy into framing Mary Margaret by promising him a private performance of the dance of seven veils?" She forced a laugh. "Because that's ridiculous."

David stared at her uncomprehendingly. "Um, no, I was actually thinking that maybe I could clear her name by getting my memories back."

"No."

"But if I tried really hard—"

"No."

"But I—"

"Whatever you're going to say, the answer is no."

In her cell at Mayberry Jail, Mary Margaret shoved aside a strange feeling that Leroy should be locked in there with her. "So let me get this straight, Emma. We have central heating in our apartment?"

"I was shocked, too," Emma assured her. "And I'm afraid there's more. You're going to fry, and while I can buy you some time by taking the batteries out of the electric chair, that'll only work for so long. You need a lawyer."
That was Gold's cue to pop out of nowhere, as usual. "Never fear, Mr. Gold, Esquire is here."

"Gold? You're a lawyer?" Emma snorted. "Why am I not surprised?"

Gold shrugged. "Actually, I dabble in many fields. I'm also an adoption agent, a landscape architect, a certified nail technician, a minor-league baseball coach, and an exotic dancer."

"Ew!" Mother and daughter turned green.

"Judge me all you want," said Gold, "but you really should want me on your side. Not to brag or anything, but I'm such a smooth talker that, looking like this, I was able to score with Rose McGowan."

"Maybe so," Emma conceded, "but on the other hand, the last time I accepted help from you, terrorism ensued and my baby mama almost died."

"You're welcome," Gold smiled serenely.

"Enough!" Mary Margaret exploded. "Emma, since it's my life, my freedom, and my snow-white rep on the line, shouldn't this be my decision?"

The savior rolled her eyes. "Everything's always about you, isn't it?"

"That does it." The accused motioned to her new lawyer. "Sic her, Gold!"

Gold happily advanced on the sheriff with an escargot fork, and she ran like hell. Mary Margaret regarded him cautiously. "So why do you want to work with me? I can't pay you. I'm a teacher—I can barely pay for Top Ramen."

He gave her a very crocodilian smile. "Let's just say I'm invested in your future, and the mayor's lack thereof."

At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Rumplestiltskin was at his wheel spinning gold and trying not to angst, when somebody barged in. "Regina, I presume? You'll have to leave, I'm not in the mood for more of our hilarious banter today."

"No, it's us," said Grumpy, a bound and gagged Snow slung over his shoulder. "The Lonely Hearts Club, Enchanted Forest Branch. We've got a bone to pick with you regarding your new anti-love drug."

"Read the fine print on the bottom of the bottle," Rumplestiltskin replied, not bothering to look up.

Grumpy did as directed, his face falling. "Possible side effects include drowsiness and loss of personality."

"Sorry, dearie, but love is non-refundable," the Dark One trilled. "And trying to bottle it just leads to love polygons, men with donkey heads, and the birth of dark wizards—"

Snow, having wriggled free of her bonds, cut him off with a whack from her trusty broom. "Let's have less talking and more regicide, Beastie Boy!"

Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Brilliant. Glad you thought of that." He handed her a bow and quiver. "Here, I swiped these off a little dude name Cupid. Take them and go wait for Regina on the grassy knoll."
Snow hesitated briefly. "And I suppose this magic comes with a price?"

"Not this time, dearie."

"But what about your catchphrase?" she persisted. "Why would you want to help me? It's totally OOC."

The Dark One finally caved. "Well, if you insist on knowing, it's because I need you to fall to the Dark Side for a while so that your future husband will be desperate enough to come to me for help, and give me a strand of his hair to mix with the strand I took from you, so that I can create the world's first True Love Potion Number Nine, which will be genetically coded to the daughter you guys will eventually have, so that I can place a drop on the parchment of the elaborate curse I'm creating in order to trap us all in a land without magic, so that when it is cast, your daughter will have the inherent power to rescue us, thus freeing me to go and reunite with my long-lost son." He took a long puff on his inhaler.

For the first time in days, a trace of compassion flickered in Snow White's eyes. "Wow. If you spend all your time thinking like that, it's no wonder you're insane."

David thumped on Dr. Hopper's door. "Hey, Hopper, I need your help."

"Then give a little whistle," Hopper instructed from behind the door.

"Um…okay." David whistled.

The door opened right up for him. "What's up, David?" asked Dr. Hopper. "If you're looking to have a loved one gaslit, I'm afraid I'm no longer offering those services."

"No, I need to undergo hypnosis to help my Eminem, and unfortunately, Dr. Kaa isn't taking new patients right now."

Prince Charming stormed into the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, sword held high. "Yo, 'Stiltskin, get out here before I start making teacup-flavored shishkebab!"

"Have you ever heard of a little thing called knocking, dearie?" The Dark One appeared, looking bored. "I suppose you're unhappy with the adoption I arranged for you? That seems to be a recurring theme in my career. Honestly, I don't know why I even try."

"Hey, I'm totally justified in my anger," Charming defended. "Prospective adoptive parents are supposed to be screened for abusive tendencies and severe mental illness before a placement is made. Did you even bother with a home study before you hocked me to that loon?" The quasi-prince's face was a mask of anger, or as close to one as his boyish good looks would allow. "You can make restitution by telling me what you did to Snow."

"I allowed her to take part in an experimental drug trial, but there were some not unforeseen complications." Rumplestiltskin hid a giggle. "You'll have to cure her with True Love's Kiss, as usual."

"Really? I get to cure Snow White and make out with her at the same time?" Charming positively glowed. "Could this quest possibly get any better?"

"Actually, yes," said Rumplestiltskin, rolling out a map printed on some sort of pancake. "I'm going to give her her location, and all I ask in return is that you give me your cloak, rubbing it carefully
against your head for several minutes beforehand, and then promise to swear off birth control for the rest of eternity."

Snow White was doing some pre-assassination stretching when Prince Charming jumped her, and not in a good way. "Get your hands off me!"

Charming snickered. "Baby, that's something I never thought I'd hear you say."

Snow White tried to punch him in the face, but to her dismay, he seemed to be enjoying it. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Killing two birds with one stone!" Without further ado, he commenced the cure-slash-makeout session.

Snow shoved him away. "Hey, that's unwanted physical intimacy, you pig!" She socked him in the head. "No means no!"

Emma came home and found a child on her doorstep. "Henry, if this is some ploy to get me to readopt you, I'm not interested."

"No, I brought proof that my mom framed Mary Margaret." He held up a ring of skeleton keys. "See? Only an evil murderess would own keys that are black and covered in skulls."

"I don't think that'll hold up in court, kid."

"Fine." Henry rose. "If you need further proof, I'll use them to unlock the door." He poked the key into the lock, to no avail. "Oops, maybe it's this one. Nope. Well, third time's the charm." But it wasn't. "Okay, fourth time's the charm."

Emma groaned. "Henry, you're my son and I'll love you no matter how crazy you get, but that doesn't mean I have to enjoy it."

"Please, Emma?" He flashed her his patented Little Orphan Henry smile. "I just know the fifth time will be the charm."

Emma grabbed the key. "Fine, I'll try it, just turn the damned Charming Family Charm off," she grumbled. She stuck the key in the lock, and the door swung wide open. "I...choose not to notice that," she stammered.

Henry snickered. "Emma, give it up."

Prince Charming came to and found himself tied to a tree. "Snow? You never told me you were into this sort of thing."

"You must be the dude who broke my heart," said Snow impassively. "What's your name?"

"Many things, but you can call me Charming."

"That's a dumb name."

"I know, but it was a gift from my sweetie."

"Then you have a dumb sweetie, too."
"I meant you!"

"Bah, I'm no sweetie."

"I'll say," Charming muttered. "I don't get it. True Love's Kiss should have changed you back into the gentle, loving robber of stagecoaches that I first fell in love with."

"I don't love you. I think you're lower than a toad covered in pond scum!"

The quasi-prince smirked. "You've said that before, baby. I didn't buy it then, and I don't buy it now."

"Blech, I don't have time for a man in my life!" Snow sneered. "I've got a queen to disembowel and I don't need any distractions!"

"Don't kill her, Snow! I know life would be a lot easier with her out of the picture, but it would also be incredibly boring! Snow? Snow!"

David was passed out on Dr. Hopper's couch in a very familiar vegetative state. "David, can you cluck like a chicken?"

"Bawk!" David squawked obediently.

Chuckling, Dr. Hopper took a quick video to post on YouTube. "Heh heh. All right now, down to business. When did you last talk to Kathryn?"

"She called me on the phone and gave me a very classy parting speech while I tried in vain to keep disliking her."

"And then what happened?"

"I somehow ended up in the woods, and two feet of snow suddenly appeared on the ground. Then I ran into Mary Margaret, whose hair had inexplicably grown three feet overnight. Also, she was dressed for some kind of renaissance faire, and I was telling her not to kill someone because it would make life boring."

Hopper frowned. "I don't know, that sounds like more of a hallucination than a memory."

Prince Charming struggled with his bonds. "This must be karmic retribution for the time I trapped Snow in that net."

Jiminy Cricket fluttered up to him. "Yo."

"A talking foot-long cricket?" Charming blinked. "Okay, why the hell not?"

"Are you James?"

"No, but I'm the closest approximation of him you're going to find. Why?"

"I'm Jiminy. I've been trying to help your girlfriend, Snow, but for a professional conscience, I'm surprisingly bad with moral guidance. Seriously, I worked on my parents for like, thirty years, with no results. Maybe you'll have better luck." He set to work painstakingly chewing through the fibers of Charming's bonds. "Ten strong, healthy fingers sure would come in handy right about now. Damn Blue Fairy and her damn no returns policy." The ropes finally snapped. "Anyway, about your
woman? She'll never be able to remember who you are until she remembers who she is."

Charming clambered to his feet. "Jiminy, that's so insightful!"

"Thanks. I got it from a fortune cookie."

Regina rode by, looking down on her subjects with disdain. "Worthless peasants. The only good commoner is a sexy commoner." She smooched an old picture of her boyfriend.

On the grassy knoll above the road, Snow drew back her bowstring. "Sic semper tyrannis, you equestrian dictator!"

"NOOOOOOO!" cried Prince Charming, throwing himself into the arrow's path.

"You again? That was idiotic!" Snow screamed, smacking him upside the head.

"No argument here," wheezed Charming, writhing on the ground. "In retrospect, maybe I should have just swatted the arrow aside with my sword like I did with that flaming one yesterday." He staggered to his feet. "I know that, given the two severe injuries you've now inflicted on me, this may seem like bad judgment on my part, but I love you, Snow. And I know you love me, even though you've never actually told me or even hinted to me that you do."

"That's ridiculous," Snow scoffed. "Loving someone who doesn't reciprocate your feelings? Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"Well, if it doesn't exist yet, I'm inventing it," he proclaimed stubbornly. "I love you, Snow, and you can play hard-to-get all you like, but I'm never going to drop the subject. I'd rather die than see you visit justice on the woman who murdered your father and countless others."

"Die?" Snow rolled her eyes. "Isn't that a little melodramatic? It's an inch-deep flesh wound to the shoulder." She smiled weakly. "But I appreciate the sentiment anyway." She took him in her arms and kissed him. Her eyes snapped open. "Honeymuffin?"

"The one and only, baby!" Charming grinned. She leaned in to smooch him passionately and repeatedly, and he flinched. "Snow, don't take this the wrong way, but I have an arrow protruding from my shoulder. I'm not really in the mood right now."

King George's Royal SWAT Team, who had bad timing and no sense of romance, charged in and tore the pair apart. "Prince James?"

"Actually, no," Charming answered truthfully. The knight looked him over. "Well, you're the closest approximation to him that I can find." He tore the arrow out of the quasi-prince's shoulder.

"Ow! I call police brutality on that!" Charming howled.

The knights ignored him, wrestling him into the back of a paddy wagon. "You have the right to remain silent. If you refuse the right, I can and will kick the crap out of you." He motioned to his men. "Come on, fellas, leave the girl. It's not like she has any type of bounty on her head, or potential use to us as a hostage."

"No!" Snow cried, watching them disappear into the woods. "My man is in danger and I'm powerless to help him. Oh, if only I had some sort of magic weapon that never missed its target!"
She sighed. "Ah well. It's getting late. I'd better track down a mug store and get home to my boys."

David walked into Mayberry Jail, cowering behind a riot shield as he approached his girlfriend's cell. "Hey baby."

"David!" Mary Margaret brightened. "You came for a conjugal visit?"

"No, just the regular kind." He hesitated. "I was hoping we could play a game of Truth or Dare. You go first."

"Um…okay. Dare."

"Okay. I dare you to tell me whether or not you killed my wife."

Mary Margaret stared at him in disbelief. "You think I'd stain my hands with blood just to get a date with you? David, what an ego!"

David grew sheepish. "I guess, when you put it that way, it does sound—"

She wasn't finished yet. "Not only that, but you two were getting divorced! It would have been completely unnecessary for me to kill her! And jealousy couldn't have been my motive, because you guys didn't even love each other! Do you think I'm stupid, as well as evil?"

David's face was beet-red. "Well, I—"

"Shut up! What are you even basing this on?"

"A vague mental picture of you swooping around in a cape trying to shoot people with a bow and arrow."

"Seriously?" she fumed. "You're taking the word of some weird coma dream versus the word of the woman you love?" She turned her back on him in disgust. "Get out of here, you pig, before I stab you with this shiv Emma helped me make!"

Snow White shuffled guiltily into her friends' septuple bachelor pad, a sack of drinking steins in hand. "Hey, dudes, sorry about all the sociopathy. I'm better now, but just in case I have a relapse, I bought you all unbreakable mugs."

"Aw, I can never stay grumpy at you," Grumpy relented. "Group hug!"

Snow White found herself covered in seven piles of heartwarming dwarf. "Oof! Well, this has been nice, but I've got to jet. King George has grounded Prince Charming, and knowing him, it's going to be a rather lethal grounding."

Grumpy shook his head wearily. "Seriously? You're going to break into King George's castle, and you're not taking your seven buff and loyal friends along? Your seven buff and loyal friends who already have extensive experience with breaking into King George's castle?"

"Well, I didn't want to presume…"

"Don't be silly," said Happy. "None of us have girlfriends, and there's no TV in here, so it's not like we have anything better to do."

Snow beamed. "I love you guys!" She took up her pickaxe, which now read "Cuddly". "All right,
then. Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to war we go!

For lack of anything better to do, Mary Margaret was making her bed for the umpteenth time that morning, when a skeleton key tumbled out of the blankets. "Hm, a file in a cake is more traditional, but I guess beggars can't be choosers," she muttered, slipping it into the lock.

"Hey, Eminem?" Emma walked in, and Mary Margaret hid the key, plastering on her most innocent smile. "I know Gold doesn't want us talking, but since when do I care what he thinks? I just wanted to let you know that Kathryn is dead and you're more screwed than ever. But you've got nothing to fear, because I still think you're innocent."

"Oh, great, my best friend thinks I'm innocent!" Mary Margaret snorted. "That's sure to sway the jury!"

"You didn't let me finish. I think Regina's framing you."

"What? Why?"

"Because Henry said so and he's omniscient."

"No, I mean why would she do this to me?"

"Maybe she's still mad at you for helping her sad and troubled son to better understand his origins?" Emma hazarded.

Mary Margaret sprang to her feet. "Emma, I'm not an expert on the subject, but isn't framing someone for murder illegal? Shouldn't you be taking some sort of action against her instead of hanging out having girl talk with me?"

Emma laughed. "Mary Margaret, you silly girl. We don't need to take action—we have Gold for that."

"We also have Gold for explosions and backstabbing," Mary Margaret reminded her.

"Just trust me on this."

"Fine. I trust you," lied Mary Margaret, one hand clutching the key and the other crossing its fingers behind her back.

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold was rubbing his magic lamp and making a wish. "Oh, how I wish I could find someone who knows what happened to my son!"

Emma walked in. "Hey Gold."

Gold glared at the lamp. "Damn thing's broken." He tossed it aside. "What do you want, Emma?"

"I have some shocking news. Regina's a dirty, rotten liar."

He blinked. "Have you even been paying attention these last few months?"

"I'm paying attention now, and that's what counts!" the sheriff snapped. "I want that skank's heart in a box!"

The pawnbroker grinned. "I knew I liked you."
At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Rumplestiltskin was going over Charming's cloak with a magnifying glass. "This is taking forever," he grumbled. "Why the hell didn't I just ask him for a strand of his hair in the first place? Wait, here we go!" He plucked a blond hair from the collar and dumped it into the bottle with Snow's. "Score! Just enough True Love Potion Number Nine to end a curse, bring magic to a new world, and maybe pick up a chick or two, if time permits."

At Mayberry Jail, Mary Margaret was leaving a note for her daughter. "Dear Emma, you know how I said I trusted you? I can't believe you fell for that." She opened her cell and fled into the night. "So long, suckers!"
Hat Trick

Mayberry Jail echoed with the chirps of Archie Hopper's relatives as its only occupant fled into the night.

Panting heavily, Mary Margaret leaned against a tree to go over her jailbreak checklist. "Step One, get the hell out of Dodge." She checked the item off. "Step Two, stumble blindly through the woods until I find a houseful of men to throw myself on the mercy of." She lumbered off dutifully.

Henry was sitting on a bench at the sheriff's station, reading through the Big Book of Déjà Vu for the twenty-seventh time that day, when his mom and non-charming grandfather walked in. "You again?" Emma groaned. "Henry, if you don't start giving me some time to myself once in a while, I'm going to have to put you up for adoption."

"You already put me up for adoption," Henry reminded her smugly.

"Then I'll hock you to Gold, here!" she threatened.

"Actually, you already did that, too," Gold noted.

Emma thought long and hard. "Fine, then, I'll dump you in a forest full of cannibalistic witches with nothing but a piece of bread!"

Henry cowered. "I'll be good. But before I go, may I congratulate you on your brilliant scheme?"

"Wait," said Gold. "Someone thought up a brilliant scheme without me?" Shocked and offended, Gold ran into the jail to pout.

Henry was equally surprised. "Wait, you thought up a brilliant scheme without me or Gold? Wow, I didn't know you had it in you."

"No, of course n—I mean, that depends. What kind of scheme are you talking about, here?"

Gold, having overcome his feelings of rejection for the moment, answered for him. "Apparently the kind that ends in Mary Margaret fleeing from Regina's version of justice. It's just like old times, huh Henry?" They both giggled.

Emma smacked them both upside the head. "Guys, be insane on your own time! Henry, is this your doing?"

Henry was insulted. "Hey, just because a guy happens to have a history of elaborate escape attempts, access to a set of enchanted master keys, little to no respect for authority…" He paused thoughtfully. "Actually, I can sort of see where you're coming from, but it wasn't me this time."

"Sheriff Swan," Gold interjected, "as we all know, but I'm going to repeat anyway, Mary Margaret's arraignment is tomorrow morning."

"In the same spirit, let me remind us all that if she's not there, she's screwed. Well, screweder," the savior amended. "Crap, I'm going to have to go after her, and I totally suck at wilderness searches. It's times like these that I wish Graham was less dead," she sighed longingly.

"Chin up, now," said Gold. "You've got a good twelve hours to find her, and you typically just need
one to solve a crisis."

Henry raised his hand. "If anyone cares, I know where she is." He held up the Big Book of Déjà-Vu. "She's in the forest, either looking for some strange men to throw herself on the mercy of, or shooting David Nolan."

"Henry, go home," his birthmom commanded.

Henry rolled his eyes. "Emma, they say the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting new results. That being said, maybe you should be the one in therapy."

"Henry, go home!"

The boy chuckled. "I'll humor you this time." He walked off, shaking his head good-naturedly.

"You should listen to the kid, Swan," Gold advised. "If Eminem's head isn't safely back in its designated noose by morning, it could cost you the position I lied and bombed so hard to get for you."

Emma blinked. "Gold, do you have amnesia?"

"No, not anymore."

"Then you should remember that I didn't want this job. I just wanted to beat Regina. And if I can't do that within the confines of the law, I can always do it with a large bat. Besides, if Mary Margaret skips town, who's going to fix me cocoa every morning just the way I like it?"

The sheriff drove her mighty Love Bug into the woods. "A lone woman driving into the woods on a deserted road, in the dark of the night, through a thick layer of fog, with owls hooting ominously in the background? This couldn't possibly go wrong."

A man suddenly threw himself under her tires. "Score!" he squealed.

She slammed on her brakes and hopped out to investigate. "Poor thing, you must be delirious."

"I usually am," he chirped nonchalantly. "So, you must be Sheriff Emma Swan, age twenty-eight, of 54 Princess Parkway, Apartment Three, Social Security Number 522-78-9395."

"The one and only," Emma replied obliviously. "I'm just out looking for a…lost coma patient," she fibbed.

"Oh? Well, when you find her, wish her luck at her arraignment for me." He smiled archly. "Now, if you'll excuse me, it's time for me to be getting home. By hobbling slowly and painfully. On the foot that you crippled." He looked her in the eye expectantly.

"Subtle," she said. "I'd be happy to give you a lift."

Thanking his lucky stars that the savior had grown up with no parents to teach her about stranger danger, he climbed in the car. "Cool. My name's Jefferson."

"Your first or your last?"

"Eh, you pick."
Jefferson raced through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, his face a mask of sheer terror. "Mustn't let…Grace find me!" he panted. "Can't bear to…listen to…her stupid White Rabbit song…one more time!" He took cover behind a tree that was thinner than he was, being delirious from exhaustion from the chase.

Grace burst out laughing when she saw him cowering behind the twig. "Papa, how stupid do you think I am?"

"You found me?" Jefferson was too impressed to be frightened. "Wow, you must be part canine. Good thing you're already wearing a little red riding hood."

"Or," Grace suggested dryly, "maybe you just suck at hiding."

Jefferson flushed. "Enough games. It's time to go hunt mushrooms now." He turned to stare directly into the camera. "Because we're poor mushroom hunters. Everybody got that?"

They head back home, because, as everyone knows, good mushrooms can be found in abundance on the bathmats of single men. However, when they reached the house, they found that someone had beaten them to the punch. Queen Regina's creepy carriage was parked at their front door, the driver tapping his meter impatiently.

"Wow," Grace exclaimed, eyes wide. "A luxury vehicle at the door of a low-income family? This can only mean one thing. We've won the Publishers' Clearinghouse Sweepstakes!"

"No, that can't be it. I didn't enter this year. It must be the Queen," Jefferson sighed wearily.

His daughter's eyebrows rose. "How do you know the Queen? Is she going to turn out to be my mysterious mother or something?"

"Ew, no! I just…" Jefferson shuffled awkwardly. "Well, I may have cruelly crushed her most cherished dream a while back. But in my defense, it was all Rumplestiltskin's idea."

"Wait, how do you know Rumplestiltskin?"

"What's with the third degree?!" Jefferson ranted. "Am I on trial, here?!" Without waiting for a response, he shoved her into the trees. "Get back into the forest, and don't follow any strange bunnies while I'm gone."

He found the Queen in his kitchen, helping herself to a slice of unbirthday cake. "Hey Jeff. Your new place is a real dump. Whatever happened to all that gold Rumplestiltskin gave you?"

"I blew it on shrooms," he admitted. "But I'm clean now. What do you care, anyway?"

"I have a job for you."

Jefferson chuckled. "Nice try, Reg, but I'm way too smart to work for you. I have a kid to raise, and being dead, heartless, or trapped in a mirror would definitely put a damper on that."

"Bah, you're a terrible father," the Queen scoffed. "Money and possessions, not love and quality time, are the keys to raising an emotionally healthy child."

"Regina, do the world a favor and don't have any kids."

"What do you know?" she sneered, unleashing her mighty Glare of Evil. "I'll show you! I'm going to get a child and raise it in an atmosphere of emotional sterility if it's the last thing I do!" she vowed,
lightning crashing in the background.

Jefferson just looked tired. "Regina, go home."

"No," said Regina. Jefferson didn't know how to respond to that. "Just hear me out!" she wheedled. "All I need is a coach seat on your next flight to the place whose name I have written on this Post-It Note."

Jefferson glanced at the note. "Wonderland? Why didn't you just say so?"

"I have a speech impediment that makes it difficult for me to pronounce my w's," she explained. "Can you give me a lift or not? There's a certain spell component-slash-loved one that I really need to pick up."

"Couldn't I just pick it up for you?"

"No, that would make far too much sense."

"Sorry, Regina, but I'm not crazy yet. The answer is no."

The Love Bug pulled up in front of Jefferson's McMansion. "Wow," breathed Emma, "this is your house? You must be loaded!" She gave him a double-take. "Are you in the market for a love interest, perchance?"

"Now Emma, you shouldn't tease the Mad Swan shippers like that," he chided, limping up the front steps. But the sheriff would not be dissuaded, slipping an arm around him, batting her eyelashes, and following himself inside.

Jefferson smirked, congratulating himself on yet another masterful use of reverse psychology. "Well, if you insist, we could do some bonding over a nice chipped cup of tea." He limped dramatically into the kitchen and returned with a tray. "Do you take yours with one morphine or two?"

"Two, please."

He handed her the cup, along with a map. "Here, maybe this will help you find your alleged coma patient. I got it off the back of a kids' placemat."

"Cool. Well, it looks like I should be able to find her somewhere between this smiley face and this mountain of gumdrops…" She swayed precariously. "Wait a minute, did you say morphine?"

"'Fraid so." Jefferson smirked. "Sweet dreams, princess."

At the local marketplace, Jefferson and Grace browsed through the toy cart, while a certain street rat and his pet monkey danced by with a stolen loaf of bread. "Look, Daddy, a white rabbit! Buy him for me or I'll sing the song again!"

"Baby, I don't have any money. In case you haven't noticed, everyone hates mushrooms. In retrospect, I really should have taken up berry picking or something instead."

Grace burst into song. "One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small…"

Wincing, her father turned to the ethnic caricature running the toy booth. "I'll give you my entire eight cent fortune and even throw in my right arm if you want, just give us the rabbit!"
"Sorry," said the ethnic caricature, "but I can't afford to let the little guy go that cheap. The price of fiberfill is up to ninety-four silvers a barrel."

"Tell 'em a hookah-smoking caterpillar has given you the-"

Jefferson clamped a hand over his daughter's mouth and rounded furiously on the ethnic caricature. "Give us the bunny or so help me, I'll blow your brains out with one of your own popguns!"

Grace pried the wooden weapon from her father's grasp. "Relax, Papa, I was just kidding. And, just a heads-up, threatening little old ladies in order to get free stuff sets a really bad example for me."

As they walked away, the ethnic car—oh, screw this, we all know it's the Queen—hopped into her Hag Wagon for a chat with her favorite enabler. "Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the greatest cosplayer of them all?"

"You, baby," the mirror assured her, "but must you use your awesome talents to swipe dollies from cute little girls? What's next, are we gonna go take candy from a baby?"

"Actually, now that you mention it, my chocolate supplies are getting low."

The mirror frowned. "Remind me again why I fell in love with you?"

Regina let the spell fade, allowing her youthful hotness to shine through, and he snapped his spectral fingers. "Right, the irresistible sexiness. Now I remember."

Back at Jefferson's McMansion, Emma had regained consciousness and used a pillow and a teacup to free herself of her bonds. "It's a damn good thing I spent all those years watching McGyver," she muttered. Going over to the window, she found it locked. "Rats! Where's a chainsaw when you need one?" she lamented, peeking through a spyglass in one of the windows. "Hm, it looks like I left my lights on and Jefferson is stalking me." The savior sighed. "This just isn't my day."

Tiptoeing down the hall in search of an escape route or power tool closet, she found her abductor trying in vain to sharpen a pair of Crayola-brand safety scissors. "These evil things are driving me insane. They must be another product of that blasted curse," he grumbled.

Back in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Jefferson was putting the finishing touches on a homemade stuffed rabbit. "Hm, I'm pretty good at this. Why the hell am I scrounging for fungus instead of opening up my own toy cart, I wonder?"

"Because you'd never make a profit with the price of fiberfill approaching ninety-four dollars a barrel," Grace reminded him. "But it's cool, we won't starve as long as I know how to create imaginary tea and crumpets." She passed her father a cup.

"Thanks, honey. Listen, I need you to go over to Hansel and Gretel's for a few hours. I should be home before dinnertime, but just in case Hansel gets hungry and tries to eat you, take this to defend yourself with." He handed her a spade.

"But why?" Grace gasped. "Are you going to do a job for the Queen? Please tell me you're not that stupid!"

"Sorry, but it's looking like I am."

"Papa!"
"Be reasonable, Grace. Which do you need more, an adoring parent or an abundance of stuffed bunnies?"

"An adoring parent, you moron!"

"I'm sorry, but the correct answer was "b"."

Grace was on the verge of tears. "Just promise me you'll come back," she pleaded. "I don't want to be an orphan. The Queen might try to adopt me." She shivered and clung to her bunny.

Edging down the hall, Emma stepped on a creaky floorboard. "You snitch!" she hissed at it, darting into the nearest room.

"Emma?" squeaked a small voice inside.

"I can't talk right now, Mary Margaret! I'm busy breaking out of…wait, Mary Margaret?" She turned and found her bestie trussed to a chair with a gag in her mouth. "What are you doing here?"

"Crying, trembling, and trying not to wet my pants. You?"

Emma stooped to untie her. "Well, I went in to work tonight, and I couldn't help but notice you weren't there. What's up with that, by the way?"

"Someone left a skeleton key under my pillow, along with a suspicious-smelling apple pie."

"Who?"

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. "Gee, I don't know. Who do we know that has a set of skeleton keys, a mysterious grudge against me, and enough dark eye makeup to confirm her evil intentions? Could it be someone whose name starts with Regina and ends with Mills?" Now free, she thumped her bestie over the head. "Honestly, did your mom drink paint thinner while she was pregnant with you or something?"

Jefferson appeared in the doorway, holding a gun. "I don't know, did you?"

"A gun?" Emma cursed under her breath. "Damn, I wish I'd thought of that!" Attempting to collect herself, she looked him squarely in the eye. "You're wasting your time. I've already called for backup."

"Called who for backup?" her abductor asked bemusedly. "You're the only cop in town, genius! You really suck at lying." He laughed, glancing from mother to daughter. "It must be hereditary." He turned to Mary Margaret. "Does your charming boyfriend know you're here?"

"Er, no."

"And does he own a sword of any kind?"

"No."

Jefferson smirked. "I'm safe, then. Emma, tie her back up."

The sheriff glared. "All right, but just so you know, the love interest ship has totally sailed!" She bound her friend to the chair. "Don't worry, it's going to be okay."

"Yeah, I can tell that by your ashen face and shaking hands," Mary Margaret snorted.
Emma scowled, shoving the gag into her mouth with renewed enthusiasm and turning back to Jefferson. "So, I noticed your telescope, and I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I already have a stalker." She flashed a wallet photo of Henry.

"Rest assured, I have no intention of horning in on his claim. I just need you to do something for me."

"Okay." Emma turned some cartwheels and did a backflip. "Can I go now?"

"Nice try, but I meant something specific."

A throng of black-masked guards dragged Jefferson into the Queen's palace. "Guys, is this really necessary? I'm here invited and unarmed, you know."

The Queen looked up and smiled. "Hey Jeff. Here to sell out, I presume?"

"No, I just…my kid is…I wanted…yeah, pretty much," he admitted defeatedly.

"Sweet! Let's hop to it, then." She clapped her hands eagerly.

He pulled a hat out of the box at his side. "Okay, but just out of curiosity, why can't you just use a mirror to get there? You know how, and you seem to have an affinity for mirrors."

She grimaced. "Let's just say I've learned my lesson about taking road trips with Sid. Now get on with it."

He put the hat on the floor and spun it. The Queen eyed it warily. "I don't have to kiss you if that thing points to me, do I?"

"No, just dive in."

Jefferson dragged Emma into his museum of top hats, where he gave guided tours Friday through Sunday. She wasn't impressed. "If you plan on trying to kill Mary Margaret, you should know that that job has also been reserved by a member of the Mills family."

"Despite my unnerving habit of gratuitously sharpening pointy objects, I have no intention of harming her," he assured her. "I'm simply trying to keep her from crashing headlong into the curse you choose not to notice."

"Well, that's not necessary. Mary Margaret was fleeing on foot, and all the curse knows how to do is cause auto accidents—I mean, how do you know about the curse—I mean, what curse?" she stuttered, sweating profusely.

"You're really going to make me go through the exposition again?" Jefferson whined. "Oh, fine, but you owe me." He lowered his voice. "There is a town in Maine, where every storybook character you've ever known is trapped between two worlds, victims of a powerful curse. Only five know the truth, and only one can break the spell!"

"Nice summary," Emma drawled, "but as usual, I don't care about the curse. You know what I do care about? Being ogled through a powerful telescope by a criminally-insane serial kidnapper. What the hell is your problem?"

Jefferson smiled wryly. "Do you want the short list, or the long?"
"Short, please."

"Okay. I've been trapped in New England's answer to Mayberry for the past twenty-eight years, living out an extended version of *Groundhog Day*, under the rule of a psychotic witch who robbed me of my child and my sanity, in a land where you can't wear a top hat without looking crazy, and —"

She put a finger to his lips. "Seriously? This is the short list?"

"Yep. The point is, you got the clock tower working again, and that proves you're not the boring muggle you keep trying to convince yourself you are."

"You're insane!"

"No, you're insane," Jefferson fired back at her smugly.

"Um, no, *you're* insane."

"No, you're insane."  
"No, you're insane!"

"No, you're insane."  
"No, you're insane!"

"No, you're insane."

"No, you're insane."

"Enough!" the savior roared. "This is getting us nowhere. What, exactly, do you want?"

"My kid back, the Evil Queen's heart in a box, the other evil queen's heart in a box, some shrooms, a trip to Disneyland with a FastPass for the teacup ride…"

Emma cut him off. "I mean, what do you want from me?" Jefferson responded by pressing his whole body against hers and burying his lips in her hair. "What, you want me to make out with you?"

Emma shrank away. "Look, I told you, I'm not interested anymore."

"Oh, don't flatter yourself," he mumbled, shoving her in front of a worktable.

Jefferson and the Queen were inside his magic hat, and provided that no one decided to try it on while they were gone, their journey was shaping up to be one smooth ride. "Jeff, my man, you're as awesome as ever," Regina gushed.

"Please quit flattering me. It's just reinforcing my certainty that you're up to something." He steered her toward a mirrored door. "Here's our gate. Don't worry, I've had it genie-proofed," he reassured her, noting the look of trepidation on her face. "If you're going to worry about something, worry about my hat's arbitrary rule that the same number of people who come through it have to go back together."

The Queen snickered softly. "Actually, I think you should be the one worrying about that."

"What?"

"Oh, never mind." She followed him through the little Stargate and they found themselves face to face—or possibly face to tail, it was hard to tell—with a giant, chain-smoking blue caterpillar.
"I hate Wonderland," Jefferson sulked. "There's never a non-smoking section around when you need one."

Back at Jefferson's McMansion, the hatter handed Emma a pair of scissors. "Please use these to make a hat and not to stab me," he instructed.

"Let me guess. You want a large black velvet top hat with red satin lining just like the other ninety you already have."

"No, I want a large black velvet top hat with red satin lining and an elaborate series of magic doors inside. You were close, though."

Recognition dawned in her eyes. "I get it now! The tea, the hats, the insanity, the Jefferson Airplane nod; you think you're the Mad Hatter!"

Jefferson bristled. "I prefer the name 'Psychologically-Challenged Hatter.'"

"Wow," said Emma. "You obviously belong in the basement with Belle. But because your social isolation, fairytale-related delusions, and penchant for stalking me remind me of my dear son, I'm willing to refrain from reporting you if you'll just let me go."

"I'm not crazy! I'm not even psychologically-challenged!" Jefferson defended. "Jeez, you earthlings are always writing songs about the need to believe in magic, but when a guy actually does, you treat him like some kind of freak!" The hatter pouted.

"Jefferson, your views on the nature of the universe are very…um…creative, but they're also opposed to every law of physics. And theology. And philosophy. And every other belief system in existence."

"Scoff all you like," he growled, "but seeing as how I've still a gun in my hand and your mom tied to a chair, maybe you should at least pretend to go along with this."

Emma sighed. "One large black velvet top hat with red satin lining and an elaborate series of magic doors, coming up.

The Queen led her reluctant escort into a hedge maze. "You want to go in there?" Jefferson balked. "But there's a 'No Trespassing' sign posted! Besides, you know who it belongs to, right?"

"Sure, to my adorably unsubtle Mo…uh, that other evil queen with whom I am in no way affiliated," Regina saved, eyes darting around nervously.

"Well, if you're personally unfamiliar with her, you may not be aware that she's A FREAKING BLOODTHIRSTY MURDEROUS PSYCHOPATH!" he screamed in her face.

"Yeah, and she can put a real damper on your love life too. But I've got to go get my beloved spell component and you've got to come with, so suck it up."

She blasted her way through the maze with a giant fireball, and Jefferson quirked an eyebrow. "And you say she's not subtle?"

"Shut the hell up."

He followed her to the center of the maze, where they found a vault labeled "Cardiac Safe Deposit
Box." Regina shook a fist at it. "Open up or I'll blast you down, too!"

The doors flew open, trembling slightly. The queen walked in and began thumbing through various file drawers. "Let's see... letter E... enemies... ex-boyfriends... ew, what's Rumplestiltskin doing in here? Ah, here we go! Ex-husbands." She took a box out of the drawer.

A patrol of what appeared to be animated tin soldiers appeared behind them. "Oh my gosh, some mighty sorceress has managed to blast through our queen's magical labyrinth and bewitch her enchanted vault! Well, our rusty halberds will surely make short work of her!"

"NOOOOO! Anything but rusty halberds!" Regina grabbed Jefferson and ran. "Wait a minute, halberds? What the hell am I doing?" Cursing her own stupidity, she turned around and gave them all a mouthful of magic hedge.

Back at the little Stargate, the Queen stopped to pick some shrooms. "If you're going to eat those, I'm afraid I'm going to have to take away your car keys," the hatter cautioned.

"No, it's a spell component. For my other spell component." The queen dropped the mushroom in the box, and Some Old Man popped out.

"Pop goes the weasel!" he screamed in terror.

Regina shushed him. "It's okay, Daddy, you're safe... for now."

"The other evil queen took your father? Why?"

"Well, she's had it in for me ever since I gave her those stretch marks, and she wanted to use him as leverage."

"Also, she needed some arm candy for the ball tonight, and Rumplestiltskin's no longer single," Some Old Man piped up.

Squinting hard, Jefferson massaged his temples. "I'm so confused."

"Allow me to clarify things for you. I'm screwing you over," said Regina helpfully.

"Wow. What goes around really does come around," Jefferson marveled.

"And how!" The Queen smirked, taking her father's hand. "Let's go home, Daddy; I've got big plans. You're going to be a grandfather if it's the last thing I do!" She hauled him through the Stargate.

The other evil queen's minions descended on Jefferson, the Knave of Hearts seizing him by the arms. "You're under arrest, punk. Got anything to say for yourself?"

"Yes, actually." He smiled hopefully. "My good knave, how would you like to go for a walk with me, through that little mirror?"

"No dice."

"Damn. It was worth a shot."

Jefferson was dragged before an evil queen for the second time that day. This particular evil queen was concealed under an oversized fan. The hatter stared. "What are you doing back there?"
"Trying to psych you out," a spooky, otherworldly voice replied. "Did it work?"

"Yes!" Jefferson cringed.

"Tee hee!" the voice giggled.

"Listen lady…or whatever the hell you are…this isn't my fault. The other evil queen tricked me!"

"That woman's name is Regina! And I should know, I gave it to her," the voice grumbled. "Little ingrate. But that's a story for another season. Right now, I want to know how you got to Wonderland. Someone shove you through a mirror?"

"Cut me a break, Your Majesty, I need to get back to the Enchanted Forest to see my daughter. You have no idea what that's like!"

The queen's fan suddenly burst into flame, and Jefferson could only assume she'd unleashed her own Glare of Evil. "I know this is a cliché, but I'm going to say it anyway. Off with his head!"

A guard stepped forward and decapitated Jefferson with his rusty halberd. "Ah! I'm alive! And I'm not bleeding!" the hatter yelped. "How the hell did you do that?!"

A guard picked him up by the hair. "Talk or we'll shrink you and sell you to a souvenir shop!"

"We used my magical top hat," Jefferson stammered.

"Well," the queen whispered, "that's too bizarre to be a lie. Where's the hat now?"

"Regina took it. I'm not sure why. It's not her color at all."

"Then make another one."

"Are you kidding?" Jefferson cried in dismay. "If I knew how to make fashion accessories that cool, I sure as hell wouldn't be scrounging fungus for a living!"

"Figure it out, or I'm going to put you to work as a painter in my rose garden!" the queen threatened. Jefferson sighed. "One large black velvet top hat with red satin lining and an elaborate series of magic doors, coming up."

Emma was still hard at work in the hat museum. "Say, Jefferson? I just managed to make a flawless top hat by hand, with no training or previous sewing experience. Isn't that miraculous enough all on its own? Can we forget about installing magic doors in it and go celebrate or something?"

"No dice. If I have to spend one more day in this house, I'm going to go even crazier!"

"What have you got against this house? It's big, luxurious, and also the only dwelling in town not owned by Gold."

"Yeah, but the view sucks." He indicated a telescope at the window.

Emma was outraged. "Jefferson, have you been stalking another woman?"

"I have a life outside of you, Em. But if it makes you feel any better, it was totally platonic. She's my daughter, you see."
"Ruby Lucas is your daughter?"

"Oh, it…uh, must have gotten pointed at Ruby's bedroom by accident." Jefferson blushed, adjusting the spyglass. "That's my daughter. The little cutie pie with the advanced case of amnesia."

"If you think she's your daughter, then why don't you just kidnap her? You clearly have no compunctions about that sort of thing."

Jefferson pointed to himself. "As you can see, Grace has a family history of mental illness. I wouldn't want to push her over the edge."

Emma suddenly had an epiphany. "Hold up. I just realized something. Since you've got a gun in your hand and my mom tied to a chair, maybe I should at least pretend to go along with this!"

Jefferson beamed. "You're catching on. So you'll help me get the hat to work?"

"Sure. Say, can you turn around and bare the crown of your head to me? I, uh, want to make sure I've got this thing sized correctly."

"No prob."

"EMMA SMASH!" The savior picked up the telescope and slammed it into the back of his head. "Psycho." She grabbed his gun and ran to untie Mary Margaret. "No worries, homegirl. I smashed him good. He can't hurt us anymore."

Mary Margaret looked over her shoulder and groaned. "Don't you ever get tired of being wrong all the time?"

"You little sneak!" Jefferson jump-tackled her from behind. "I can't believe that the woman I stalked, kidnapped, and threatened with a gun would betray my trust in such a manner!"

As they wrestled for the gun, Emma saw a huge, jagged scar reaching all the way around Jefferson's neck. "I…choose not…to notice that!" she grunted breathlessly, holding him at bay.

Mary Margaret freed herself and grabbed a croquet mallet that Jefferson had stupidly left in the same room as his hostage. "Eminem SMASH!" she roared, smacking him over the head with it and roundhouse-kicking him out the window.

"Are you okay?" Emma asked.

"As okay as someone who's been kidnapped, ripped from the man she loves, and framed for murder can be."

They went downstairs, only to find that Jefferson had inexplicably fled from the armed women with a grudge against him. "Who was that loon?" Mary Margaret wondered.

"The Mad Hatt—I mean, a very lonely man," Emma saved. "By the way, that move you used on him was awesome. Remind me to stay on your good side."

"I have no idea where that came from." Mary Margaret was truly bewildered. "It was almost as if I had some kind of long-forgotten experience in hand-to-hand combat with crazed villains."

"I choose not to notice that, either." Emma found her Love Bug hidden safely under a tarp, keys placed neatly on the front seat. "Well, that's awfully handy. Jefferson was such a thoughtful kidnapper. I'm going to miss him."
"Well, now that he's out of the picture, what happens to me?" Mary Margaret wanted to know.

"Run away. Or don't. Whatever."

Mary Margaret blinked. "Sooo…you hunted me down, tracked me through the woods, and fought off a gun-wielding maniac just to tell me I can go ahead and leave?"

"Hm, when you put it like that, it does seem like a real waste of time. Well, if you'd prefer, we could team up to take down the jerk who framed you. Within the confines of the law, if possible, or with roundhouse kicks and croquet mallets, if necessary."

"Ooh, that does sound promising. Count me in."

Regina danced into Mayberry Jail, singing gleefully. "I'm getting revenge in the morning! Ding dong, the guillotines will shine!"

The smirk was wiped from her face, however, when she found Mary Margaret seated in her cell reading the latest issue of her mirror's *Mirror*. "Hey Regina. You're looking flabbergasted today. Bwa hah hah!"

The mayor looked dazed. "Did you just thwart my evil plan *and* plagiarize my evil laugh? Oh, it's on, now!"

Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I'm sorry, but my client is not accepting any visitors named Regina at this time. Hit the pavement, little girl."

The mayor dragged him into the hall. "I thought you said she'd take the key and run!"

"And you actually believed me? Man, you're even stupider than I thought."

"Don't push me, Gold! I'm probably the only person in town who's crazier than you are!"

Gold looked unworried. "Our friend Jefferson would disagree." He smiled, and it was incredibly disturbing. "See you at the arraignment. Sucker," he added under his breath.

At the only school in town, Emma found her son sitting alone on a bench. "Well, kid, I hope you've enjoyed your short break from birdhouse lessons, because I found your teacher."

"Is she okay?"

"As okay as someone who's been kidnapped, ripped from the man she loves, and framed for murder can be."

Jefferson's amnesiac daughter walked by, noticing the Big Book of Déjà-Vu in his lap. "Hey Henry. Still insane, huh? You know, for some reason, I find that quality very appealing in a man. Call me!"

"Will do, babe."

Emma frowned. "Kid, stop flirting for a sec and give me that book." She flipped through it and found an eerily accurate full-page illustration of yet another Storybrooke resident. "You know what, Henry? Maybe, just this once, I'll choose…*not* to ignore that."

Henry grinned from ear to ear. "Houston, we have liftoff!"
In the distant land of One Week Ago, Mr. Gold found Regina idly smooching a ring in her Mayoral Lair. "Didn't your mother ever teach you it's dangerous to put small metal objects in your mouth?" he scolded.

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "No, but she did teach me to brutally crush people who get on my nerves."

"Warning noted. I just dropped by to ask you for a favor."

"If you want my firstborn, I'm afraid you'll have to fight Emma for him."

"No, actually I'm talking about my woefully non-lethal beating of that dirty Capulet who offed my girl. Seeing as how the whole thing was your fault in the first place, I was hoping you could convince the district attorney to drop the charges."

"Why would he listen to me?"

"Because you'll be wearing this." Gold presented her with a skimpy string bikini.

"No offense, Gold, but why the hell would I want to do that? The only person I want to see locked up more than you is Mary Margaret."

"I was hoping you'd say that." Gold grinned. "I happen to have a contingency plan for that, just like I do for everything else. All you have to do is make something tragic happen to Kathryn and pin it on Mary Margaret."

Regina's eyes sparkled. "Or, better yet, I could make something tragic happen to David and pin it on Mary Margaret, getting rid of them both in one fell swoop!"

Gold thought it over. "Hm, not a bad idea in theory, but let's be realistic. David's far too cute to die."

"But—"

"Just do as you're told, Regina. You know as well as I do that none of your little plots ever succeed without my help."

The mayor snickered under her breath. "Your girlfriend would disagree with that statement."

"What did you say?"

"Er, just that a trial could get very messy," she lied expertly. "Particularly if it involves you."

"A trial?" Gold burst out laughing. "Due process? Since when is Storybrooke a democracy?"

"Good point, but why should I trust you? That never seems to end well for anyone."

Gold's chin rose indignantly. "I'll have you know I always honor my agreements! Unless, of course, they involve fighting in combat or using scary portals."

The Evil Queen, currently neither evil nor a queen, was riding on a cute little pony while her loving daddy looked on with pride. "Ah," she sighed contentedly, "nothing could possibly disillusion
someone as sweet and innocent as me!"

"Regina!" her mother barked.

"Except that." Regina dismounted, looking extremely tired. "So Mom, I presume that you dislike my riding the same way you dislike everything else in the world?"

"Damn straight!" Cora snarled. "I want some grandchildren to abuse, and you're never going to find a husband if you persist with this interest in sports. Men don't want a beautiful, athletic woman who can share their interests! They want a bimbo who likes to sit around and talk about shoes!"

"Honey, I know this is asking a lot," ventured the original Henry, "but could you please be a little less bitchy? Just a little," he added nervously.

Cora conjured up a spiked mace and then beat him over the head with it. "When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you, you flesh-colored, straight-toothed wimp!"

A hot stable boy who apparently had a death wish placed himself between Cora and Regina. "Sugarplum—uh, I mean milady, perhaps this saddle…"

Regina snatched her mother's mace and battered him over the head with it. "When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you, you lowly, sexy peasant!"

Cora beamed. "Ah, Mommy's little tyrant."

"Shut up, Mom!"

In response, Cora used a spell to hoist her into the air and cut off her oxygen. "I find your lack of obedience…disturbing," she snarled.

"And I find your lack of a heart disturbing!" Regina retorted. "You know I hate magic for the moment!"

"Yeah, I just don't care." Cora yawned. "How about we make a deal? I'll stop using magic when you start being an obedient daughter."

"Really?" Regina looked doubtful. "That's all it will take?"

"Okay, that was a bald-faced lie," Cora admitted. "But shut up and fall in line anyway."

"But Mom, why can't I just be who I am?"

"Because who you are sucks. I'm getting on in years, and the Enchanted Forest needs another villain. Someone cruel and heartless, like this!" She choked Regina more tightly.

"Um, honey?" the original Henry said meekly. "I don't want to be a nag or anything, but could you please stop killing our daughter? I've become sort of attached to her."

"Pansy," sneered Cora.

"I'll be good!" Regina choked out. "Or evil! Or whatever the hell you want, just put me down!"

"That's my girl." Cora dropped her and walked off, the original Henry went to spend the night at a battered men's shelter, and Regina went off to the stables for her daily dose of fluff.

"Hey baby, sorry for abusing you out there."
"That's okay," said Daniel. "Given the example your parents have set for you, it's no wonder healthy relationships aren't your strong suit."

Regina melted. "Oh Daniel, you're so patient and understanding, so loving and pure-hearted, so…” Horrified realization dawned in her eyes. "So obviously doomed."

"Well, then, you'd better enjoy me while you can," he drawled seductively, pulling her in for a kiss.

David pounced on Emma as she walked out of the only diner in town. "Hey Emma."

"Hey, lying bastard."

"I deserved that. How's my semi-ex-girlfriend?"

"Contemplating both suicide and lesbianism, thanks to you."

David winced. "Look, I know I've been less than charming lately, but in my defense, being widowed, dumped, and suffering severe brain trauma all in one week will do that to a guy."

"Explanation not accepted," Emma replied coldly. "You men are all alike! You have your fun with a girl, then leave her to rot in jail, for a crime she didn't commit, with a baby to raise!"

"Mary Margaret's pregnant?!" David shrieked.

"No, that was, um, a figure of speech." Emma coughed awkwardly.

"Phew, don't scare me like that!" David struggled to get his breathing under control for a minute. "Can I see my girl now? Look, I even wore my heavy-duty kneepads so I can grovel for forgiveness as long as she wants."

Ignoring him, Emma hopped into the Love Bug. "Sorry, but the last thing a woman in trouble needs is the love and support of a good man."

"Then what does she need?"

"For Kathryn to miraculously turn up, alive and unharmed. But let's face it, that's not going to happen."

At Mayberry Jail, Mary Margaret woke up with a start. "Ah! Another damned dream about the burning room! Oh well, at least that singing priest wasn't there whining about his hot Gypsy girl this time."

Regina was looking on with glee. "They say only the guilty, and narcoleptic dwarves, sleep in prison."

Mary Margaret rubbed her bleary eyes. "Regina, did you seriously break into a freaking police station? That's the stupidest crime I've ever heard of."

Regina's grin didn't fade. "Yeah, almost as stupid as fencing jewels to flesh-eating trolls."

The prisoner clutched her aching head. "I'm so confused."

The mayor's smirk widened. "That's it, keep describing your inner pain for me. I'm audio-recording this conversation to cheer me up on lonely nights."
Regina rode her doomed stallion into the fields to see her equally doomed lover. "Hey baby, I thought you were going to bring the carriage so we could snuggle in the backseat?"

Daniel was affronted. "Regina, all you ever want to do is make out! You never spend any quality time with me, and it's really hurting my feelings!" He sniffled. "What about my needs?"

Regina blinked. "Honey, I think we're a little mixed up. I'm the woman in this relationship and you're the man."

"Don't change the subject! When are you going to tell your parents about us?"

"Ideally, at my mother's funeral."

Daniel shook his head. "I don't get it. Your mom started out as a lowly, sexy peasant just like me. Isn't she being kind of hypocritical, here?"

"Yes, and also kind of callous, evil, abusive, traitorous, and sociopathic. What else is new?"

"Just tell her the truth, Regina," Daniel urged. "What's she going to do about it? Chop off my head? Tear out my heart? Strangle me with the sheer power of her mind, like she did to her own child mere hours ago?" He laughed. "You're so paranoid, Regina."

Chuckling indulgently, Regina threw her arms around him. "You're lucky I like my men cute and dumb, baby."

"I'm not dumb, I'm brave," he insisted. "And I also have a strong romantic streak. I love you, and true love is the strongest magic of all!"

Upon hearing these words, Regina melted into a puddle at his feet. However, she was forced to pull herself together when a little girl on a runaway horse rode by, screaming for help and a proper safety helmet. "Sorry, baby, but we'll have to reschedule this makeout session. It's time for me to ride to the little girl's rescue on my noble steed, and maybe rescue some kittens from a tree, if time permits." She stole a quick good-luck kiss and jumped onto her doomed stallion. "Here I come to save the day!" she belted, riding to the little girl's side and hoisting her out of harm's way.

"NOOOOO!" the little girl screamed, jumping out of her rescuer's arms and tumbling to the ground.

Regina rushed to her side. "Are you okay, sweetie?"

The child looked dazed. "Yeah, I just got this terrible feeling of dread when I looked into your eyes for the first time. Silly, huh?" She dusted herself off. "Thanks for saving me, but I'm never getting on a horse again. I'll stick with small animals that can't trample me, like bluebirds."

"Nonsense. The only way to overcome something you're afraid of is to face it. Unless it has no heart and an array of dark magic at its disposal. Then you should run and hide in abject fear." Regina shivered.

"Good advice. I'm sure it will serve me well in the future."

Regina smiled. "I like you, kid. We should go out for non-poisonous candy apples some time. I'm Regina, by the way."

"I'm Snow White."

The moment the words left her mouth, ominous music began playing on a band of invisible timpani.
"Ah! What was that?" Regina yelped.

"I don't know, but I'm getting that terrible feeling of dread again," Snow whimpered, flinging herself into her savior's arms. "Hold me!"

At Mayberry Jail, Mary Margaret was sitting patiently in her cell while Emma and Gold decided her fate. "So...you want to give Regina's scariest toady the opportunity to privately interrogate Mary Margaret?" Emma frowned suspiciously. "Are you sure you're on our side?"

"Yeah, but don't tell Regina I said so."

"Speaking of Regina, why am I not going after the rest of her apple tree with my chainsaw, as I promised I would if she ever crossed me again?"

"Because you're a cop and can no longer get away with it," Gold reminded her. "You could always dust that key she left with Mary Margaret for fingerprints, but a clinical, rational solution like that doesn't really seem like your style."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"We simply play up dear Eminem's image: the sweet little goody-goody with the congenital lying disorder."

"And a history of adultery, who is being represented by the most hated man in town," Emma added.

"Hey, whose side are you on?" Mary Margaret protested indignantly.

Fortunately Sidney walked in and kept her from having to answer that question. "Hey, Emma. I brought you some flowers."

"Thanks Sidney, but why are they humming?"

Beads of sweat broke out on Sidney's forehead. "Beats me. They're probably just infested with bugs-insects! I meant insects!"

"Um, okay. Did you find any dirt on Regina?"

"Well, a guy named Jefferson tells me she has a history of shroom abuse, but he's not exactly what you'd call reliable."

"Believe me, I know." Emma sighed wearily. "So the bottom line is, you've got nothing, as usual."

"Hey, if you don't like the job I'm doing, you could always conduct your own investigation," he sneered. "You know, like the citizens of this town have been paying you to do all along!" Sidney tried to calm himself. "Sorry, I didn't mean that. I'm just in a bad mood because I knocked over my favorite lamp this morning. I'll keep looking."

"Forgive me if I don't hold my breath," the sheriff grumbled, rejoining Mr. Gold and Mary Margaret.

"I've decided I'm going to talk to the D.A.," Mary Margaret announced grandly. "Gold here is right about stuff almost as often as Henry, so I figure my best bet is to just shut up and do whatever he tells me."

"Damn straight." said Gold.
Regina walked in, with District Attorney Spencer trailing behind her on a leash. "An excellent decision, Miss Blanchard," Regina sneered. "I know firsthand how good you are at talking." The mayor's Glare of Evil was out in full force today.

Spencer noticed a bottle on Emma's desk. "Hey, did you swipe my McCutcheon's?" He grabbed the bottle possessively. "You dirty crook!"

In an interrogation room, Mary Margaret sat stiffly at a table while Spencer held a cattle prod to her head. "Did you hate Kathryn Nolan? Tell the truth or I'll set Dr. Hopper on you!"

"I didn't hate her!" Mary Margaret denied. "Honestly, I tried really hard to, but she was just so darn sweet."

"Wrong answer!" he bellowed, zapping her.

Gold raised his hand politely. "Excuse me, but I'm pretty sure this violates the Constitution."

"So does buying and selling children," Spencer retorted, setting the voltage on the prod to high. "I'll ask you again," he growled. "Did you hate Kathryn Nolan?"

"No!"

He switched it off. "This obviously isn't working. Let's try something else." He pulled out a tape recorder. "Can you repeat what you just told me for the record?"

"I did not hate Kathryn Nolan!"

Little did she know, he'd been holding down the pause button during the word "no". He played it back with glee. "I did…hate Kathryn Nolan."

"Hey, no fair!" Mary Margaret whined.

Young Regina admired herself in a full-length mirror. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the sportiest one of all?"

Her mom walked in. "Don't you mean the fairest one of all?"

Regina frowned. "Why would I want to be the palest one of all?"

"Because I said so!" Cora snarled, magicking her into a fancy ball gown. "Now shut up and fall in line extra hard today. We're about to be visited by the king."

"Grandpa?"

"No, the other king."

"What's he doing here?" Regina wondered. "Did he hear our family was unhappy and come to spike our well with antidepressants?"

"No, that little girl you so heroically rescued was his daughter, and you've impressed him." Cora slapped her daughter across the face. "That's for being heroic!" Then she hugged her tightly. "That's for impressing the king!"

King Leopold entered, trailed by the original Henry and a bunch of vacantly-smiling, clearly drug-addled attendants. "Is that her?" he whispered, pointing to Regina. "Mm, hot! Maybe this won't be so
bad." He bowed. "Hey, thanks for saving my kid. It's nice to meet a woman who can do something besides sit around and talk about shoes."

Regina turned to her mother, smiling smugly. Cora surreptitiously zapped her with some lightning.

Leopold rambled on, oblivious. "The fact that my child was out riding by herself with no safety gear suggests that she needs a mom to supervise her. Unfortunately, her old one spontaneously dropped dead a few years ago."

Cora began laughing uncontrollably. "S-sorry, Your Majesty," she choked out, tears of mirth pouring down her face. "I was just, uh, thinking about a funny bumper sticker I saw earlier."

"Um. Okay." He turned back to Regina. "So anyway, you wanna get hitched?"

Regina gaped. "Er, have we met?"

"Sure. About eight seconds ago, remember?"

"Right," Regina said slowly and gently, as though speaking to a rather slow child. "Now, focus on the part of that sentence that contains the words, 'eight seconds ago.'" Does anything strike you as odd about that?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"She means that they've been the best eight seconds of her life, and she'd love to marry you," Cora interjected, conjuring up another mace and slapping it threateningly against her palm. "Right, honey?"

Regina ran into the stable and dove headfirst into Daniel's arms. "Marry me. Right now. This is not a request."

"Huh?" Daniel gaped. "Shouldn't we try going out on a real date first?"

"No time!"

The stable boy paled. "Wait, are you pregnant?!"

"Worse! I'm engaged!" she wailed. "There's only one solution. We've got to run away, and hope that my mom won't remember to use her enchanted globe designed specifically for finding misplace offspring."

"Regina, I don't think you've thought this through," Daniel said gently. "You may not have noticed, but I'm around twenty-five years old, and I'm still a freaking stable boy. This doesn't bode well for my professional future."

"Aw, that's not important," Regina assured him. "If we need cash, we'll just hock one of our kids to Rumplestiltskin."

"I like the way you think, baby!" He swept her into his arms. "But we seem to be gender-flipped again. Pipe down and let me propose to you properly." He took a ring off one of the saddles and slid it onto her finger. "Cheap, I know. Here, let me make it up to you with some really hot kissing."

"Ooh, okay!"

But alas, their smooching was yet again interrupted by little Snow White. "What are you doing?" she
stammered. Regina blushed. "Well, you see, sweetie, when a man and a woman love each other very much—"

"Ew!" the little girl shrieked, fleeing into the night. Regina sighed, reluctantly prying herself out of her boy-toy's arms. "Well, I guess I'd better chase after her. I have a feeling I'm going to be doing a lot of that."

She found the little girl curled up in a little ball on the ground, humming loudly, fingers stuffed in her ears. Regina gently pried them out. "Sorry, Snow, I didn't mean to squick you or anything—"

"It's not that!" Snow sobbed. "I just don't want our family to be broken before it even exists! Why were you kissing that man in the stables?"

"Because he's irresistibly sexy," Regina replied simply, as though that explained everything.

"Ew!" Snow covered her ears again. "You're going to be my mom, I really don't need to be hearing about your sexual escapades."

"Snow, honey, as much as I've enjoyed experiencing female bonding with someone I can trust not to kill me, I can't be your mother."

"Why?"

"Boy, where do I start?" Regina mused. "Let's see...I have no idea how a healthy mother-daughter relationship is supposed to work, I'm barely a decade older than you, there are people out there who actually ship us, I don't love your father—"

"Aw, you don't need to worry about that last part," Snow assured her. "The oxytocin in our water supply at home will have you and Daddy head over heels for each other in no time."

"You just don't get it, Snow. Your pop's a good guy, with great taste in women, but he's neither hot, nor a stable boy."

"I don't understand."

Regina smiled indulgently. "Don't worry, you will when you hit puberty. True Love is the most powerful magic of all. It creates happiness, pisses off villains, and breaks all sorts of pesky curses. Are you getting all of this, sweetie?"

Snow was taking careful notes on a legal pad. "'Love = happiness, broken curses, and pissed-off villains,' she read back dutifully. "Sounds pretty awesome. I can't wait to find my own sexy agricultural worker and live happily ever after," the child sighed dreamily. "But for now, I guess I'd better go break the news to Daddy. Maybe we can commission that nice Dr. Frankenstein to build him a bride instead."

"Snow, no!"

"Aw, don't worry. Daddy's cool. He'd never do anything rash, like get jealous and sic a genie on you."

"I'm not scared of genies, I'm scared of my mother, like every other sane person in the world should be." Regina shuddered. "Snow, do you know what a secret is?"

"No, I'm a mentally-deficient three-year-old." Snow rolled her eyes.
"Okay, that was a dumb question," Regina admitted. "Here's a better one: Can you keep a secret from everyone, especially my mother?"

Snow bit her lip nervously. "Probably not. I have a rare genetic disorder that severely inhibits my ability to lie."

Regina's eyes darkened. "Let me rephrase the question again: Can you keep a secret from everyone, especially my mother, or am I going to have to take up witchcraft and destroy everything you love?"

Snow cowered. "I'll be good!"

"That's my girl!" Regina said tenderly, hooking pinkies with the child.

Down at the pier, Emma was thumbing through the Big Book of Deja-Vu and trying desperately not to notice the faces of everyone she knew staring out of the illustrations at her, when August happened along. Completely by coincidence, of course. "Hey, Emma. If you're trying to use that book to prove Mary Margaret's innocence, chapters one, two, seven, sixteen, and eighteen may prove to be helpful. And if you have time when you're done with those, check out the chapter on Pinocchio. Not to brag or anything, but that guy's awesome."

Emma tossed the book aside, knowing that it would find its way back to her when she needed it again. "It's hopeless, August. Mary Margaret doesn't need an Emma Swan; she needs an Adrian Monk."

"Sounds like you've got a case of detectives' block," he mused. "It's a lot like writers' block, but more potentially deadly. And do you know what I do when I have a block? I go spend a few years partying on some island to clear my head, then start over from scratch."

She thought it over. "Well, if I try to leave town, Henry will work the Charming Family Charm on me, so partying on an island is out. But I guess I could give the starting over part a try."

"That's the spirit!" He followed her to the parking lot.

She groaned. "August, I already have more than my fair share of stalkers. I don't need you following me around, too."

"Eh, the other stalkers can take a number. I saw you first."

Emma was too tired to argue further or ask what he was talking about, so they rode out to the only bridge in town together. "Ruby said she found the box over here, by the shore. I would have checked it out sooner, but I didn't feel like it." She noticed August doubling over, as though in pain. "Are you okay?"

"No, my pants are full of wood."

"Ew, I really didn't need to know that."

"Not like that, you sicko!" He straightened up. "I'm fine. Probably a lot better than you, considering that Mary Margaret is in the slammer and you're doing such a lousy job of getting her out. After all, she's the first close relationship you've had since I told Baelfire to step off—" He bit his tongue.

Fortunately, Emma had been doing her best to tune him out ever since he'd made that disturbing comment about wood. "Hey August, check it out! I just found the missing piece of the puzzle. Literally!" she crowed. "So, are you up for a little unsanctioned search and seizure?"
August shrugged. "Since the Constitution obviously means nothing in this town, I don't see why not."

Regina looked lovingly on her "sleeping" son. "Aw, he's so cute when he thinks he's got me fooled," she crooned, heading for the shower.

Henry pulled a long-forgotten walkie-talkie from under his pillow. "The eagle is in the nest and the package is secure," he reported unintelligibly.

"Henry, you little nut, if you don't start making sense, I'm locking you in the basement with Belle!" his birthmom threatened.

"I put the keys under the mat," he translated. "Though I really don't see why all this subterfuge is necessary. If you intend to present the shovel as evidence, you'll have to get a warrant eventually.

"Hey, do I tell you how to do your job?" Emma barked, hauling August into the garage. He began shivering violently. "What's wrong, homie?"

"Table saws. Power sanders. Severed wood everywhere I look!" He swayed precariously.

"Get ahold of yourself, man!" She swatted him with her hand, and it came away covered in splinters. "I choose not to notice that," she stammered. Luckily, she soon spotted a broken shovel and was able to change the subject. "August, check it out. We nailed her!"

August clamped a hand over the savior's mouth. "Emma, don't jinx it!"

Snow White noticed some white flowers lying around Cora's castle, and tentatively approached them with a bright red paintbrush. "Hey, knock it off!" Cora snapped. "Uh, I mean, please knock it off, you darling child."

Snow shrank away from her. "I'm sorry; please don't eat my heart and liver!" she whimpered.

"And rob my darling daughter of the privilege? Wouldn't dream of it," Cora said innocently.

"Huh?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm just glad to see you becoming friends with Regina. She's going to need good friends to lean on by the time I'm done with her." Cora laughed evilly. "Ahem. Sorry, I was just thinking of a funny birthday card I got last year."

Snow smiled obliviously. "Gee, Cora, you're so full of good humor."

"And how!" Cora batted her eyelashes demurely. "So, now that we're buddies, has my little girl said anything incriminating to you lately?"

The little princess opened her mouth to lie, but thanks to her disability, nothing would come out but a tremulous squeak.

Cora grinned. Phase One was complete. "But enough about my problems. Let's talk about the totally natural death of your delightfully late mother. It must have been so hard for you."

Snow rolled her eyes. "Duh, no, losing a parent was a laugh a minute. Of course it was hard for me!" She brushed away a tear. "Allow me to give you some advice. If you're ever in a jam, don't go to the Blue Fairy for help—she's less than no help."
Cora was getting impatient. "I know, my ex-boyfriend told me so loudly and repeatedly. Now shut up and listen. I don't want to have to kill Regina like I killed your mother, so can you help me make up with her?"

Snow's little head was reeling. "That's sweet of you…I think. Well, here's the scoop: My dad's neither sexy enough, nor equestrian enough for Regina's tastes, so she's eloping with a hot young agricultural laborer." She sighed dreamily. "I'm so jealous!"

Regina opened her front door. "Can I help you, Sheriff Swan?"

"Yes."

"Must I help you, Sheriff Swan?"

"I'm afraid so." Emma smirked. "I finally got a search warrant for your garage. Are you going to open it for me, or do I get to use this?" She revved up her chainsaw hopefully.

"That won't be necessary." Regina opened the garage and Emma made an unsubtle beeline for the once-broken shovel.

"Hey!" she protested upon finding an intact shovel in its place. "You switched it out! That's not playing fair!"

The mayor was unmoved. "Neither was illegally breaking into my garage."

"Aw, come on, have a heart!"

"I do. I have several dozen, in fact," Regina replied serenely.

"You're being unreasonable! Aside from the adultery, the poorly-constructed web of lies, and the hideous sweaters, Mary Margaret's not a bad person. Why do you want to screw her over so badly?"

"Ask our son."

Emma stormed up to the only inhabited room at the only hotel in town. "Open up, August! I know you're in there, I can smell your varnish-scented cologne!"

August obediently came to the door. "Hey Emma. What brings you to my neck of the wood? Were you in the mood to be jerked around and Gold was unavailable?"

"Don't play dumb with me! I know you ratted me out to Regina!"

August's eyebrows shot up. "Why the hell would I want to do that? Regina hates me. She tried to make you run me out of town just a couple of weeks ago, remember?"

"I choose not to notice any of that!" She slapped him and a weird knocking sound resonated through the air. "Dirty liar!"

He looked affronted. "I'm not a liar. Just ask Dr. Hopper."

Mary Margaret sat in her cell, weeping and singing mournfully to herself. "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to Hell I go," she bawled.
"Damn right, you little blabbermouth!" Regina walked in, camcorder in hand.

"What's your problem, lady?" Mary Margaret sobbed. "If this is about me taking the last slice of apple cobbler at the school bake sale last month, I'm sorry! It was just so tempting."

"That was you?!" Regina fumed. "First my man, now my cobbler? You've stolen everything I ever loved, you jerk!" She pulled herself together. "Oh well, at least you're good and screwed now."

"But I didn't kill Kathryn!"

"Who cares about Kathryn?" Regina snorted dismissively. "She's not even a regular. Anyway, I know you didn't kill her, but you still suck." Without further ado, Regina stormed off to edit the incriminating parts of the conversation out of her video and post it to YouTube for villains everywhere to enjoy.

Mary Margaret blinked. "What the hell just happened, here?"

Regina ran into the stables under cover of darkness, and found Daniel waiting with open arms. "Are you ready for a lifetime of poverty and culture shock?"

"You know it, baby!" she whispered excitedly. "And just wait till you see the lingerie I've packed for our wedding night."

"Well then, by all means, let's get this show on the road!"

They ran outside, but found Cora standing in their path. Steam was pouring out of her ears, and she clearly hadn't come to bride away. "Freeze, you star-crossed suckers!" She blasted them backwards into the stable.

"Ow!" Regina whined.

"Shut up!" Cora barked. "Seriously, Regina? This is your cunning plan to escape from the clutches of one of the most powerful sorcerers of all time? Climb out a window and hope she won't notice?" She shook her head in disgust. "Deceit I can tolerate and applaud, but stupidity? Ugh, you must have gotten it from your daddy's side of the family."

"Look, I would have told you, but I kind of like living."

"I said shut up!" Cora roared, conjuring up yet another mace. "I did not waste all these years killing people and reading Machiavelli, to get you to the cusp of finally usurping that snot-nosed brat Eva, just to have you throw it all away for some peasant. However sexy he may be."

"But it's my life!"

"No, it's mine. I swiped it from Rumplestiltskin, fair and square."

"Wait, what?" Regina scratched her head, confused. "Oh, screw it, I don't even want to know. We're leaving and your magic can't stop us."

"Sure it can," said Cora, blasting them back against the wall again. "See?"

"So, what do you plan to do about this?" Regina challenged. "Chop off our heads? Tear out our hearts? Strangle us with the sheer power of your mind, like you did yesterday? Try it and I swear I'll hold my breath until my face turns blue, just like I did when you tried to deny me that hamster I wanted back in kindergarten!"
"No, but I could tear out your heart and make you stop loving him, or just whip up a batch of Anti-Love-Potion Number Nine." Her daughter's only response was to suck in a deep breath, puffing up her cheeks. Cora caved. "Fine, fine, you can have your freaking stable boy. But I'm not feeding it or cleaning its cage if you forget."

"Yay!" Regina threw her arms around her mother. "That was easy."

Cora went over to Daniel. "Daniel, can I give you some advice, from one lowly, sexy peasant to another?"

"Sure, Mom."

"Don't ever call me that."

Over on the other side of the room, Regina's eyebrows knitted. "A little too easy, now that I think about it…"

Cora smiled kindly at the stable boy. "The key to a successful marriage is to keep your guard down at all times. Can you do that for me?"

"I think so." Daniel relaxed his stance, put his hands behind his back, and stuck out his chest.

"Damn it, I can't believe we fell for this!" Regina cursed under her breath. "Daniel, stop!"

But it was too late. Cora had already plunged her fist into Daniel's chest, torn out his heart, and drop-kicked it into the nearest wastebasket. "And again, it would seem that the power of True Love has been grossly overestimated," the stable boy wheezed, going limp.

Regina ran to his side, gathering his oddly bloodless remains into her arms. "I lose more men that way," she sobbed miserably. "Mother, why have you done this?"

"Because I'm evil, and killing people is one of the perks. Besides, it's for your own good. Love may seem like fun at first, but the next thing you know, it's your wedding day, and some dreamy jerk's asking you to choose between love and power, and you're ripping out your own heart to get him off your back…" She colored, clearing her throat loudly. "But we're discussing your problems right now. I hate to sound like a broken record, but shut up and fall in line. You're going to be a queen."

There was a brief flash of clarity in Regina's tear-filled eyes. "Hold up. A queen, and my name just happens to be Regina? Mom, how long have you been planning this?"

A stone-faced, dead-eyed young woman was standing stock still while a bunch of chicks in nun habits fitted her for a wedding dress. "Wow, this mannequin sure is lifelike," little Snow White mused, poking it experimentally.

"Ow!" Regina yelped.

"Regina, is that you? Wow, you're definitely the fairest of them all!"

"All of whom?"

"I don't know, I just thought it sounded neat." Snow smiled sheepishly. "I hope that for my wedding day, I will look just as beautiful and no revenge-crazed witches will crash the party."

"I'm sure that won't be a problem," Regina reassured her absenty.
"So, has Daniel seen the lingerie you picked out for the wedding night yet? Your mom told me she's giving you two tickets to Jamaica as a wedding gift, so we should pick out a nice bikini for you, too."

Regina gasped. "Snow, did you tell my mother about Daniel and me? I'm shocked." She paused, lost in thought. "Well, not that shocked. Come to think of it, you were the only other person who knew about us."

"You're welcome," Snow chirped obliviously.

Regina picked the little girl up by the collar and pinned her against a wall. "Snow, what part of "don't tell anyone, especially my mother" did you not understand?!"

Snow looked puzzled. "This is just a crazy hunch, but are you angry with me?"

"Noooo!" Regina sneered sarcastically. "I mean, no, dear, of course not," she amended more gently, composing herself. "But I'm not marrying Daniel. He, er, got cold feet and ran off to Agrabah to join the Forty Thieves."

The child stared. "Wow, Regina, your face just got even blanker and I didn't think that was physical possible."

"Just a touch of Bell's Palsy, darling, nothing for you to be concerned about. I'll have access to the best doctors in the kingdom, now that I'm marrying your dad."

Snow White was beside herself with happiness. "You're going to be my mother? Score! I really wasn't looking forward to being raised by whatever monstrosity Frankenstein would have come up with."

"Don't worry, dear, I'll bring you up with the same unconditional malice and vindictiveness my mother raised me in."

"Aw, this is all so sweet!" Cora crooned, walking in. "I despise sweetness. Snow, go away."

"Sure thing, Granny." The kid skipped off cheerfully.

Cora looked her daughter over proudly. "Just look at my little girl! All disillusioned and emotionally numb, just like your mother before you. The only way I could possibly be any prouder of you would be if you somehow worked in killing a small, cuddly animal."

Regina obediently drop-kicked her old hamster out a window. "Happy now?"

"Very."

"Good, I'd hate to think that you went to all the trouble of spooking Snow's horse and manipulating me into rescuing her for nothing." She walked away, singing angrily. "No good deed goes unpunished! All helpful urges should be circumvented! No good deed goes unpunished! Sure I meant well, well look at what well-meant did!"

Cora winced, rubbing her ringing ears. "Dear, stop singing. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but there's a reason you're the only Disney villain without a song."

Regina sat at a window in the Stepford House, smooching Daniel's ring and singing a song of triumph. "Oh Danny Boy, that jerk Snow White is bawling/My crazy plan has finally turned the tide/I
will not rest, till she's reduced to crawling/ Because she spoiled my chance to be your bride!"

Henry came in, grimacing in pain and rubbing his ears. "Mom, stop singing. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but there's a reason you're the only Disney villain without a song."

At Mayberry Jail, a pair of state troopers had somehow managed to get into Storybrooke to haul Mary Margaret away. Emma squirmed uncomfortably. "Hey, Eminem? You know how I said last week that I could get you out of this mess? I'm really sorry about that." Mary Margaret didn't answer; just stared numbly ahead with a blank face, like her stepmother before her.

Emma rounded on Gold. "These are the results you're always bragging about? You're the sorriest excuse for a puppetmaster ever!"

"Relax, Emma," said Gold serenely. "She's not dead yet. Just wait until she's strapped to the electric chair and the executioner's finger is touching the power switch. That's when I'll make my move."

"Does the word procrastination mean anything to you?"

"Do the words dramatic timing mean anything to you?" Gold strolled off smugly.

Infuriated, Emma picked up the vase of flowers Sidney had brought over and hurled it at his head. However, he dodged it and ran with surprising speed for a crippled guy, and the vase shattered against a wall. Several non-insectoid bugs spilled out of it, along with a bunch of obviously-Photoshopped pictures of Regina making out with Sidney. "Sidney's a mole?" She sighed. "I should have known nobody could be that useless without making a concerted effort."

Emma pounced on August as he exited the only diner in town. "Hey, man, I just wanted to say I'm sorry I suspected you. In retrospect, it really was kind of stupid."

"So does this mean that next time I tell you something that you have trouble believing, you'll keep an open mind?"

"...We'll see."

Any further attempts at bonding were cut off by a scream worthy of the cheesiest horror film. "Sounds like Ruby's found another heart," Emma deduced.

They ran to investigate and found Ruby walking out of the alley. "Hey, did you find another heart?" Emma asked urgently. "Did it look like it might have belonged to Graham?"

"No, I found a person!"

"Who?" Emma demanded.

"I wouldn't want to spoil the surprise. You should go look for yourself, while I seek comfort in the arms of your handsome friend, here." She flung herself unsubtly at August, who shrugged helplessly and motioned for Emma to go on without him.

The sheriff ran back to the alley, where she found a body sprawled on the ground. "A half-dead townsperson, sprawled face-down on the ground? Oh, if only Mary Margaret were here to smooch the life back into you." She flipped the body over, and found herself face-to-face with Kathryn Nolan. "Kathryn?"
"The one and only," said Kathryn.

"It's good to see you, but why are you laying face-down on the pavement?"

"My kidnapper told me to. Something about dramatic tension."
The Return

At the only hotel in Storybrooke, August W. Booth woke up screaming in pain. "Ahh! Wood doesn't even have any nerves in it; why is this hurting so badly?" He rolled up his pant legs. "Ah! Termites!" he howled, grabbing his phone. "Henry, would you mind skipping school yet again? Right, right, stupid question. Meet me at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors in five, and bring a can of Black Flag with you."

Not wanting to look suspicious, August and Henry were talking in hushed voices in a back alley. "So you want to use me as bait against the most terrible creature in the Enchanted Forest?" Henry frowned. "Are you sure you're one of the good guys?"

"Positive, now get in there and work the Charming Family Charm."

The boy hesitated. "Wait, why exactly am I working the Charming Family Charm, again?"

"Uh, to get back at Gold for hocking you to Regina?" August tried.

Henry thought it over. "Fair enough, I'm in." He strolled into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors wearing his patented Little Orphan Henry smile. "Hey, Mr. Gold, I need a bell."

"You and me both, kid," Gold said wistfully.

"No, I meant a bell, not a Belle."

"Oh, okay, I think I might have some in back." Gold turned to go check the backroom.

"NO!" Henry screamed. "I mean, uh, I need to ask you a question first. Er...have you ever noticed that I kind of resemble you?"

Meanwhile, August was sneaking in through the back door Gold had stupidly neglected to lock. He rummaged through the office, stumbling across a pair of hideous puppets. "Ugh, Grandma, Grandpa, what's he done to you?"

Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Hey, I unleashed the unstoppable force that is Emma on the last jerk who broke into my office, and I'll do it again if I have to!"

"Sorry, I just came by to visit with family, but said family doesn't seem to be up for talking." He gave the puppets a pat on the head. "And by the way, if you really want people to stay out of here, maybe you should consider locking the freaking door."

At the hospital, Whale was assessing Kathryn's condition. "Good news, you're as hot as ever. Oh, and alive too."

Emma walked in. "Hey Kathryn. As Mary Margaret's best friend, I know I should be giving you the silent treatment, so I'll keep this interrogation brief. This kidnapper of yours, did he force you to construct a magic hat at any time?"

"No, he mostly just plied me with drugs. It was kind of nice, really." She shrugged dismissively. "So what's been happening on your end? I hear you guys thought I was dead. Was there a big funeral
with lots of mourners gnashing their teeth and wailing about how they couldn't go on without me?" she asked hopefully.

"No, but for some reason, the school gym coach has been inconsolable."

"Hm. Well, about that heart you thought was mine, where and who the hell did that come from?"

"Maybe some misunderstood genius swiped it from a graveyard?" Whale speculated.

"But why?" Kathryn wanted to know.

"Because someone's trying to frame Mary Margaret," Emma explained.

"Really? Heh heh heh," Kathryn snickered. Noticing the look on Emma's face, she tried to turn the laugh into a cough. "Uh, I mean, how despicable."

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Regina was furiously pelting Gold with a barrage of apples. "You broke our deal, Gold! I can't believe that a manipulative satanic weirdo who steals babies for a living has turned out to be untrustworthy!"

Gold just patted her condescendingly on the head. "It's a good thing you've still got your looks, dearie."

"But you promised you'd off my bestie!" Regina whined.

"No I didn't."

Regina thought back on their conversation. "…Okay, true, but you're still an evil bastard."

Gold preened. "Thanks for noticing."

"But why would you set me up like this, after all the good times we've had together?"

"What, you mean like the time I cruelly manipulated you into killing your beloved father, or when you sadistically tore the woman I loved from me?"

Regina shrugged. "I thought we had a love-hate relationship."

"No, I'm pretty sure it's all hate."

She looked hurt. "Then why did you make the curse for me in the first place?"

"Because I'm quirky like that. Now please buy something or get out."

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, young Baelfire was repeatedly kicking a ball against a mud-brick wall. "This hobby is incredibly boring," he observed. "Maybe I should take up grand theft auto instead." Lost in thought, he let his ball drift into the road. "Wow, did I really just lose a soccer match to a freaking wall? I'm bad at this," he grumbled, chasing after the ball.

A man driving a donkey cart knocked him into the gutter. "Hey kid, quit bleeding all over this public street or I'll have you arrested for littering!"

Baelfire blinked. "Seriously? You just ran over a child and you think you're the one with a right to be mad? Ever heard of a little thing called road rage, homie?"
"Wait, does that tattoo on your forehead say "Property of the Dark One?" The driver paled. "Uh, you're right, you're absolutely right about me! I need help! I'll check myself into anger management therapy right away, just please don't sic your rabid dad on me!"

Rumplestiltskin sauntered out of the hovel he had neglected to move out of, for some reason, wearing a dress, for some reason. "Wow, I never thought there could be a person more sniveling and cowardly than me, but here he is!" He turned to his son. "Bae, is this clown bothering you?"

"No, but you're going to kill him anyway, aren't you?" Bae sighed.

Rumplestiltskin slapped his son on the back proudly. "Go to the top of the class, dearie."

"You're giving me the death penalty for scratching a kid's knee?" the driver asked incredulously. "What is this, Texas?"

"Hey, considering that our justice system considers falling in love with the wrong person a felony, I think my views on crime and punishment are positively progressive." That being said, he transformed the driver into a snail and raised his foot to step on it.

Bae threw himself in front of the creature. "Papa, please don't kill him! I've always wanted a pet, and I—"

But his father wasn't listening. "Rumple SMASH!" he thundered, crushing the unlucky mollusk under his boot. Slime sprayed everywhere. "Ew. Maybe next time I do this, I should wear galoshes. Bae, get me my shoeshine kit."

"Get it yourself," Bae grumbled, storming inside.

At the hospital, as Kathryn lay comatose, David found himself suddenly feeling attracted to her for a change. "I know this is in really poor taste, given how you hate my guts," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her, "but I just can't seem to help myself."

Kathryn jolted awake. "David, I know that you enjoy being romanced in your sleep, but it kind of creeps me out."

"Sorry baby. I just came by to say I'm sorry for leaving you, then coming back to you and keeping you at arm's length, then leaving you again, then cheating on you, then leaving you again, then lying about why, then…" He glanced at his watch. "This is taking forever. Let's just say I'm sorry for our relationship in general."

Kathryn patted his cheek. "Aw, David, I can't stay mad at you. Especially with all these delightful sedatives in my system."

"Kathryn, you're as insufferably nice as ever." David shuddered. "And it's making me kind of ill. Bye, get well soon, have a nice life, don't write."

Over at the Princess Pad, the whole town had gathered to welcome home the woman they had been shunning and slandering for the past several weeks. Mary Margaret was grudgingly handing out glasses of punch. "Drink it and get out, you bunch of hypocrites," she barked.

Henry stood in the corner, chatting with August. "So, uh, have you ever actually met Mary Margaret?" he asked skeptically.
"No."

"Then don't you think your turning up to welcome her home is kind of suspect? Especially considering that Mr. Gold is standing right over there and he's already suspicious of your motives?" 

"...No."

Henry buried his face in his hands. "I'm surrounded by idiots. What's all this subterfuge of yours about, anyway?"

"Mind your own business, kid."

Henry burst out laughing. "Me? Boy, you really are new around here, aren't you?"

August glared at him. "Please go talk to someone who isn't me for a while."

"Okay," Henry agreed. "Hey Miss Blanchard, the class made you this," he said, shoving a giant card into her hands.

"We're so happy you didn't kill Mrs. Nolan'", she read. "Wow, your writing skills suck. I must be a really lousy teacher."

Emma handed her son his coat. "Hey kid, we need to get you home before your mom figures out that that elaborate dummy in your bed is a fake and tries to invite me over for turnovers." On her way out the door, she nearly tripped over David, who was kneeling on their stoop with a bouquet of flowers and a stuffed bluebird, wearing a t-shirt that read "The Scum of the Earth". "Beat it, David, and stop crying all over my stoop, or I'll arrest you for littering," she threatened.

"Emma, don't you think Mary Margaret should be the one who decides whether or not she wants to see me?"

"What, because she's been making such good choices with men lately?" She shoved Henry at him. "Here, drive my kid home, then come back tomorrow and wash my car, and maybe I'll reconsider."

Henry gave his grandfather a sympathetic pat on the back. "Cheer up, Gramps, it's not all bad. This is the perfect opportunity for me give you a refresher course in the Charming Family Charm. You seem a little rusty."

Gold was looking on with interest. "Ah, they grow up and drag you into strange new worlds so fast. By the way, have you ever noticed that your son kind of resembles me?"

"Can the small talk, Gold," Emma snapped. "I know you're the one who kidnapped Kathryn."

"How would I kidnap Kathryn?" Gold asked, bemused. "I'm scrawny as a little girl and I can barely walk."

The sheriff shrugged. "Didn't stop you from kidnapping Moe French. So help me, if I find out you did the same thing to Kathryn, I'll—"

"Put me in jail for the few hours it will take me to weasel out of the charges again?" Gold snickered. "I quiver with fear. Now tell me what you know about August W. Booth."

"Well, he's very cryptic, very smug, enjoys wearing leather, has an unhealthy interest in my worldview...you know, he kind of reminds me of someone, but I can't work out who."

Gold paled. "I see. Well, I suppose I should be getting home now. There's a Charmed marathon that..."
I really wanted to see." The moment he was out the door, a high-pitched scream rang through the air.

Back at the hovel he was too lazy to move out of, Rumplestiltskin handed his maid a bright red shirt. "Go put this on, dearie, then bring us our dinner."

Like all teenagers, Baelfire was sulking. "Dad, that was totally embarrassing! You just killed a man in front of all my friends! This is even worse than the time you showed Morraine those naked baby pictures of me!"

Rumplestiltskin looked bored. "Say what you will about my parenting style, at least I didn't abandon you to go screw some pirate. Now shut up and let me bippity-boppity away your boo-boo."

He raised his hand, but Bae swatted it away. "You're gonna help me with your magic? Thanks just the same, but I'd rather not lose my firstborn, see my parents turned to wood, or go insane." He handed Ye Olde First Aid Kit to his father. "Papa, I know I risk becoming a smear on your shoe by saying this, but you're turning into a freaking psycho. I miss my old dad, the lovable doormat who held me when I cried and gave me chocolate for dinner when I whined."

"Bah, that guy sucked," his father snorted. "By the way, son, I don't know if you've noticed, but I sold my soul and stopped a friggin' war for you. You're welcome."

"Yeah, yeah, you've had a brilliant career as an anti-villain, but I think it's time for you to retire before the villain part overshadows the anti-part."

"Hey, I'm just trying to protect you."

"From what?"

"From dentists, and your mom, and squirrels, and oatmeal, and Casper the Friendly Ghost, and—"

"Papa, you're the one who's afraid of that stuff!" Baelfire shouted, hitting him over the head. "Come on, don't you miss the way things used to be?"

Rumplestiltskin blinked. "What, you mean the poverty and starvation, the inability to walk, and the taste of boot leather? Hell no, and if you do, I'm sending you to a cricket for some psychiatric help. Besides, I can't get rid of the power unless someone stabs me to death with my Achilles dagger. Or unless I find some girl who's willing to make out with me."

"Ew!" Bae balked. "Both of those scenarios would traumatize me for life, but if I could find another way, one that wouldn't hurt me, kill you, or subject me to the sight of you making out with someone, will you promise to do it?"

"Son, I'll promise you anything you want if you'll shut up and let me eat."

"Sweet! I'll take that as a yes, then."

At the only hotel in town, Mr. Gold took out a set of lock picks and prepared to break into August's room. "Wait, what the hell am I doing? I own the place." He took out a key, let himself in, and began searching the place for Neal Cassady books or Soccer Pals. But alas, all that he found was a picture of his Achilles dagger. "Aw, nuts. My son is trying to kill me, and he didn't even spell my name right! Could things possibly get any worse?"
Downstairs at the only diner in town, Sidney Glass was enjoying a cup of something non-alcoholic for a change, when he felt the cold bite of a chainsaw pressing against his neck. "Hey Emma," he said without looking up.

"Don't you 'hey Emma' me!" the savior snarled, thumb hovering precariously close to the on switch. "I know you helped Regina frame Mary Margaret. What gives, did she threaten you with a jar of homemade applesauce or something?"

"No, she promised she'd be my date to the execution." He sighed dreamily. "I already had her corsage picked out. Why'd you have to go and spoil our fun?"

Emma gaped at him. "Uh, because your fun was endangering the life of an innocent woman?"

"I know." Sidney shivered. "Evil is so sexy!"

"It's not going to seem so sexy when the two of you are sharing a jail cell."

"Actually, I've always had something of an affinity for enclosed spaces—"

Emma could see that this conversation was going nowhere, so she ended it the only way she could think of. "Sidney, stay away from Regina, or I'll sic the Swan Queen shippers on you!"

In the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, several tiny veterans of the Ogres' War were honing their skills with wooden swords. "I've got some business nearby that would horrify you. Why don't you go play with them, Bae? They look like much better company than that wall you're always playing with."

"Okay." He went to join the children, who ran off screaming. The boy sank down on a fallen log. "Man, all this murder is really putting a damper on my social life. And it's probably not doing the victims any good either."

"Maybe I can help with that," Morraine offered, sitting down beside him.

"Morraine? You shouldn't be hanging around with me. I'm dangerous."

"I know." Morraine shivered excitedly. "I love that in a man. Besides, aside from the teeth, your dad's not that scary. And I know you'd never let him hurt me."

"What, like I didn't let him hurt that guy with the donkey?" Baelfire rolled his eyes. "Oh, yeah, I'm great protection from the most powerful and evil creature in the world."

"Hm, point taken, maybe I should beat it."

"No!" Bae yelped, seeing the prospect of scoring a date slipping through his fingers. "Uh, that's not necessary, I'll be changing him back soon enough."

"How?"

"Beats me. I've tried nothing and I'm all out of ideas."

Morraine shook her head. "Men! You're all alike, too macho to ask for help."

Seeing the prospect of scoring a date slipping through his fingers yet again, Bae swallowed his pride. "Fine, you got anything?"
"Yes, actually. While I was in the trenches, I heard about this thing called the Reul Ghorm. She's an ancient being that rules the night. From what I can tell, she's the closest thing this world has to God. And since your dad seems to be the closest thing this world has to a devil, she'd probably love to help you get rid of him."

"Hm, sounds promising. Now, about the dance on Friday—"

"Whoops, sorry, but your dad's coming back. I'm afraid I can't stick around to find out how that sentence ends."

"But I thought you said you weren't afraid of him?"

"I lied. Don't tell the Reul Ghorm, okay? I like my nose the way it is." She ran like the Dark One was chasing, which he was.

Rumplestiltskin emerged, looking wounded. "Why is everyone so afraid of me? Are they racist against green people or something?"

"No, I think the snail puree all over your shoes might be the culprit." The boy sighed wearily. "Who did you off this time?"

"Our maid. Remind me to swing by a temp agency on our way home and get a new one."

"Somehow I don't think we'll get many applicants, Papa."

Over at the convent, Gold was watching August from the bushes and thanking his lucky stars for Storybrooke's lax anti-stalking laws. Once the stranger was out of sight, he was free to pop out of nowhere, as usual. "Hey, Hortense."

The Reverend Mother's face flamed. "I told you, I prefer to simply be called Reverend Mother," she hissed.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sure I'll care someday."

"Look, we already gave you the rent." Gold gave her a knowing look. "All right, Leroy already gave you the rent. My point is, go away."

"I'd rather grill you about August."

She gave him a funny look. "Since when do you care about anyone who doesn't owe you money?"

"Since now! Now tell me what I want to know or I'll turn you into a sn—uh, double your rent."

"Okay, okay!" she relented. "He's here to resolve his dysfunctional relationship with his long lost father, and maybe flirt with Emma a little, if time permits."

Gold stumbled away, looking disturbed. "Well, that clinches it, he's got to be Bae. There couldn't possibly be another man in town who has a difficult relationship with his son."

Baelfire made his way out into the woods and sat down under a tree. "When you wish upon a star, 'cause your daddy's so bizarre, you'll try any silly plan girls throw at you," he sang tentatively at the sky. "I knew it, nothing's happening. This is just like those rumors about the Tooth Fairy."

"I'm here, I'm here," the Blue Fairy said, fluttering down breathlessly. "Sorry I'm late, I had a date
with Santa Claus. Now, what's this wish of yours? I presume you want your very own mountain made of candy, just like all the other children who summon me?"

"I wouldn't say no to one, but right now, I'm more worried about getting my father to brush his teeth and stop killing everyone."

"You're the Dark One's kid? Well, today's your lucky day. I just happen to have a contingency plan for transporting him to another dimension, where his powers will be useless."

"What kind of place is this?"

"Either earth or some alternative version thereof. Nobody's entirely sure yet."

"Any cute blondes in it?"

"Oh yeah."

"I'm there!" Bae eagerly pulled a comb out of his pocket and spritzed himself with cologne.

"Aw, you're such a good son, Bae. If anyone can talk some sense into his hard green head, it'll be you. Or maybe some hot chick. Those always seem to have a good influence on villains." She tossed him a little glowing thing.

"A jellybean?" said Bae.

"Yeah, the magic kind. Be sure you don't use it in fertile ground, or you'll end up with a big, angry giant on your hands, instead of a portal to Neverland."

"Wait," said Bae suspiciously. "You just happened to have this on you? And you just happen to know the intimate details of my relationship with my father? And you just happen to know my name, which I never actually told you?" He scowled. "This is a set-up, isn't it?"

"All right," she conceded, "I paid Morraine fifty bucks to get me some dirt on the Dark One's home life, and another twenty to casually mention me to you. But what I said still goes."

Meanwhile, back in Storybrooke, yet another stalker was out plying his trade. "Mary Margaret!" David shouted, jumping out of the shadows at her, still wearing his "Scum of the Earth" shirt and his groveling kneepads. "I'm not going to quit harassing you until you hear me out, so you may as well just get it over with."

Mary looked tired. "Fine, what have you got?"

"Well, I'm scum," David began.

"Correct, go on."

"I'm the very antithesis of charming."

"I'll say. What else?"

"I'm lower than a toad, but if some fair princess were to bestow a kiss on me, maybe I could change into a dashing prince." He puckered up his lips expectantly.

"That's for frogs, David, not toads," she reminded him.
"Look, I'm sorry for neglecting to close my eyes and ears to all the forensic evidence and blindly believe every word you tell me, but I'm afraid I have a brain, as well as a heart. Can't we just let it go? I mean, we could stand here all day figuring out who falsely accused who, or we could go home and snuggle over a cup of cinnamon cocoa." He produced a couple of steaming travel mugs.

"Honeymuffin, I never thought I'd say this, but this is a problem even cocoa can't solve. Some unstoppable force that is probably wearing a lot of dark eye makeup is working to destroy our relationship, and frankly, I'm too lazy to fight it anymore."

"But I love you! No, even more than that, I wuv you!"

"You'll find a new love. Probably within the next ten minutes, being who you are."

Rumplestiltskin sat at his wheel, spinning something that wasn't straw into something that wasn't gold. "Something feels very wrong about this," he muttered under his breath.

Baelfire ran in, magic jellybean in hand. "Hey Papa? You know how you said getting rid of your magic was impossible for you? You must be a complete moron, because I managed to figure it out in less than a day, and I'm just a kid. Have you ever heard of the Blue Fairy?"

"You mean that holier-than-thou chick who wears a lampshade?"

"The very same. She gave me this jellybean."

"Mm, is that pineapple flavor?" Rumplestiltskin tried to pop it in his mouth, but Bae swatted his hand away.

"Papa, no! This will take us to a land without magic."

Rumplestiltskin tapped his chin, as though straining to remember something. "Son, I could be wrong, but it seems like we already tried living without magic and we almost died."

Baelfire put his foot down. "Dad, you've turned into some kind of magic junkie, and you're hurting the people who love you. Either come to the land without magic like you promised, or I'm calling a cricket and setting up an intervention."

Rumplestiltskin groaned. "Bae, I just promised that to shut you up!"

"It still counts!" the boy insisted. "Are you breaking our deal?"

His father sighed. "I'd really like to, but unfortunately I'm Lawful Evil. Lead the way, son."

The only shrink in town was surprised and terrified to find Mr. Gold standing on his doorstep. "Have you come to threaten me?"

"No, I think Regina has that handled pretty well. I've come for psychiatric help."

Hopper brightened. "All I can say is, it's about time." He brought his new patient inside and got him settled on a very stereotypical couch. "Well, let's begin." He took out a clipboard. "Mr. Gold, do you hate your mother?"

"Of course, I hate everything except escargot and my son."

"Ew, you like escargot?" Hopper gave him a double take. "Wait, you have a son? How old is he?"
"How the hell should I know?" said Gold. "The point is, he may or may not have come to town, and
he may or may not be trying to kill me. Advice?"

The good doctor stared at him. "Yeah, actually. Call the freaking cops, not a shrink!"

Gold shook his head. "Nah, the only cop in town is Emma, and after all the times I've screwed with
her, she'd love nothing more than to see me killed. I need to make up with my son, but I really don't
see that happening. I have a history of screwing things up with everyone who's ever loved me."

"Well, stop that," Archie advised.

"Aw, but that sounds hard!" Gold whined.

August was skulking around the Love Shack, when Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I
know who you are, so quit plotting my downfall or I'll ground you."

August laughed. "I'd like to see you try, Papa."

Baelfire dragged his father through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia. "Are we there yet?"
Rumplestiltskin whined.

"No."

"This is taking forever. Why couldn't we just plant the bean back in our yard?"

"I thought it would be nice to stretch our legs before the interdimensional journey," Bae explained,
tossing his jellybean into the dirt.

Charybdis' evil twin opened up beneath them, and Rumplestiltskin screamed like a girl.
"AH! DADDY! Run, Bae, before it's too late!"

Bae smacked his father in the face. "Will you get a grip?"

"Can't," the spinner whimpered. "Put this down on the list of stuff I'm scared of, below your
mother, but above squirrels!"

"Yeah, yeah." Baelfire shoved his father unsympathetically toward the portal. "Less looking, more
leaping!"

Rumplestiltskin dug his claws stubbornly into the ground. "Bae, I know this will shock you, but I'm
chickening out!"

"Well, stop that!" Bae screamed, dangling over the edge of the portal, clinging to his father's hand.

"But that sounds hard!" Rumplestiltskin protested.

"You're a coward!" the boy accused.

"Ugh, you sound just like your mother," Rumplestiltskin grumbled, letting him fall into the portal.

"I resent that remaaaaaaark!" Baelfire howled, disappearing into the green abyss, which slammed
shut behind him.

Rumplestiltskin sat up, dazed. "Aw, nuts. Bae, I didn't mean it!" He clawed at the ground, but alas,
even his mangy fingernails could not claw through the fabric of the space-time continuum. "Bae? Bae! Don't you slam your portal in my face, young man!"

Back at the Love Shack, Gold was apologizing to August, intermittently picking crow feathers out of his teeth. "Son, you were right about everything. Except for your plans to become a professional soccer player. Let's face it, that was never gonna happen. But that thing you said about me being a coward was spot-on. If it makes you feel any better, since you left, I've spent every waking moment looking for you. Well, except for a few months when I met that really hot chick. And a few more months when I met that other really hot chick," he amended. "Anyway, the point is, I'm sorry for tossing you into a potentially lethal vortex, to live as a lonely orphan in a strange new dimension."

August shrugged. "Eh, no biggie."

Gold smiled, breathing a sigh of relief. "Wow, that went a lot easier than I was expecting. Say, while you're in a forgiving mood, you weren't too attached to your mother, were you?"

"Er, no, of course not."

Gold beamed with pride. "That's my boy. So why were you looking for my Achilles dagger?"

August fumbled for an excuse. "I, uh, wanted to send you a Fathers' Day card, but I couldn't remember how to spell your name?"

"Huh. Come to think of it, I'm a little hazy on that myself. I suppose it's to be expected; my name is longer than most novellas." He clapped his alleged son on the back. "Well, let's go dig her up and find out together."

The two of them headed to Gold's secret stash in the woods, where someone had conveniently left a shovel for them to use. "I buried it here in the woods, which I figured would be a lot safer than the heavy duty safe I have in my shop. I didn't want to risk Regina getting her hands on it, though granted, if she'd wanted to, she's had ample opportunity for the past three decades." He shrugged sheepishly. "Call me paranoid."

August mopped a trickle of sweat off his face. "I'm getting kind of tired, can you take a turn digging?"

"Are you crazy? I'm wearing Armani!" Gold huffed.

"Never mind," August panted, "I think I've found it."

Gold reached down and scooped it out of the hole. "R-U-M-P-L-E-S-T-I-L-T-S-K-I-N?" he read. "Hm, I could have sworn it was R-U-M-P-E-L-S-T-I-L-T-S-K-I-N. Well, no matter, I want you to have it. I went and got some psychiatric help, just like you always wanted me to, and I don't need it anymore."

"Wow, this thing is really shiny for something that's been lying in the mud for months on end," said August, taking the proffered dagger and pointing it at Gold. "By the powers of the darkness, I command thee, Dark One, to tell me what kind of polish you use and whether it works on wood, as well."

"Wait a minute," said Gold, "you're not my son! My son would never try to control me, and he would know that there's no magic in this land, and he would never say something as corny as 'By the powers of the darkness, I command thee!'" Gold looked closely at the stranger's face for the first
time. "Plus, he had black hair and brown eyes, and you've got brown hair and blue eyes."

August snickered. "Yeah, man, you really need to get your eyes checked."

"Cram it, Baelphony!" He snatched his dagger back and pointed it at the stranger's throat. "How did you come to know the intimate details of my relationship with my son?"

"That's a very good question," said August.

Gold kept waiting, but August offered no further info. "Okay, fine, but what the hell possessed you to manipulate me in this manner? Are you suicidal or something?"

"Pretty much," said August. "I have a terminal case of termites, and I need magic. I tried hitting Emma up for some, but it was a lost cause. It seems that jumping through all those hoops in order to make her a hardened cynic has finally backfired on me."

"I wouldn't say that. She trusts you."

"Seriously?" August burst out laughing. "Not too smart, is she?"

"No, but with both you and Henry on the case, there may be hope for her yet." Gold withdrew his Achilles dagger. "Try again, and stay away from my puppets."

Back in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Rumplestiltskin was seething. "When you wish upon a star, 'cause you're bearing mental scars, you must suppress the urge you have to kill that Blue," he grated, looking up at the night sky.

Said fairy fluttered down, a can of mace and a safety whistle at the ready. "How do I follow him?"

Rumplestiltskin demanded.

"Well, it's nice to meet you, too," said the Blue Fairy sarcastically.

"Enough with the etiquette tips! How do I follow him?"

"By jumping through the portal."

"Besides that."

"Sorry, homie, you're out of luck."

"You're lying."

"Actually, fairies can't lie," Blue corrected him. "I tried doing it to weasel out of that date with Santa last night, and he saw right through me." She pouted. "Now I'm on the naughty list for life."

"Fascinating, but we're talking about my problems right now," the Dark One snarled. "There's got to be another way. A time-turner?"

"Nope, I'm afraid I gave my last one to Hermione."

"A realm jumper?"

"You mean Jefferson? I'm afraid he hasn't been born yet."

"A mage?"
"Dude, you're a mage," she reminded him.

He brightened. "I am a mage, aren't I? All I have to do is use some of this sweet dark magic Bae's always nagging me about!"

"N-n-no?" the Blue Fairy stammered unconvincingly. "That will surely—I mean, never work."

Rumplestiltskin chuckled. "Wow, you really can't lie, can you?"

"Okay, maybe it will work," she conceded, "but it'll take forever and be a real pain in the neck. Wouldn't you rather just give him up for lost and have another kid?"

"No, I can do this!" he ranted. "I will do nothing else! I will love nothing else unless I meet a really hot chick. Then all bets are off." He glared up at her. "And should the curse happen to grant me power over you in the form of a rental agreement, you'd better watch your back, you son-swiping goody-goody."

"To be fair, I didn't steal your son. Your violence, and more importantly, the sight of your hideous teeth, drove him away." She paused. "See? I didn't stutter that time, so it's got to be true."

"That does it!" Rumplestiltskin roared. "Time for things to get ugly!" He cleared his throat, threw back his head, and hollered, "I DO NOT BELIEVE IN FAIRIES!"

"NO!" screamed the Blue Fairy, flying off in search of some lifesaving applause.

Emma walked into her office, only to find that Regina had barged in, as usual. "Madam Mayor, if you're looking for your son, he's actually not here, for once."

"No, this is about the case."

"What case?"

"The only case you've had since you were sworn in."

"Oh, that. What about it?"

"Sidney wants to confess. Isn't that right, Sidney?"

Sidney wandered in, looking confused. "Actually, I don't really see..." Then Regina fluttered her eyelashes at him, and the confused look was replaced by a besotted smile. "Mm...yeah, I want to confess. Confess my undying love for—!"

Regina stuffed an apple in his mouth to shut him up. "Your undying love for money and publicity, which motivated you to commit this heinous crime?"

He just giggled. "Whatever you say, baby."

The mayor patted his head. "There's a good boy." She turned to Emma. "Dude's obviously crazy."

"Crazy in love!" Sidney sighed dreamily.

"Whatever," said Regina, not bothering to look at him. "Anyway, I'm sure they won't lock the poor guy away for long."

Emma's only response was to hand her a copy of the entertainment pages. "Giancarlo Espinoza's
new series *Revolution* is a smash hit, sure to run for multiple seasons,'" Regina read. "Well, there goes that theory."

"Aw, damn it," Sidney cursed, reaching for the paper to see for himself.

He was becoming downright painful to watch, so Emma dragged Regina into the hallway for some privacy. "Well, that was the biggest load of crap I've ever heard."

"Worse than Gold's spiel about being invested in Mary Margaret's future?"

"Okay, the second-biggest, but you're still a complete psycho, and I don't want you around my son."

"Then maybe you should have checked me out before you signed away your parental rights," Regina retorted.

"Screw parental rights! I've never cared what the law says before, and I'm certainly not going to start now!" Emma revved up her chainsaw, preparing for battle. "I'm taking back my son by any means necessary. If I were you, I'd take any plants you care about inside tonight."
At the Princess Pad, August had just finished installing a bolt on Mary Margaret and Emma's door. "Here's one place Regina won't be barging into anymore. Unless she comes when you're both out and the bolt is unfastened. Or simply kicks down this heavily-decayed wooden door. Then you're screwed."

Emma eyed the ornate bolt dubiously. "Er, thanks August, but where did you learn carpentry? A medieval trade guild?"

"If I said yes, would you believe me?"

"No."

"Damn. Looks like it's back to the drawing board." He began gathering up the selection of tools he had somehow managed to cram into the one tiny suitcase he had brought to Storybrooke.

"Well," said Mary Margaret, "as much as I'd love to stick around and figure out what the hell you're talking about, I have to get back to school. I shudder to think how far behind my students have fallen in their birdhouse maintenance lessons while I've been in the joint. By the way, Emma, when Henry ditches class to go on an adventure with you, as we all know he will, can you ask him to bring me back a ten-pound bag of birdseed?"

"I'll try," Emma replied uncertainly, "but that kid's never obeyed me in his life and I doubt he's going to start now."

"But Emma, seeing as how you're planning to get custody of him, shouldn't you try to change that? No offense, but if he's going to be living here, I don't want him constantly interrupting my naps to make sure I haven't fallen under a curse. Or swindling me blind with that 'Charming Family Charm' thing he's always bragging about."

"No worries, I'm going to see Gold today about building a case against Regina. While I'm there, I'll buy one of those creepy puppets and threaten to hang it in Henry's new room if he doesn't fall in line."

"Hey, stop talking trash about my grandpar—" August tamped down a spark of indignation. "I mean, just because someone is made out of wood and ugly as sin, it doesn't give you the right to denigrate them."

Fortunately, Henry chose that moment to radio Emma, sparing her the mental strain of trying to make sense of that remark. "Emma, I need to tell you something important about Operation Cobra."

"So tell me."

"I can't tell you over the walkies! Mr. Gold gave them to us, and you know he's probably got them bugged."

"I do not!" a Scottish-accented voice crackled through the speaker.

"Told ya," the boy gloated. "Meet me at the only diner in town, and leave your relentless logic at home."
Being in a hurry to find out what her son's mysterious emergency was, Emma decided to leave her car at home and walk to him. "Emma, wait up, my shoes are full of sawdust!" August panted, lumbering stiffly after her.

"But Operation Cobra needs me, and I don't really want to talk to you in the first place."

"Wait, are you saying you believe in Operation Cobra now?"

"No."

"Stop toying with my emotions, woman!" he shouted, shaking her furiously.

Emma jerked away nervously. "August, I think you're a little overstressed. Here," she said, offering him her iPod, "try some relaxation tracks." She popped the headphones in his ears and fiddled with the buttons. "Ooh, this one is my favorite. Sounds and Songs of the Blue Whales."

"AHHHHHH!" August screamed, tearing the headphones off and stomping them into a fine powder. "Don't scare me like that, I only wanted to offer you some good advice! A custody battle against Regina is pointless. Seriously, you freely, willingly, and knowingly signed away your legal rights to Henry and had no contact with him until a few months ago. If, by some miracle, you managed to convince a judge to remove him from Regina's custody without any evidence of abuse or neglect, he'd just end up in the foster system you so despise."

"I choose not to notice any of that," Emma said staunchly, head held high.

"Emma, I'm trying to help you, here!"

She placed a hand over his mouth. "Look, Booth. You may be an able, cunning man who has aided me on multiple occasions and shown nothing but friendship towards my son and me, but I'm afraid that after Graham's untimely death, I'm just not ready to get emotionally involved with another strong and silent leather-clad man. I'm going to go to Gold for help instead. That never backfires, right?"

Henry, as usual, was drinking a mug of cinnamon cocoa and reading the Big Book of Deja-Vu. Emma slid into the booth beside him. "What's the problem, kid? Did you read the original Grimm's Fairy Tales and scar yourself for life?"

"No, but my emergency is book-related. Someone added the story of Pinocchio to the Big Book of Deja-Vu. Do you think it could have been the professional writer who has recently shown a pronounced interest in me and Operation Cobra?"

His birthmother chuckled. "Oh Henry, you and your zany conspiracy theories!"

"Maybe you're right," Henry conceded. "Whoever wrote this story didn't even bother to put in a freaking ending, and that doesn't seem like very professional behavior."

"Henry, I hate to be a killjoy, but as your parent and sheriff, I think I should remind you that you're legally supposed to be in school."

"Fine, but keep it up and you may not be my favorite mom much longer."

On a storm-tossed raft that appeared to have been built by a first-grade arts-and-crafts class, rather than two experienced carpenters, Pinocchio and Geppetto struggled to stay afloat. Meanwhile, the world's first man-eating baleen whale loomed ominously behind them. Geppetto paddled as fast as
the adrenaline would carry him. "Hang on, son!"

"Believe me, I want to!" Pinocchio screamed. "Faster, Father, he's catching up! I'd offer to help you paddle, but I'm too lazy!"

"Well, it could be worse. You could be part donkey!" Geppetto redoubled his efforts, but it was no use. The whale was so close that they could hear one of the prophet Jonah's sermons echoing out of its open mouth. "Eh, screw it, we're gonna have to jump. Pinocchio, since I only bought one life preserver for this craft, you should take it. I deserve to die for such short-sightedness."

Pinocchio shoved the life preserver back at his dad. "I don't need it, floating is one of the very few perks of being made of wood."

Guilt shadowed Geppetto's face. "Son, I have a confession to make. You're only fifty percent wood. About halfway through your construction, I ran out of wood and had to finish you up with particle board. You'd better not take any chances."

"Pops, I'm trying to do something noble, here! Quit ruining the moment!" Without further ado, he tossed the life preserver back to his father and dove overboard.

Geppetto awoke on a flotsam-strewn beach, snuggling serenely with the life preserver. "Mmph, what gives?" he mumbled. "My bed hasn't been this wet since kindergarten." He gingerly blinked his eyes open. "Oh, right, the whale." He got up and rifled through the debris along the shore. "Pinocchio? Please be okay, son! I really don't want to have to explain this to social services." Horrified, he plucked a tiny wooden corpse from the wreckage. "Pinocchio, you drowned? B-b-but...how...you don't even have lungs!" The poor carpenter wasn't sure whether to be heartbroken, confused, or both. "Oh well. I guess I can always make a new one. And no skimping on the materials, this time."

"Don't run off to the lumberyard just yet," the Blue Fairy cautioned, floating down for a chat. "I might be able to help him."

Geppetto was skeptical. "If you really want to help, where the hell were you when we were about to be eaten by that whale?"

"Hey, who's the embodiment of all that's pure and good, here?" the fairy barked.

"You, ma'am," Geppetto conceded meekly.

"Damn straight. Now put on this lead apron and let me do my stuff." She waved her wand and Pinocchio was enveloped by a blast of glowing radiation.

When it faded, he was no longer made of wood. He was also considerably shorter and chubbier, his nose was way smaller, and his hair had turned red. Geppetto frowned. "Who are you?"

"Pops, it's me, Pinocchio."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I'm a real boy!"

"Maybe, but your acting's as wooden as ever." He gave his son a hug. "But at least now I can hug you without getting a splinter." He brightened. "Say, Blue Fairy, as long as you're turning puppets into people, can you do my parents, too?"
"Sorry Geppetto, but that would involve crossing Rumplestiltskin, and I'm afraid I'm already on his short list. Now go home and live your lives together as a family, and say hey to my good friend Jiminy for me."

"Will do," said Geppetto.

"Oh, and one more thing, Pinocchio. If you want to stay a real boy, you have to remain brave, truthful and unselfish. After all, a little boy lying, or being scared or self-centered? That simply isn't done."

At the only hotel in town, August examined his pointy, plumed childhood hat. "Man, I don't know what I was thinking. This is one fashion statement I never should have made." He picked up the phone and dialed. "Hey Gold, you want to buy a hat? Great, I'll bring it over in a few, and while I'm there, maybe you could sell me a hammer to beat some sense into Emma's rock-hard head with." He got up for about three seconds, then collapsed back onto the bed, clutching his leg in pain. "Ah! All this because I freed myself from the clutches of my abusive and neglectful foster parents? There's something wrong with this Aesop!"

Mary Margaret was standing out on the playground at the only school in town, watching the children play and trying to ignore the feeling of Jefferson's eyes on her, when Regina barged in, as usual. "Miss Blanchard, I see you're still alive. I don't suppose you'd be willing to knock that off, would you?"

"No."

"It was worth a try. Do you know where my kid is? You'd better—you are being paid to watch him, after all."

"He's with his mother."

Regina looked down at her side. "No he's not."

"I meant Emma. I'm trying to make you mad."

"Why?"

"Because I have no regard for my own safety, and I'm still mad at you for trying to have me disgraced and killed."

"Oh, are you still going on about—er, I mean, what are you talking about? That was Sidney."

Mary Margaret burst out laughing. "Oh please! We both know Sidney sucks at evil. Everyone sucks at evil, compared to you."

"You really think so?" Regina preened.

"Yeah, but don't worry, I forgive you. The Evil Regals will come after me if I don't, and anyway, your life must really suck if your only source of joy is destroying everyone else's happiness."

The mayor glared. "To be fair, I'd prefer to be using Henry and/or Daniel as a source of joy, but you and Emma have made that incredibly difficult."

Mary Margaret sighed. "Talking to you always gives me a raging headache." She waved Henry
over. "Hey kid, can you come and rescue me from this conversation?"

Henry grinned. "Sure, what's a handsome prince for?" He turned to his mother, while Mary Margaret ran inside for an aspirin. "Hey Mom-slash-Great-Grandma, I presume you've come to gloat, as usual?"

"No, I came to bring you your lunch." She held out a TRON lunchbox.

Henry swatted it aside. "Mom, I left that thing at home on purpose! I don't want my classmates finding out I'm a TRON fan! That would be an even greater shame than having a jailbird for a grandma."

"Speaking of Miss Blanchard, I've finally realized how stupid it was of me to let you be taught by her. I think it's time to put you in a new class. Maybe one with bars on the windows, given your recent behavior."

"No mere bars can hold me! I'm a Charming!" Henry boasted.

"You're not a Charming, you're a Prince of Hearts and — I mean, you're a Mills and those fairy tales aren't real!" Regina saved. "Mary Margaret never should have given you that book. I can't believe the nerve of that woman, giving a high-quality, educational gift to one of her favorite students. What kind of sick teacher is she? I should throw her butt in jail!"

Her son looked unworried. "Seems like you already tried that. Repeatedly. When are you going to learn, Mom? Good always triumphs in fairy tales. If you wanted to change the genre of our life, maybe take up UFO hunting and turn it into sci-fi, or adopt twelve more kids and turn it into as family sitcom, you might have a prayer. As it stands, though, you're pretty much screwed."

As August walked into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Mr. Gold was examining a cuckoo clock with Marco and wearing an even bigger smirk than usual. "Hey Booth, as one smug, cryptic, leather-loving meddler to another, do you think it's worth my while to bring you face-to-face with your long-lost, amnesiac father?"

"In my professional opinion, yes."

Marco picked up the clock. "I'm very busy right now, being the only carpenter in town, but I'll try to repair the clock before you get impatient and beat me to death with your cane."

"Naturally," said Gold neutrally.

Marco tipped his hat to August on the way out. "Yo."

August averted his eyes. "I am not a complete screw-up! Get off my back!"

"Uh…okay."

As the door fell shut behind him, Gold snickered. "Did you think you were the only one who could manipulate a tragic father-son relationship for his own selfish purposes?"

"None of your damn business."

"Fair enough. Let's stick our noses into Emma's, instead. You said you could make Emma believe and get her to break the curse. You weren't just telling me that because it was the only thing keeping me from killing you, were you?"
"No, she's just being so unreasonable! For some strange reason, she cares more about saving her only child from a lifetime of psychological abuse than the remote possibility that magic might be real."

"Did you try telling her to stop that?"

"Yeah, but no luck. She mentioned earlier that she was coming to you for legal advice. Can you do me a favor and screw with her mind a little?"

"Is the Pope Catholic?"

"Excellent. Trust me, unlike you, Jefferson, and her own son, I can get her to believe."

Gold's eyebrows shot up. "You want me to trust the pathological liar who pretended to be my missing child in order to magically enslave me?"

"Okay fine, don't trust me, but help me out anyway."

In his workshop, Geppetto was passing a wrench to his newly-human son. "All right, Pinocchio, you're almost seven years old now, and it's high time you got a job. I was thinking we'd start you off with something simple, like mechanical engineering."

"Dad, do the words 'child labor' mean anything to you?"

"No."

Pinocchio pouted. "This sucks! I demand to be enrolled in a proper school!"

"And what if I don't?"

Pinocchio seized Jiminy Cricket as he fluttered by on his entomologically-inaccurate wings. "Then I'll roast your friend here under a magnifying glass!"

"Pinocchio!" the Blue Fairy chided, "Put that lovable personification of man's inherent integrity down! I'm afraid I have some bad news."

Geppetto shoved Pinocchio and Jiminy into the next room so they wouldn't have to hear him swearing. "You always have bad news! Can we get a new family fairy, please? Someone a little more upbeat, like that nice Nova girl?"

"I'm not letting Nova near any more single men, now shut up and listen. The Evil Queen—the young one—is preparing a terrible curse that will send us to a horrible new land with amnesia, reality TV, and only one bar."

"So stop her with that wand you're always flashing around."

"Sorry, but I'm management," the Blue Fairy replied haughtily. "You'll have to do it yourself."

Geppetto blinked. "I'm a mild-mannered seventy-year-old artisan. What the hell am I supposed to do, bludgeon her to death with a bucket of wood glue?"

"No. The manipulative satanic weirdo Snow White and Prince Charming keep in their basement says that their unborn daughter can break the curse, and I see no reason not to take his word for it. Luckily, I've found an enchanted tree, one of Pinocchio's birthfamily, which can shield the child if fashioned into a wardrobe. Can you whip one up for us?"
He pondered the request. "But wouldn't it make more sense to use the tree for cuttings, grow more of them, and make a whole bunch of wardrobes?"

"Hey, if you'd found a woman to make your son instead of wasting a perfectly good enchanted tree, our supply wouldn't be so low in the first place."

"Shut up."

"We'll pay you time-and-a-half," the Blue Fairy offered.

"I'm in!"

---

Emma, being under the delusion that Gold cared about her personal life, was pacing frantically around the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. "Gold, I have to do something about Henry! It's only a matter of time before that sicko Regina decides to kill him in vengeance for leaving the toilet seat up or something. And I fear the Charming Family Charm can't keep him safe forever."

Gold thumbed impassively through the latest issue of *Fortune*. "Then maybe you should have checked her out before you signed away your parental rights, instead of hocking your kid to a twisted old pawnbroker and hoping for the best."

"Why does everybody keep saying that?" the savior griped, exasperated.

"Look, as much as I love inflicting the agony of losing a child on people, I'm afraid I'm going to have to take a rain check this time. I already helped you with Mary Margaret, and if I perform too many good deeds in quick succession, I could lose my bad-boy status."

"So what am I supposed to do?" Emma demanded.

"Solve the problem on your own for a change?" he suggested.

She gaped at him. "Is this some kind of sick joke?"

"I realize I'm putting you in a tough spot, here." Gold bit back an oxymoronic evil giggle. "Oh, if only there was another smug and cunning meddler in town that you could go to for help!"

Her eyes lit up with understanding. "Wait a minute, I see what you're getting at!"

---

A few minutes later, she was banging on the door of Sidney Glass' padded cell. "Yo Sid, open up! Gold said you could help me with my Henry problem."

August tapped her on the shoulder. "Um, Emma, I think he meant me."

"Oh." She shrugged. "Okay, I guess that works, too. Whatcha got?"

---

David strolled out merrily out of the animal shelter, whistling his little heart out. "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's home from work I go!" he sang, pausing when he noticed Regina peering under the hood of her busted car. He walked over to investigate, chuckling good-naturedly. "Regina, who are you trying to kid? Do you know what a carburetor is?"

"No," she admitted.

"Do you know what a fanbelt is?"
"No."

"Do you even know how to put the hood back down?"

"Don't you dare! It took me over two hours to figure out how to get that thing open in the first place!"

"I wouldn't dream of it. Can I offer you a ride home?"

Regina eyed his battered and grungy pickup distastefully. "And be seen riding in that thing? Ugh, I'd rather read a Snow Queen fic!"

"Aw, come on!" David prodded, smiling brightly. "You look like you're going through a rough time, and I've been told I'm great in comfort mode."

"So this is what the Charming Family Charm looks like on a hot guy?" She looked him over with new interest. "Hm, I think I'm finally starting to see what all the fuss is about."

David insisted on carrying Regina's groceries inside, like all good TV characters, in a paper bag with a baguette sticking out of it. "Thanks homie," she said. "It's nice to see you getting your sense of chivalry back, after the unfortunate events surrounding your divorce." She smiled coyly. "You know, I've always had a thing for cute men who love animals. Want to come up to my bedroom for dinner?"

He recoiled. "Er, thanks, but no thanks."

Regina was undeterred. "Hey David, as long as I've got your ear, what's your opinion of the damsel-in-distress archetype? Classic or outdated?"

"Definitely classic."

"In that case…" She threw herself into his arms, weeping bitterly. "Woe is me! My son and everybody else in town hate me, simply because I'm unapologetically deceitful and vindictive! Oh, if only some big strong man could see through to the fragile and vulnerable girl within me!"

David sighed resignedly. "All right, all right. Yes to dinner, but no to dinner in your bedroom."

The Blue Fairy led Geppetto, Pinocchio, and their pet-slash-friend Jiminy through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia. "As I said before, the Evil Queen will stop at nothing to destroy the happiness of Snow White and Prince Charming, and their werewolf chum, and their preachy little cricket…"

Jiminy was offended. "I am not preachy. I'm sage, thank you very much."

She wasn't listening. "…and their oversized dwarves…"

Seven hours later…

"…and you and your son, and her former tutor's long-lost girlfriend, and her headless business associate who's supposed to be in another dimension…"

By this point, Pinocchio was passed out in his father's arms and Geppetto's eyelids were drooping. "Did you really have to make us sit through that list twice?" Geppetto yawned.
"Yes. Now follow me." She shepherded the bleary-eyed carpenters to a glow-in-the-dark tree. "This is the last enchanted tree in the entire realm. I know it's wrong to chop down the last member of such a critically endangered species, but it's for the greater good."

"For time-and-a-half, I'll eradicate any species you want," said Geppetto, examining the wood.

"Excellent. The tree has enough magic to protect two from the Queen's curse, so we'll send Snow White and her husband through before their child is born. A land without magic isn't the ideal place to honeymoon, but we have to work with what we've got."

"Wait," said Geppetto. "This curse is going to take us to a land without magic?"

"Well, mostly without magic. There are a few draconic wizards in the east, but the odds of us bumping into one are pretty low."

"But what about Pinocchio? If there's no magic in this place, he could turn back into wood! And while I'd enjoy the peace and quiet of being childless again, who will support me in my old age?"

"I told you to get a 401k while the market was good, but you didn't listen," Jiminy lectured.

Geppetto ignored him. "All right, let's make a new deal. I'll build your wardrobe if you'll give Pinocchio the second spot in it and recommend me a good stockbroker."

"Geppetto," Jiminy scolded, "are you really going to tear an innocent family apart because of your irrational fear of the remote possibility of your son being temporarily harmed?"

Geppetto brandished a fly swatter menacingly. "You have no right to be bossing me around after what you did to my parents!"

Jiminy scratched his head, searching his memories. "What, you mean trying to keep them from being robbed?"

"No, the other thing!"

The cricket was confused. "You mean mourning with all my heart after my despised parents harmed them?"

"No, the other thing!"

"You mean devoting my entire life to protecting their orphaned child?"

Geppetto sighed. "Fine, I've got nothing, but butt out or I'll have Pinocchio stuff you in the cuckoo clock again!"

"Yay!" Pinocchio squealed.

Jiminy hung his head in defeat. "I'll be good."

"Then it's settled," Geppetto declared smugly, scooping up his little bundle of joy and cedar. "Pinocchio goes through, or no one does. Or you could hire another contractor, but I warn you, you'll never find prices as good as mine."

"True," the Blue Fairy acknowledged, "but what am I supposed to do about Snow White? The last person who tried to separate her from her prince ended up getting jailed, cursed, and exiled."

"No worries, all we've got to do is lie."
"But I suck at lying. Just ask Rumplestiltskin."

Pinocchio raised his hand. "I'd be happy to give you some pointers. I'm an old pro at lying," he bragged.

In Fairytale Land's answer to the Pentagon, the Blue Fairy surreptitiously wiped a trickle of sweat from her brow. "Good news, Your Majesties. I've found wood to make a magical wardrobe that can stop the curse by tearing your family apart for three decades and sending you to a foreign and terrifying new land."

"Uh, check your dictionary, lady," said Snow White. "That's horrible news."

"It's not horrible, it's bittersweet! And definitely not false." The fairy glanced over at Pinocchio, who smiled and gave her a thumbs-up.

August drove Emma across the town line, and because they weren't in a car that the curse could crash, there was nothing it could do to stop them. "August, as nice as it is to be riding a vehicle I don't have to be ashamed of, for once, I really don't see how this is going to help me beat Regina."

"I'm taking you on a long ride to tell you about our shared past and intimate emotional connection. Now just relax, hang on to me, and enjoy the sound of a thousand Wooden Swan shippers sighing with pleasure."

Over at the Stepford House, David and Regina were flirting in the dining room while Henry shivered on the doorstep. "It's nice to meet a woman who can cook something besides cocoa," he complimented her. "You really know how to work some magic."

Regina's eyes snapped wide open and she sprang from her seat to seize him by the collar. "Who told you?!" she demanded, shaking him furiously. "Was it Gold? Jefferson? They're damn liars, both of them!"

"No, I was just trying to be charming!" It was the wrong choice of words. He struggled against her grip in vain. "Please, let me go and I'll wash your dishes!" he offered in desperation.

"Okay!" she agreed readily.

He clutched his bruised throat, gasping for air. "And yet, you're still the closest thing I have to a friend. Depressing, much?"

"Hey, I saved your life," she reminded him.

"True. And now that pining over Mary Margaret is no longer eating up all my spare time, I finally have time to ask you how." He waited expectantly.

Regina, who had somehow failed to anticipate such a reasonable request, fumbled for a good lie. "Uh, I found you passed out on the ground and gave you mouth-to-mouth." She puckered up and leaned in closer. "Want a demonstration?"

The kiss was interrupted, however, by not one but two angry mobs. One was armed with engraved pickaxes, the other, with water balloons full of cyanide. "Freeze!" they commanded in unison.

"Who are you and what are you doing in my house?" the mayor demanded.
"We're Team Snowing, and this is Team Evil Regal. We've joined forces to put an end to this horrendous mockery of a ship. It demeans us all."

David hastily withdrew from Regina. "Regina, I'm sorry, but they're right. This is one relationship that would be too bizarre even for Storybrooke.

He ran out the door like a scared bunny, leaving Regina to deal with the mob of meddlesome fans. "If you people aren't out of here in five seconds, this is what I'm going to do to you," she snarled, shattering a nearby mirror with her wineglass.

In the hallowed halls of Neuschwanstein Castle, Snow White was in the throes of labor and looking decidedly less fair than usual. "AHH!" She seized her husband by the hair. "Next time, we adopt!" she hissed.

"Doc, do something!" the prince demanded, cutting himself free of her grasp with a pair of scissors.

"Like what? Have you two provided me with any pain meds, medical supplies, or obstetrical equipment? The dwarf huffed. "I can't work like this, people!"

Upstairs, Geppetto was thumbing lazily through a book of varnish samples, while Pinocchio and Jiminy leaned against a wall drinking coffee. "What do you guys think? Should we go with Sequoia Sunrise for that warm undertone, or Medium Chestnut for a more sedate look?"

"We can decide after lunch," Pinocchio proposed.

"Guys, quit loafing around on my dime!" the Blue Fairy commanded, floating through an open window and dodging the bug zapper in front of it. "I have some bad news. On this day in the castle of David, our savior is born."

"So why are you telling us?" Geppetto asked. "Do you want us to take her some frankincense and myrrh?"

"No, what I want you to do is stand idly by while your longed-for child suffers twenty-eight years of hardship and possible death."

"Huh?"

"I'm sorry, but Snow White needs to accompany her child to the new land, or it could grow up to be some kind of chronic skeptic who chooses not to notice the curse."

"But what about Pinocchio?"

"Sorry, but it seems I stopped caring about him a long time ago." Blue straightened her tutu. "I've got to jet now. Fairy stuff. Can you please give Snow and Charming the good news for me?"

He stared at her comprehendingly. "Why don't you just as a condemned criminal to chop off his own head?"

"I'll take that as a yes." She fluttered away.

Geppetto shot a dirty look at her retreating back. "Screw the honor system. Pinocchio, into the wardrobe."

"Geppetto!" Jiminy protested. "You heard the Blue Fairy, the savior needs her mother to…eh, forget it," he sighed. "I don't know why I even try."
"Relax, my boy can raise the savior." He handed Pinocchio a cigar. "Congratulations, son, it's a girl!"

Pinocchio was not amused. "First a job, now a baby to raise? Dad, if you keep forcing these adult responsibilities on me, I'm running away to Neverland!" he threatened. "Not to mention that this is incredibly dishonest, and I really don't think I can handle another nose job."

"Don't be such a fairy's pet, Pinocchio. Everyone knows that lying is okay in three situations: when your girl asks you if she looks fat, when your boss asks you if you're really sick, and when your fairy asks you to sacrifice yourself for the greater good." He thumped his son on the back. "Now then, you must make sure that the savior grows up happy and loved, and doesn't become an angry cynic. Do you understand?"

"Not at all."

"Figure it out," the old man ordered gruffly, shoving his son in the closet.

"You know," Jiminy mused, "it may be for the best that we're not sending Snow White through. She'd never fit into that little cupboard—heck, I probably wouldn't!" He waved goodbye to his young charge. "Later, Pinocchio, I'll see you when the curse breaks."

"Actually, I don't think you will," said Pinocchio.

Geppetto shoved the cricket aside. "Stop horning in on our farewell scene!" He turned to his child. "You will find me again, my son. And on that day, you will bring with you a mature 401k with my name on it, and the keys to a nice condo on the beach."

Pinocchio nodded glumly, and Geppetto closed the wardrobe's doors. When he opened them back up, his son was gone. "Well, that was depressing. Jiminy, now that the underage kid is out of the way, wanna go get drunk before the curse hits?"

August and Emma drove up in front of a diner that wasn't Granny's, for a change. Emma was miffed. "You drove until the sun went down to find a cheap truck stop to take me out to? This is better than our groundwater date, but not by much."

"This isn't a date, Emma, I brought you here to tell you the story of how I found you as a baby."

"You couldn't just tell me at home?"

August laughed. "Please, Emma, don't you have any sense of the dramatic?"

In some unenchanted forest, a large redwood sneezed Pinocchio out of a hole in its trunk. The boy got on his feet, looking dazed. "Hello? Anybody home?" He noticed a cricket hopping by, and bent over to ask it for directions. "Excuse me, do you know where I could go to see about setting up a 401k?" He prodded the insect, but to no avail. "Silent crickets? Huh, I guess this strange new land isn't all bad."

A plane whizzed by overhead, and he screamed. "Yikes! That's one bird even Snow White wouldn't touch!" He shuddered. "And if that's what the birds here are like, I can only imagine the whales." The boy scrambled back into the tree trunk as fast as his legs would carry him, but alas, the powers that be had decided that getting back to the Enchanted Forest so easily would be boring. A magical wall of plot armor slammed him backward, and his entire life flashed before his eyes. Fortunately, he was only seven, so it didn't take long.
When he came to, there was a baby crying inside the tree. "Hey, you must be Emma. I'm your new dad, Pinocchio." He picked her up and started walking. "Speaking of which, I guess it's time to go job hunting."

August led a protesting Emma through the woods. "All the answers you want are right here where I found you. Except for the ones to this morning's New York Times crossword puzzle. You should probably just give up on ever figuring those out."

Emma was skeptical, as usual. "Hold up, I wasn't found in the woods. I was found by the side of the road. I know that because a newspaper told me so, and as my friendship with Sidney Glass has taught me, journalists never lie."

"The newspaper didn't lie, I did," August clarified.

"Why?"

"Because it's my schtick."

"Then why the hell am I listening to you?" Emma turned to leave.

August facepalmed. "I should not have said that." In desperation, he finally tried the truth. "When I found you, you were wrapped in a suspiciously medieval blanket with your name embroidered on it."

She faltered. "I…choose not to notice that?"

"Emma, give it up. The Big Book of Deja-Vu is based on a true story, and we were both sneezed into this world through that tree over there." He pointed.

The savior sighed. "August, when Henry is paranoid and delusional, it's sort of cute, but on an adult, it's just creepy."

"So what's your explanation? You think that me, Henry, and Jefferson are all suffering from the same elaborate hallucination, that the mayor went to all that trouble to frame Mary Margaret and banish the Zimmer twins for no apparent reason, that Graham dropped dead of a massive heart attack at the age of twenty nine and in perfect health, that Storybrooke just happens to have a disproportionate large selection of short men, and that the town just happened to mysteriously implode the moment you decided to live there?" He shook his head wearily. "Emma, have you ever heard of a little thing called Occam's Razor?"

"You're asking me to believe you're a fairytale character?"

"Yes, I'm…the Huntsman from Snow White!" he fibbed, feeling his nose nervously. Emma looked unconvinced. "All right, fine, I'm Pinocchio, but I knew that wasn't going to help my case any."

"Pinocchio? Did you add that story to the Big Book of Deja-Vu? Dude, I don't know if you noticed, but you forgot to put in the ending." She laughed. "Honestly, if all your writing is that bad, it's no wonder you've never had an actual job in all the time I've known you."

"I did that on purpose!" August defended. "The ending hasn't happened until just now, and I'm not creative enough to make one up."

"The ending is me calling Hopper to lock you in the basement with Belle?"
"No, the ending is you letting go of your skepticism."

The savior stared at him incredulously. "Have you even met me?" Laughing hysterically, she turned to leave.

"Emma, where do you think you're going?" August called, stumbling after her. "I'm your ride, so unless you want to walk back to Storybrooke, you can't storm off until we're done talking." Wincing, he crumpled to the ground.

She just looked annoyed. "If you think that I'm going to automatically open up my heart to you just because you're injured and helpless, you're sad out of luck. Try Mary Margaret."

"I'm not screwing around!" August growled. "You can't leave yet, I haven't had a chance to show you what's in my pants!"

Emma pulled her gun on him. "Get away from me."

"Get your mind out of the gutter. I just wanted to show you what happened to me in Phuket. You ever been? It's an amazing island, full of pleasures, and enjoying them doesn't even transform you into a donkey." He sighed wistfully. "Then you had to ruin everything by deciding to stay in Storybrooke, and I started turning back into wood, rendering all my father's threats, lies, and extortion pointless." He rolled up the leg of his pants, flashing his naturally-occurring peg leg at her.

She eyed it quizzically. "Nice legs, but like I told you, I'm not really in the market for a new man right now."

"What, you can't see it? Just like all those ER personnel I consulted couldn't see it? Hm, I know I shouldn't be shocked, but I still am."

"August, I don't know whether you're crazy, drunk, or both, but either way, I'd rather hitchhike home in the back of a manure truck than spend another minute talking to you." She backed away nervously.

"Aw, come on! Why can't you just believe in magic? It makes you feel happy like an old-time movie, in case you haven't heard."

"Why are you so interested in my worldview and ethical priorities, anyway? Are you Dr. Hopper's long-lost twin or something?"

"No, I just want you to fulfill your freaking destiny!"

"I don't want to fulfill my freaking destiny! I just want to get custody of my son and maybe play a little video poker if I have any time left over."

"It's your responsibility!"

"I'm allergic to responsibility!"

"Well, so am I, but I got over it! Eventually."

"Hey, you're not my father, so get off my back!"

"I am too, and I will not!" August persisted. "Help us, Emma Swan! You're our only hope!"

"No," said Emma succinctly.
At a Dickensian orphanage that had somehow wormed its way into the modern United States' child welfare system, Emma was bawling in her crib. Little August appeared over the edge, dark circles under his eyes and spit-up stains all over his shirt. "Emma, please stop crying! Our foster parents seem like the type to punish such things with a near-fatal beating." This reminder just made the little orphan cry harder. August sighed. "Pre-teen parenthood sucks," he grumbled, stuffing a pacifier in her mouth. "Now stand still while I fix this dangerous crib that whoever did the homestudy on this place has foolishly overlooked."

He dug into a toolbox, and looked up to find his foster father looming over him. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Your job. You're welcome."

"You've got a smart mouth on you, kid." The man snarled, snatching the box back. "Now get out of my way, I've got places to go and puppies to kick."

A boy named Lampwick came in to comfort him. "Hey kid, you okay?"

"Apart from being stranded as an orphan in a strange new dimension with a baby to raise, sure, I'm swell. How's it going with you?"

"About the same, but things are looking up now that I've come into money." He flashed a wad of stolen cash. "We're running away. Wanna come with? We've got jobs and housing lined up with a dude named Fagin."

Little August hesitated. "But what about my solemn vow to care for Emma and secure the future of my homeworld?"

"Solemn vows are for suckers."

"All right, you've convinced me." He blew Emma a kiss. "Don't worry, Em, it's not goodbye forever. Someday when I'm all partied out, I'll be back to interfere in your love life, like every good father should." The boy danced off to join his friends, singing to himself. "I've got no strings to hold me down, except for you and that damn cursed town. I had strings, but now I'll flee, there are no strings on me!"

Over at Marco's workshop, August was lurking in the shadows to watch someone without their consent, as usual. "Hey, mister?" he called out. "I couldn't help but notice you're having trouble fixing that clock. Has it occurred to you that there could be a cricket lodged in the gears?"

Marco opened it up to check. "Well I'll be jiggered, you're right. How did you learn so much about mechanical engineering?"

"My father taught me. Whether I liked it or not."

"How sweet. He must be very proud of you."

"If he is, then he's an idiot. I'm a total screw up."

"Well, admitting it is the first step." Marco patted him gently on the back. August beamed. "You know, old man, something tells me that you wouldn't mind having an unpaid, unlicensed assistant."
"That is correct." Marco handed him a hammer. "Welcome aboard, homie!"

Henry was sleeping peacefully in his bed at the Stepford House, when Emma called him up on his walkie-talkie. "Henry, wake up, I need to talk to you and it can't wait until a less suspicious hour."

Henry, being used to weird situations like this, given his background, went down to meet her without batting an eyelash. "Emma, this is kind of unnerving," he said, slipping into the Love Bug's front seat. "If my mom find out I'm here with you, she'll get really mad, and I'm afraid the Charming Family Charm can only protect me for so long."

"Relax, you won't have to worry about her much longer," said his birthmom. "Tell me, Henry, do you want to get away from Regina and come live with me?"

"No, Emma," he said sarcastically. "I stole a credit card, tracked you down through the internet, ran away from home, travelled all the way across the state line in order to get to you, coerced you into moving here, and spent the last several months conspiring with you against my mother because I don't want to get away from her and come live with you."

"Hey, keep giving me lip and I'm leaving you here." She buckled his seatbelt and started the car.

"What? Where are we going?"

"When I figure that out, you'll be the first to know."
Over at the Stepford House, Henry and Regina had just entered their sixty-fourth consecutive hour of uncomfortable silence, when the doorbell ding-donged. "The witch is dead," Henry gloated under his breath.

Regina looked up with a frown. "I don't recall us expecting any company, but if it'll put an end to this awkward silence jag of ours, I'll be happy to talk to anybody." She opened the door and found Emma Swan standing on the other side. "Okay, almost anybody," she amended. "Emma, go away. To Antarctica, if possible."

"No," the sheriff replied stubbornly. "Henry told me to come over, and I've found that I tend to be far more happy and successful if I listen to him."

"Do you honestly expect me to invite you into my house for dinner, after all the love and encouragement you've given my child?" Regina was appalled.

"I didn't come for dinner, it's probably poisoned. I came for you."

The mayor recoiled, tempted to call 911 until she remembered who would be answering. "For the last time, Swan, you're not my type."

"No, I meant in a violent way." The good people of Storybrooke rallied around her, toting torches, pitchforks, and a piñata shaped like Regina's head.

Regina breathed a sigh of relief. "Whew, you had me worr – wait a minute, Henry! Help!"

Her son appeared at the top of the stairs, chainsaw in hand. "Sorry, Mom, but I'm siding with them. There are full-size candy bars in that piñata."

They hauled her to her apple tree. It had run away from her yard when Emma showed up, anticipating another chainsaw attack, and was now planted in the middle of Main Street. Which had to be violating about a billion traffic laws, but since when did Sheriff Swan care about what was legal? Ruby and Leroy set to work tying her to the trunk. "Red? Grumpy? I never even met you guys, why are you so full of hate?"

"You give lousy tips," Ruby explained nonchalantly.

"And you didn't buy any Miners' Day candles," Leroy accused. "For that, you must die!"

Emma plucked a rotten apple from the tree's lower branches and crushed it in her hand, black goo running everywhere. Her mother pulled a face. "Honey, couldn't you have found a less disgusting metaphor?"

"Hey, we're talking about Regina's bad decisions right now," the savior snapped.

"I just wanted to win for once, so naturally, I turned to the black magic that has brought me nothing but pain, hardship, and defeat," Regina defended. "Is that so wrong?"

Emma sighed tiredly. "Too easy, I'm not even gonna bother. Pops, hand me that sword and let's get her head on the road."

"Henry, do something!" Regina cried in desperation. "Surely all those years I spent gaslighting and
"Hm, decisions, decisions." Henry held out his hands, weighing his choices on an imaginary scale. "Psychological abuse, full-size candy bars…psychological abuse, full-size candy bars…Full-size candy bars!" He grabbed a blindfold and lined up behind Dr. Hopper, chainsaw at the ready.

"That's my boy." Emma raise her sword menacingly. "And Regina? Do you know what I'm going to do after I kill you?"

"What?"

"Wash off all your makeup!"

"NOOOOOOOO!" Regina screamed, bolting awake in bed. She shuddered. "Ugh, introspection sucks. I'm never doing that again!" Rising, she went in to check on her son and found him sleeping like a down-filled baby. "Aw, I don't know what I was so worried about. His determination not to turn out like me will ensure he never attempts matricide." As she looked down at him, however, a new concern arose. "Man, I really need to put this little guy on a diet. He's getting as big and lumpy as a pile of pillows."

Meanwhile, flesh!Henry was rolling toward the town line in Emma's Love Bug and shivering in his jammies. "Hey Emma, do you think we could run back to my place real quick? I need to get my stuff, or at least a freaking pair of pants."

Emma laughed hysterically. "Oh, Henry, you're too precious! Now that we're on the run, I'm afraid your days of having 'stuff' are over."

"On the run? That's where we're going in the dead of night, without my mom's permission, in your old getaway car?" He grew pensive. "I know I shouldn't be shocked, but I am. Emma, we can't leave! We're under a contract, and anyway, I don't want to spend the rest of my life on the run, living out Bonnie and Clyde: The Next Generation"

"You sound just like your father," she griped.

"But Emma, what about the curse?"

"Henry, I'm not saying that I think your curse theory is a load of dragon crap, but…I'm not sure how to finish that thought without making you cry."

"I can prove it. Kiss me."

"Okay, now you really sound like your dad."

"Emma, this is serious!" he groaned, exasperated. "Maybe an attempted suicide will knock some sense into you!" He grabbed the steering wheel and ran them into a ditch.

"Gah! Stop killing us!" his mother screamed, swatting him aside.

"I'll stop endangering our lives when you stop living in denial!" the boy retorted.

"Then I fear it's going to be a long couple of decades for our family, kid."
In the courtyard at Neuschwanstein Castle, a pair of guards dragged Prince Charming before his non-legal, non-biological, non-loving, non-weekend...father? Wow, they're really lowering the bar nowadays. "Brought down by a couple of mooks?" King George sneered. "Some action hero you turned out to be."

"Actually, it was Snow White who took me out. They just have supernaturally good timing." He looked down at his bonds. "Or supernaturally bad timing, depending on one's point of view."

"Oh, go kiss a corpse, smart-aleck!" The king whacked him over the head. "I take you in as my son, and this is how you repay me? By slaying a dragon, sacrificing your very identity for the good of my kingdom, and attempting to marry a beautiful and powerful princess? Worst. Prince. Ever."

Charming remained unruffled. "Romance is a beautiful thing, and while I would have liked a less tragic one, you've gotta take what life hands you." He glanced at his watch. "Now, if you're going to guillotine me, can you get on with it? They say the head stays alive for several seconds after being severed, and I'm dying to find out if it's true."

"Whateves." The king motioned for his executioners to do their stuff. However, when they tried to release the blade, it magically transformed into a shower of apple cider. Charming shook himself dry. "Is death supposed to be this sticky?"

Regina barged in, as usual. "Yo, George, I came to invite you to the support group I'm starting. 'Surrogate Parents Against Brats Who Just Won't Die.' There's a twenty dollar membership fee, but if you're short, I'd be willing to accept your second-string son in lieu of cash."

"In the market for a love slave that doesn't keep you up all night barking?"

"No, I dig beastly men. Except, of course, for Rumplestiltskin. Actually, I was hoping to use the kid as princess bait."

George considered this. "Well, I suppose he does have a solid work history in the bait profession."

He handed her the quasi-prince's leash.

Regina went to her window to greet the day and maybe shoot a few bluebirds, and found her apple tree somewhat less alive than it should have been. Running outside, she plucked a withered apple from a low-hanging branch. "Great, what am I supposed to do now?" she complained, hurling the fruit at an unlucky squirrel. "Start feeding my enemies poisoned mangoes? I'll be the laughingstock of villains everywhere!"

She went straight to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors to ask Gold for help, because that never backfires. "Gold! My tree is dying and I order you to care about it!"

"Perhaps it's the fact that Emma hacked it in half with a chainsaw?" he guessed lazily.

"Speaking of Emma, I don't suppose you care that she's going to break the curse and angry lynch mobs are going to turn us both into human piñatas?"

"Let me think...no."

"You're getting on my nerves."

"Thanks, I try my best."

The mayor stomped her foot petulantly. "Go-old! This is serious! She's trying to take my son, and
taking people's children is supposed to be your job. Aren't you going to kill her for infringing on your racket?"

"You know perfectly well that killing Emma would break the curse. And while I want the curse broken, I want it broken in a suitably epic manner."

"Wait, you want the curse broken? Then why the hell did you make it in the first place?"

"Some freaky blind kid told me to."

"Screw the freaky blind kid, I'll give you anything you want!" Regina brightened. "Which reminds me, I still have your long-lost girlfriend Belle locked up in my secret dungeon under the hospital. Fix your defective curse and give me your recipe for lanolin bombs, and she's all yours."

Gold's eyes narrowed. "Hold up. You lied to me about my girl's death and you've been holding her captive for the past thirty years? If that's true, I'll have no choice but to hunt you down like a mad werewolf."

"Heh, just kidding."

Her number-one deranged magical ally being a bust, she headed down to the only school in town to try her second choice. Searching out little Paige's bicycle, she taped a bunny-themed greeting card reading "Hoppy Stalking" to the back of the seat. "Stupid Jefferson and his stupid unlisted phone number," she grumbled as she walked away.

Emma climbed up the bedsheet ladder she'd used to run away earlier and crawled into the Princess Pad's kitchen window. She found Mary Margaret waiting for her, curlers in her hair and a rolling pin in her hand. "Do you know what time it is, young lady? I was worried sick! I waited up all night, and almost called the police, until I remembered who the police department in this town is."

The savior shuffled her feet, staring guiltily at the floor. "Uh, I was over at Ruby's studying and we fell asleep?" she fibbed lamely.

"Don't you lie to me, missy!" Mary Margaret gave her a swat with the rolling pin. "David's going to hear about this!"

"Sorry Mo-, uh, roomie, I just—"

"Don't take that tone of voice with me! I thought you said we were like family?"

"We are. Abandonment is a longstanding tradition in my family."

Mary Margaret was not amused. "Well, for Henry's sake, maybe you should get a new family tradition, like eating Pillsbury Crescent Rolls at Thanksgiving."

"Maybe that would be for the best," Emma admitted. "I discovered last night that the kid really doesn't have much of an aptitude for abandoning his loved ones."

"You kidnapped your son?"

Emma shot her a quizzical look. "You stalked a married mental patient, Miss Judgy-Pants."

"Point taken, but as a parent and a sheriff, you really need to stop committing these felonies. It can't
be healthy for a kid to have to keep raising bail money for his own mother."

Snow White and her Cartoon All-Stars lay in wait outside Neuschwanstein Castle, the former peering through a spyglass. "Bad news, homies. This joint is crawling with mooks, and they're armed with melee weapons, so we can't count on Stormtrooper aim to keep us safe."

"We need some air support," proclaimed Granny, who was holding a loaded crossbow and dressed in bloodstained camouflaje fatigues, camo face paint, and steel-tipped combat boots. "Maybe you should rally your unholy army of bluebirds."

"I have a better idea," Grumpy piped up. "I'll get my old buddy Dumbo on the case. Heavy artillery, baby!"

Hearing a rustle in the bushes, they all drew their weapons, except for Doc, who had sworn an oath to do no harm. Luckily, it was only Red. "No need to be alarmed. It's just a bloodsucking werewolf."

"Red, there's blood on your chin." Snow pointed. "Please remove it before you inspire a Twilight crossover."

"Sorry." Red pulled a napkin out of her purse and daintily wiped her mouth. "I just came to let you know that your prince is still alive, but Regina has forced him to abandon his career as a romantic hero and take up his old job as bait again."

"Drag. Well, no matter. I've never been beaten by her before, and I'm certainly not going to start now. But if any of you supporting characters are afraid of ending up like poor Stealthy, I understand."

Sneezy raised his hand. "Actually, I sort of am, but 'Snow White, the Six Dwarves, and the Two Werewolves' just doesn't sound right. Like it or not, we're all in this together."

"That's the spirit!" Snow beamed. "Now let's go defy some gender roles and rescue us a prince!"

Red fell into step beside Snow, picking human remains from her teeth to send home to the grieving family. "What's the Queen's problem anyway? Does she have Borderline Personality Disorder or something?"

"No, she's jealous because I'm so much hotter than she is."

Red raised an eyebrow skeptically.

"All right, that's a lie, she's actually mad at me because I'm an inveterate gossip who ruined her life," Snow admitted. "But if anyone asks, tell them the jealousy thing instead. It sounds way better."

Charming was being tortured by suspension in a dank, dark dungeon, wishing the Geneva Convention existed, when Regina barged in, as usual. "I want some time alone with the prisoner," she told her mooks.

"Ah, in the market for a love slave who doesn't slobber all over you, are you?" one of the guards said knowingly.

"Actually, now that you mention it, that's not a bad idea." The queen looked Charming over thoughtfully. "What do you say, Your Alleged Highness? Are you into abusive women?"
“Well, yes,” Charming admitted, "but I'll make an exception in your case."

The queen just smirked. "Hm, I wonder if you'll still be so devoted to Snow when she's smeared all over my boots?"

"Whatever she did to you, spare her life and take an anger management class instead."

"Hmph, you sound just like that insufferable cricket. But don't worry, I'm not going to kill her. I'm just going to curse her, and when I'm done, I'll even be gracious enough to leave her for her loved ones to find so that they can have a fighting chance at breaking it."

"You're a class act, Your Majesty."

Regina refilled her fruit bowl in the Mayoral Lair with mangoes, and placed a decanter of mango juice on the mantle. "It's just not the same," she lamented miserably.

Jefferson appeared in the doorway. "Hey, thanks for the card, it really brightened my day. So, as long as you're in a giving mood, how about giving me my kid back?"

The mayor smiled bemusedly. "Why would I want to do that? It's not as if I can relate to the pain of losing your only child."

Jefferson sighed. "Keep telling yourself that. So what do you want?"

"I want your help."

"I can help you stop breathing," he offered, pulling out his gun.

Regina smacked it aside, chuckling. "Aw, put that thing away. We both know you're way too nice to put an end to my unholy reign of terror." She took out Jefferson's hat and placed it on the table.

"Sorry Regina, but it's not going to work. If it did, we could all just ride it home and Emma would be rendered completely useless."

"No worries, I'm sure I have something that will fix it in my MacGuffin closet."

"Fair enough. So where do you want it to take you? The Quidditch World Cup?"

"No, home to beautiful British Columbia to pick up a poisoned apple. I'm going to feed the flesh to Emma so she can't break my curse, and then use the seeds to plant a new apple tree so that I can get rid of these ridiculous mangoes." Disdainfully, she tossed the tropical fruits into the trash.

"Regina, haven't you been paying attention? I want the curse broken."

"What is that, the phrase of the day or something?" she scoffed. "Why the hell would you want to go back home and live happily in poverty with your loved ones, when you could throw your lot in with me in exchange for a promise of luxury? Don't tell me you've learned your lesson about that?"

"No, of course not," said Jefferson. "Throw in my daughter and two extra-large cases of amnesia, and you've got yourself a deal."

Back at Neuschwanstein Castle, Snow and her Cartoon All-Stars were waiting for Red to start the Twilight Bark, when a howl rang out in the distance. "All right, guys, we're go. Also, fifteen puppies have been stolen. Everybody keep an eye out for them."
"Right."

One of the dwarves fired a flaming arrow into the sky to signal their airborne allies. It plummeted back to the earth, impaled on a baby elephant. "Dumbo! No!" screamed Grumpy. He swatted his brother angrily. "Watch where you're pointing that thing, idiot!"

"Sorry." He fired another arrow.

The Blue Fairy rallied her troops to action. "All right, guys, I know we're usually benevolent, but let's make an exception just this once." She waved a sparkly blue flag. "Tonight we dine in Hell!"

The fairies swarmed the castle, careful to avoid the bug zappers King George had hung from the ramparts. Snow and her homies scaled the wall, waving to Humpty Dumpty on their way over, and charged the guards. "Who's the damsel in distress now?" the princess crowed, shooting mook after mook in the head.

The fairies descended on the next wave of guards, pouring fairy dust on their heads. "Whee, I can fly!" they squealed, rising into the air.

"Stop thinking happy thoughts!" the Blue Fairy yelled at them.

"Has anyone ever seen Old Yeller?" Nova called out helpfully.

The guards all broke down sobbing, falling back to the ground with a loud splat.

---

Over at the only hotel in town, Henry banged on August's door. "Hey August, open up! Emma wants to run away, and since you're such an expert on the subject, I figured you might be able to share some insight."

August opened the door. "Henry, stop that incessant banging. Wood has feelings, too."

"You were going to make Emma believe," Henry reminded him, shoving his way inside.

"I lied. But as you can see, I have a really good excuse," said August, rolling up his sleeves.

Henry stared at his wooden arm. "You're Pinocchio? This blows, but at least I'm right."

"Are you really surprised?"

The boy smiled demurely. "No, I guess not. So, have you shown Emma yet?"

"I tried, but that woman's so jaded we could carve her up and make jewelry." He handed the boy a package. "I hate to repeat myself, but I'm giving up on her. Here's my Operation Cobra T-Shirt, VP badge, and last month's dues. It's all up to you now, kid."

"So what else is new?" Henry sighed.

---

At the only diner in town, Archie Hopper was fidgeting nervously. "Look, Emma, I know I said after the mine incident that I'd help you get custody of Henry, but I was only trying to scare Regina. I thought that was obvious."

"But she broke Henry's favorite toy!" Emma protested.

"I'm sorry, but that's not illegal."
"She tries to discourage his delusional behavior, too!"

"That's not a crime either, Emma."

"She tried to keep me from seeing him, just because showed her yard with a chainsaw and publicly threatened...hm, I'm starting to see your point. But do you think she'd ever hurt him?"

"Nah, she'd only hurt everyone he's ever loved in order to make him emotionally dependent on her. A perfectly healthy relationship, I'm sure," Archie assured her. "This war between you two has to end, so for Henry's sake, please kiss and make up."

She eyed him suspiciously. "Did the Swan Queen shippers tell you to say that?"

Snow White made her way back through the escape tunnel to King George's dungeon, stepping over Stealthy's skeleton on the way. In her old cell, she found a magic mirror with her man trapped inside and sign reading "Smile! You're on Candid Mirror" posted on top. "Charming? Regina kidnapped you as a replacement for her genie? Phew, that's a relief. I was afraid she wanted you as a replacement for her Huntsman."

"You and me both, honey."

Snow was miserable. "This relationship sucks! Do you realize we still haven't even been on a date yet? We're always too busy chasing each other for various reasons. When the hell are we supposed to find time to make that baby Rumplestiltskin keeps pestering us about?"

"There there, baby, don't give up on us yet. I'm sorta counting on you to get me out of this dungeon."

Charming's charming visage faded, replaced by an image of Regina tweezing her nose hairs. "Hey, I don't remember my face being this snow-white...wait a minute. Sid, why didn't you warn me?" she screeched, throwing her tweezers at the glass. Slightly cracked, her reflection addressed Snow White. "Say one word about this and your prince gets it."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Snow said innocently.

"Good. Now, I think it's high time we talked out our differences like civilized people."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you all along—"

"Don't interrupt!" the Queen snapped. "Meet me at the place where we first met. I'll be carrying a red rose and a copy of Pride and Prejudice."

In the castle's main room, Snow White pulled knives, swords, chainsaws, and mini nukes from various spots on her person. "At least keep the little knife hidden in your bra," Grumpy urged her.

"No, that would be dishonest, and besides, it's incredibly uncomfortable."

"Snow White, I know you're just trying to keep your heart snow-white, but everyone knows lying to a villain doesn't count," Red chided gently.

"Look, enough people have already been hurt because of the bad blood between me and Regina. Clearly, the only solution is to sacrifice myself, leaving her to terrorize my loved ones and everyone else in the kingdom without opposition."

Red stared at her uncomprehendingly. "Are you even listening to yourself?"
"I know it's a lame plan, but I already tried wishing on a star and it didn't work, so I'm going to have to go with Plan B." She walked out, followed by a flock of bluebirds chirping a funeral march.

"I don't like this." Red murmured. "I don't trust that queen."

"Get out of here! Why ever not?" Grumpy sneered sarcastically.

At her family mausoleum, Regina unceremoniously kicked her dead dad out of the way and led Jefferson down a flight of stairs. "Here's where I keep my magic."

"Er, why?" Jefferson asked meekly.

"Well, I figured no one would be insensitive enough to come looking in here, but since Emma and Graham proved me wrong, I've been forced to install heavy-duty padlocks and a security system."

Jefferson accidentally brushed against the casket, and a siren began whirling. "STEP AWAY FROM THE CORPSE! YOU ARE MUCH TOO CLOSE TO THE CORPSE!"

"Rats, what was that security code, again? Oh, right. 1h85N0." Regina punched the numbers in, while Jefferson arranged his hat in the center of the chamber.

"It's not spinning," he observed.

"So spin it."

"Oh, sure, I never thought of that," Jefferson snapped.

"Well, here, try some of this Magical-Gro I brought from home." She dumped the whole bottle into his hat and added water, but the hat was as stationary as ever and twice as grungy.

"Well, that was a bust." Jefferson emptied the hat with a wet squelching noise. "And you now owe me my daughter, two extra-large cases of amnesia, and fifty bucks for my dry-cleaning bill."

"Well, how about this?" Regina held up her shamefully cheap engagement band. Daniel's face, projected in the center, was silently mouthing something that looked like, "Let it go, baby— given our age, income level, and class disparity, we were more or less predestined to divorce anyway."

Jefferson eyed it curiously. "What is that, some kind of Giga-Pet?"

"No, my man. The one Snow killed, not the one I killed."

"Well, whoever he is, he's got more magic in him than a Dungeons and Dragons convention. Fork him over."

"But I need him for stoking my unholy rage!" Regina protested.

"Since when do you need any help stoking your unholy rage?"

"Hm. Good point." She tossed the ring into the hat, which made a few feeble attempts at spinning, then fizzled like a bad spin-off. She rounded on Jefferson furiously. "Some mad genius you're turning out to be."

"Hey, cut me some slack, it happens to lots of guys!" said Jefferson defensively. "Besides, not all is lost. I can still reach through and grab your apple, and maybe a white rabbit or two, if time permits." He handed her the hat. "Just close your eyes and think appley thoughts."
Snow strode into the Evil Queen's stables. In the interest of being a good sport, she had painted a bright red target on her face. "Regina, why did you invite me to your favorite makeout spot? You do realize I'm in a happy and committed relationship, right?"

"Ah, happy and committed relationships," Regina seethed. "I used to know what those were like, until I met you."

"Huh?"

The Queen led her outside. "See this grave marker with the name 'Daniel' on it?"

"Uh huh."

"It means that Daniel is dead, Sherlock."

"Get outta town! Really?"

"Yup. And it's totally your fault. Because you narked on us, my mom killed him."

"Then why aren't you swearing vengeance on her, the direct cause of your unhappiness, who acted intentionally, as opposed to me, the hapless child who she cruelly conned into indirectly assisting her?"

"Well, I tried that, and it didn't heal my pain or restore what I'd lost, so I figured more vengeance was the answer."

Snow patted her stepmom gently on the shoulder. "Regina, sweetie, are you sober? I really think we should get you to a clinic-"

The Queen swatted her angrily aside. "Stop sympathizing with me!"

"Look, so maybe I did make a slightly fatal boo-boo. But on the other hand, you kind of orphaned me. Can't we just call it a tie, shake hands, and go out for pizza?"

"But then I won't get to destroy you," Regina pointed out. "You see my dilemma, here, right?"

"Aw, come on, haven't we both suffered enough?"

"I will never have suffered enough! NEVER!" Regina thundered. "However, I'll humor you by performing one last motherly act before I take you out." She took an apple out of her Gucci handbag and presented it to her stepdaughter. "Snow, I insist that you eat more fruits and veggies."

Snow regarded the apple with amusement. "Well, good thing it's not poisoned," she snickered sardonically.

"Eat it or I'll stick your prince in a guillotine with a non-liquid blade!" the Queen threatened.

"And if I eat it, you'll let him go?"

"Yes, I'll let him go…to an unmarked grave, in a thousand mangled pieces," she added in a soft whisper. "Jeez, she thought, Rumplestiltskin would cringe to see this girl's deal-making skills."

"Then congratulations, you've won."

"I...won?" Regina stammered, staring at her in dumb awe. "This…this has never happened to me
before. I'm...really not sure what the proper etiquette for this situation is."

"My heart bleeds for you," Snow grumbled, chowing down. "Blech, is this thing made of wax?" she gurgled as she dropped to the earth, unconscious.

In the Queen's dungeon, Charming awoke with a start, clutching his chest. "Gah! I'm psychic? Why didn't somebody tell me?"

The obviously-phony apple rolled out of Snow's cold, limp fingers, and Regina, who certainly didn't have any other enemies that such a priceless curse might come in handy against, didn't bother to retrieve it.

Instead, she waited thirty years and let Jefferson do it. The apple shot into his hand as though magnetized. "This is what you traded your last remembrance of your True Love for? A half-eaten fruit that appears to be made of wax?" He sighed. "Whatever. I guess a serial kidnapper with a telescope in every window of his house really doesn't have any right to judge other people's sanity. If you'll just finish ringing up my daughter and fork over the dry cleaning money, I'll be on my merry way."

"Stop nagging, Jeff, it's not becoming. I'll deliver your daughter as soon as all my personal problems have been resolved, I've reconciled with my distant and troubled son, and all my enemies are vanquished."

"But I'll be dead by then!" Jefferson protested. "My daughter will be dead by then! Hell, my great-great-great grandchildren will probably be dead by then." The hatter sighed. "Why do I keep taking jobs for evil tricksters who'd as soon betray me as look at me?"

"Because it gives you that edge that the fangirls love," Regina reminded him.

She took the apple home, minced it finely, and made some turnovers. "Ew, there's hero spit on this!" she balked, wiping her hand on her apron. "I sure hope the health inspector doesn't find out."

The doorbell rang. "Is that the health inspector?" she called warily.

"No, it's me, Emma."

"The sheriff? Excellent, she doesn't give a damn about the health codes or any other law. Plus, now I can get my revenge without even having to put on shoes." She smirked. "I'm on the biggest roll of my life." She opened the door.

"We need to talk, and not in our usual emotionally-charged, banter-packed way," said Emma gravely.

"Our fans will be crushed," said Regina, standing aside to let her in.

"This isn't about them, it's about Henry. Our constant feuding has made him even more warped than he was when I met him, and I didn't think that was possible. So I'm skipping yet another town."

"But what about your friends, your family, and the political office you swore to uphold?"
"Screw 'em all."

"Pfft, some archenemy you turned out to be." Regina's face fell. "I'm kind of disappointed. But what about Henry?"

"I want you to promise me you'll let me visit him. The pain of betrayal and abandonment in his eyes, the anger and resentment he'll surely spew at me for failing him; I wouldn't miss that for the world."

"I understand completely." Regina motioned for Emma to follow her. "Would you mind joining me in my cauldron — kitchen!" she amended hastily. "So, what exactly are you proposing?"

"I stop kidnapping your son and vandalizing your home, and you stop attempting murder."

"Well, I agree with the first part," said Regina. "But he's my son?"

"Yes," Emma conceded reluctantly.

"And I'm a way better mom than you?"

"Yes," Emma grated.

"And prettier?"

"Yes!"

"And Disney's Snow White is the worst movie ever made?"

"Fine, whatever."

The mayor grinned, packing the freshly-baked turnover into a travel dish for her. "Oh, Emma, I truly regret that it has to go down like this. I'm starting to think I could learn to like you." She pressed the dish into her hand. "By the way, I made you a present that's totally not poisoned. I swiped the recipe off an old friend with a real talent for baking. Baking absolutely everyone and everything."

"It, uh, looks delicious," said Emma uncertainly. "As a goodwill gesture, I insist that you take half for yourself. And eat it right now, while I'm watching."

"Hey, don't you trust me? I thought we were buddies?" She reached out to hug the savior, but just couldn't bring herself to do it, and had to settle for an awkward fist bump.

"Um…okay." Emma grabbed the turnover and ran, taking out her phone and pulling up the asylum on speed dial.

Granny, Red, and the Seven Dwarves burst into the Queen's stables to protect Snow White, like they should have done in the first place, and found her lying unconscious in a pasture. "She's dead!" Red wailed. "I hate to say I told you so, but I did."

"Why, why, oh why must selflessness and stupidity always go hand in hand around here?" Grumpy sobbed miserably.

The Queen watched triumphantly from her mirror. "Heh, selflessness is for saps." Getting rather disturbed by Sneezy's version of weeping, she took out her remote and changed the channel to Prince Charming screaming in her basement. "Ah, the Doomed Hunk Show. I do so love doomed hunks."
Gold was at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors plotting, as usual, when Regina barged in, as usual. "Gold! I've come to gloat."

"Don't you ever get tired of that, Your Majesty?" he drawled, not looking up.

Regina ignored him. "I tricked Emma into eating an apple covered in hero spit and poison!"

"What is this, a villain's exposition?" Gold shook his head ruefully. "Haven't I warned you about that, dearie?"

"Silence!" she roared, storming out. "I've foiled you, and there's no way in hell that you're going to manipulate me into unwittingly fulfilling your twisted agenda a sixth time!"

Over at the Princess Pad, soon to be renamed The Empty Nest, Emma opened the door for Henry. "Hey Sport, you know how you told me last night that I couldn't leave? I'm doing it anyway."

"Failing to do what I tell you again?" Henry shook his head ruefully. "Haven't I warned you about that, dearie?"

"Look, I spoke to your mom, and she says we can still see each other. And if you can't trust a murderous, abusive sociopath, who can you trust?"

"Emma, haven't you ever read Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*?" Henry took a book out of his backpack. "What we have here is a textbook case of the monomyth. Right now, you're in Stage Two: Refusal of the Call. Soon, you'll come to your senses and carry out Stage Three: The Atonement, by breaking the curse, and then Stage Four: Descent into the Underworld will come up, and you'll have to fight your way out of some unfamiliar magical land—"

Emma covered his hand with her mouth. "Henry, this isn't fiction!"

Henry turned to smile knowingly at the camera.

His birthmother tilted his face back toward her. "Knock that off, it's creepy. So is believing in curses, for that matter, but I didn't want to say anything."

"Wait, you don't believe in the curse? After all the mysterious crap that's gone down these last few months? Man, August was right, you are messed up."

"And how! And I really don't want it to rub off on you. I'd much rather Regina's cold cynicism and vindictiveness rubbed off on you." Emma hugged him.

Henry peeked over her shoulder. "Where did you get that ominously-lit apple turnover?"

"Your mom."

He thumped her over the head. "Emma! That thing is poisoned! Jeez, even if you don't believe in my brilliant theory about the curse (which you totally should), don't you see how stupid it is to be eating food prepared by an attempted murderer with a major personal, political, and professional vendetta against you?"

Emma blinked. "I don't understand what you're trying to say, son."

Henry buried his face in his hands. "I sure as hell hope whatever's wrong with you isn't genetic."
"Whatever. If that's how you feel, I'm eating your half." She picked it up and opened her mouth, but Henry snatched it away.

"You're really going to make me do this, aren't you? Fine, I guess we all knew it was coming, so let's get it over with." Sighing heavily, he took a big bite. "Blech, is this thing filled with wax? Well, no matter. Later, Emma. Please break the curse and DVR *The Simpsons* for me while I'm out." He moved over to the softest part of the floor and dutifully crumpled into a heap.

"Henry? Henry!" Emma cried, running to his side and pulling out her phone to call an ambulance. "Henry, I'm going to put up with Whale's roving eyes for your sake. Never doubt my love for you."
A Land Without Magic

An incarcerated Prince Charming whacked at the lock on his cell with a rock, to no avail. "I guess if it were that easy, they wouldn't have left all these rocks conveniently lying around all the cells. Ah well, this changes nothing. I will always find you, Snow, even if one or both of us is comatose! In fact, especially then!"

A pair of guards appeared. "Don't you ever stop spewing monologues?" one of them complained as they dragged him from his cell.


Royal Henchman #43's eyes welled up with tears. "It seems like the classy thing would be not to call attention to my aching loneliness." He ran off down the corridor, sobbing bitterly.

That left Charming alone with Royal Henchman #44, whom he promptly kicked in the junk. "Ah! Of all the spots to leave unarmored!" the guard wheezed, crumpling to the floor. Charming took off down the corridor, and the guard staggered after him, confused. "Hey, aren't you gonna take my sword? It might come in handy in this palace full of hostile warriors, don't you think?"

"Swords are for ugly people," Charming scoffed. "I already possess the most powerful weapon known to man. The Charming Family Charm!" Coming face to face with a hostile archer, he flashed his most debonair smile, and the archer was forced to turn his weapon on his own comrade instead. The quasi-prince laughed boldly. "Still got it!"

"Actually, you're a little late," the Huntsman corrected, removing his helmet and unlocking Charming's manacles. "I was already under the influence of the Charming Family Charm; Snow unleashed it on me years ago. Incidentally, if things don't work out between you guys, can you tell her to give me a call?" Charming decked him in the face. "Ow. Okay, fine, I'll just wait for you guys to have a hot daughter for me to pursue instead. I can be patient."

Charming decked him again. "What the hell is this, Twilight?"

The Huntsman handed him a sword and a Thor lunchbox. "Here's a little something for the road—don't worry, no apples. As for me, I must stay behind to stall the Queen."

"Okay, thanks."

"Don't argue with me, Charming. This may be difficult, but it's for the best. Just because my future holds a lifetime of rape and slavery at best, and execution for saving both your lives at worst, that's no reason to endanger yourself for my…" The Huntsman frowned. "Did you just say 'okay'?" But Prince Charming didn't answer. He was already halfway to Fantasyland.

At the only hospital in Storybrooke, yet another Charming had fallen into a coma. "Henry?" Emma cried. "Oh, this is awful, you've suffered some sort of massive brain trauma! I know! I'll shake you really hard. That should help." She grabbed him by his shirt and rattled him like a tambourine.

A nurse pushed her aside. "Lady, are you this child's legal guardian?"

"No."
"Do you have anything meaningful to contribute to his treatment?"

"No."

"Will you at least stop shaking him while he's brain-damaged?"

"Never!"

"Then get the hell out."

Emma looked hurt. "Why?"

Whale walked into the operating room, soaking wet, suds in his hair, and wearing nothing but a towel. "Dude, we really need to get another doctor around here so I can have a little time to myself once in a while." He wiped a trickle of shampoo out of his eyes. "So what's with Henry? Coma?"

He looked thoughtful. "You know, I had a case very similar to this just a couple of months ago. That guy was cured by a kiss from someone who loved him." He turned to Emma. "You wanna give that a try?"

"Whale, despite what you'd like all the single women in this town to believe, physical affection doesn't solve all problems."

"Fine, then, what's your solution?" he challenged.

Emma held out a baggie full of ominously-lit turnover. "He ate this right before he passed out. Call me crazy, but I'm starting to think he might have been on to something when he told me it was poisoned."

"All right then. You're crazy," Whale agreed wholeheartedly.

"Fine, whatever, just shut up and save the freaking kid. I'm a busy woman, and I really don't have time to train a new sidekick right now."

"I'm doing my best, but there's no explanation for these symptoms. It's almost like…acute meningoencephalitis!"

"Well, maybe there's a cure for whatever that is in the Big Book of Deja-Vu. It's held the solution to every other problem I've had this year." Emma dug the book out of Henry's backpack, which she'd brought along just in case he woke up and felt like doing homework, and was very appropriately overwhelmed by deja-vu. "Wow," she gasped, snapping out of it. "I really am a magical princess from another world? And David Nolan was once awesome? I'm not sure which to be more shocked by." She paused, lost in thought. "I wonder why that never happened all those other times I touched this book?"

Her musings were interrupted by Regina running into the room. "Yo, my network of high-resolution spy cameras says my kid is here?"

At the sight of her, Emma started fuming like a widowed pirate. "Dr. Whale, do you happen to have a chainsaw I could borrow?" she grated.

"No, but there might be some surgical saws in the supply closet."

"I guess beggars can't be choosers." She seized her archenemy by the hair and hauled her into the closet.
"Ah!" Regina yelped. "What the hell is this, some kind of PSA against open adoption?"

Emma repeatedly bludgeoned her over the head with the Big Book of Deja-Vu. "This horrible disaster is all your fault!"

"I'm sorry, you're going to have to be a lot more specific. Which one?"

"The one that resulted in Henry chowing down on that 'non-poisoned' turnover you gave me!"

Emma smacked her one last time for good measure.

The mayor looked relieved. "Well, I guess that explains why you're still conscious. For a minute there, I was afraid I'd lost my touch."

"It's all true, isn't it?" Emma persisted. "The curse, the Enchanted Forest, the bad CGI — all of it!"

"Yes," the mayor admitted. "Except of course for the part about me being sweet and vulnerable on the inside. That's all just a vicious lie cooked up by the paparazzi." Her eyes darted around nervously.

The savior groaned. "But why would you want to kill me? I caved like a freaking fairy dust mine, admitted you were right, left Henry in your custody, and ran off with my tail between my legs. What more did you want me to do, get a megaphone and proclaim your supremacy from the rooftops?"

"Swan, you may have left me legal custody of Henry, but this is Storybrooke, where genetics everything. Besides, this is Henry we're talking about. You could have changed your name, gotten reconstructive facial surgery and moved to Jupiter, and he'd still probably have had you tracked down within the week."

Emma finally pried her hands off Regina's throat. "I'm sorry, but you seem to have mistaken me for someone who cares about your emotional insecurities. Get in there and fix our damn kid or I'll drown you in a bucket of your own stupid apple cider!"

"I can't. Maleficent never told me how."

"Then take us back to the Enchanted Forest so we can search for a cure with magic!"

"I can't. Rumplestiltskin never told me how."

Emma rubbed her forehead tiredly. "Is there a less useless magician that I could seek help from?"

Regina thought it over. "Well, there is this one guy, to whom going for help never backfires."

"Who?"

"Gold, aka Rumplestiltskin, aka the Beast, aka the Crocodile, aka the Fairy Godmother."

The savior raised an eyebrow. "Fairy godmother?"

"Do yourself a favor and don't ask."

The Evil Queen was in her lair, practicing her regal swooping, when the Huntsman dropped in. "Where's the prisoner?" she demanded.

"Definitely not mounting a daring mission to steal back my heart and rescue me from your clutches," the Huntsman sulked.
"Let me get this straight," said the Queen. "You felt bad for the target and decided to help it get to safety instead of killing it...again?" She kicked him, and he whimpered. "What kind of lame hitman are you?!

"The kind who weeps with grief when he has to kill animals for food, never mind killing innocent human beings for the sake of your pride." He shook his head ruefully. "I don't mean to judge, Your Majesty, but it seems like you really should have gotten someone a little less sweet for this position."

"I don't pay you to talk!" the Evil Queen roared. "Useless man...or dog, or whatever the hell you call yourself. Looks like it's time for me to call on my other magically enslaved lover." She went to her mirror. "Yo Sid! Show me Prince Charming, and then a reputable temp agency specializing in assassins."

Sid obeyed, she snapped her fingers, and the quasi-prince was instantly sucked through a magical portal. The Huntsman looked on, confused. "If you had the power to do that all along, what the heck did you need me for in the first place?"

"Bed stuff," she replied, as though it should be obvious. "The tracking skills were just a bonus."

Charming came to in the middle of a vast forest with breadcrumbs strewn absolutely everywhere. "Lost in the woods?" he said loudly. "Oh no. I sure hope some sexy bandit doesn't spring from the shadows to steal my jewels and my heart." He waited a few seconds, but nothing happened. "Rats! That green thing wasn't a time warp." He rose, dusting himself off and pausing to pick up some breadcrumbs for dinner. "Well, no matter. Wherever I am, and whatever is going on, I've got to stay in motion or I could lose my status as a man of action." He closed his eyes and began pointing in various directions. "Eeny meeny miny moe, catch a dragon by the toe, if he eats you, get a clone—"

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I see you're in trouble, Honeymuffin."

"You always seem to," Charming noted warily. "Don't you ever have anything better to do than spy on me?"

"Well, I don't have a girlfriend anymore and my spinning wheel is out for repairs, so no. But enough about me. You seem to be trapped in the Even More Enchanted Forest. Want some help of a magical nature?"

"No, I'd rather retain my life, my loved ones, and my sanity," Charming declined.

"Aw, come on!" Rumplestiltskin prodded. "I'll give you this gold-plated Action-League Secret Decoder Ring I just enchanted to find Snow."

"My mother's ring? Where did you get that?" the quasi-prince demanded.

"I eat Cracker Jacks too." Charming shot him a death glare. "All right, I stole it from you with magic. Handy stuff, by the way. Sure you won't try some?"

"What part of 'go to hell' do you not understand?" Charming roared, swinging a sword at his face.

Rumplestiltskin batted it away carelessly. "Hey now, slugger, you could put an eye out with that thing. Yours, I mean, not mine. I'm invincible."

"I choose not to notice that!"

The Dark One sighed. "I really hope your child isn't as stubborn as you are."
Charming shut his eyes and flew at him blindly, sword whirling furiously. Rumplestiltskin giggled. "Hey, quit stabbing me, it tickles!"

The quasi-prince redoubled his efforts, tackling him to the ground. "Hey, what's this little dagger you're wearing?"

"Hands off, Honeymuffin!" Finally goaded to action, Rumplestiltskin simply performed a disappearing spell on Charming's sword, ending the fight once and for all. "Are you through creating pointless space-filler yet?"

"I guess so," Charming relented. "Though you've got to admit, I was doing well for a guy who grew up on a sheep farm and never received any kind of martial training."

"I will give you that much," Rumplestiltskin conceded. "So anyway, about your girl? I really want to see you two happy kids together…for now."

"Yes, I've noticed. What's up with that, anyway?"

"Well, among other things, it will really piss off Regina."

Mary Margaret was headed out of the only diner in town, a twelve pack of Zoloft cupcakes tucked securely under her arm, when her faithful stalker struck from the shadows. "I will always find you, baby, whether you like it or not!"

She groaned. "What the hell is this, Twilight?"

"Hey, I came to tell you I was wrong. Isn't that every woman's dream come true?" David turned on the Charming Family Charm full-blast. "What I'm feeling here is love, and some other sensations I can't mention on a PG-rated show."

She yawned. "David, did you not get the breakup notice I sent you last week?" She felt around in her purse. "Hang on, I think I might have a copy on me. Ah, here we go." She presented him with a notarized certificate reading "Notice of Termination of Relationship: Class 4B – Torrid Love Affair."

David's face fell. "Well then, I guess there's no reason for me to stick around any longer, apart from my job, my friends, the crippling mental and physical illness I'm still recovering from, and that other beautiful woman who recently displayed an interest in dating me."

Mary Margaret's eyes narrowed. "What other beautiful woman?"

"Oh…I…uh…" David glanced nervously at his watch. "Whoops, look at the time! Gotta jet, Boston awaits!"

Back in the Even More Enchanted Forest, Rumplestiltskin held up a bottle full of shiny purple stuff. "Kool Aid Bursts?" Charming reached for the vial. "Thanks, I guess I am a little thirsty after all that pointless fighting."

Rumplestiltskin slapped his hand away. "No, this is True Love, and if there's a brain in your head, you'll stay as far away from it as possible."

"You too, huh?" said Charming knowingly. "You loved someone?"

"I actually loved three someones, but let's keep things simple and just talk about the cute one for
"Okay. What happened to her?"

"She died." Rumplestiltskin paused. "I think. Actually, now that you mention it, I never did see a body or a grave or anything."

"So how do you know she died?"

"Regina said so."

Charming just stared him blankly. "Dude, seriously?"

The Dark One blinked. "Dear gods, you're right. What the hell is wrong with me? I'm supposed to be the smart one around here!" He stuffed the potion in a Faberge egg and tossed it to the quasi-prince. "Here, you stash this in Maleficent while I go file a missing persons report."

Prince Charming hesitated. "You want me to fight Maleficent? I don't know, I wouldn't want to steal Philip's thunder or anything…"

"Screw Philip, this is important! Someday I might need magic to destroy your family. Or save it, depending on what kind of day I'm having."

Emma and Regina stormed into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, where they found Gold polishing his riches and humming 'Never Smile at a Crocodile', as usual. "Yo Emma. Finally pried your head out of the freaking sand, huh?"

"No, Henry finally pulled my head out of the freaking sand, and now he's in a magically-induced coma just like all his favorite celebrities." Emma held up the Big Book of Deja-Vu.

"So kiss him."

"Why?"

Gold pulled a facedesk. "I'm surrounded by idiots," he grumbled. "Fine, if kissing isn't enough of a challenge for a hero of your caliber, I guess you could go on an epic quest for that Love Potion #9 I've got stashed in the basement."

"Where did you get Love Potion #9?" Regina wanted to know.

"A gypsy named Madame Rue." Gold giggled. "No, just playing, I made it. It really wasn't that hard. The only ingredients are purple food coloring and Emma's parents' hair."

"Yuck. How did you get that past the FDA?" Emma wondered.

"Hid it in Maleficent. Provided she hasn't had the stomach flu at any time in the past three decades, it should still be there." He handed her a box. "Here, take your father's sword with you. I know you've got no experience or training with such a weapon, and have most likely never even touched one in your life, but that never kept your daddy from pwning."

Regina raised her hand. "Does anybody care what I think about all this?"

"No," said Gold and Emma in unison.

"Just checking."
At the only hospital in town, Emma approached her unconscious, heavily-powdered son's bedside. "Henry, you were right about everything. Again. I should have known." She put the Big Book of Deja-Vu by his head. "Here, in case you wake up with amnesia like Grandpa did." She glanced down at her wristwatch. "And since I'm already here, maybe I should try that kissing thing Whale and Gold suggested." She bent down and puckered up, but then had second thoughts. "Or maybe not. The last guy I kissed promptly dropped dead."

Regina walked in. "Actually, that was my doing."

"You murdered the man I loved?!!" Emma shrieked, aghast.

"A little bit, yes. And brainwashed him. And raped him. Nightly. But that was weeks ago – the distant past. Water under the bridge, righ—"

Emma grabbed her by the neck and slammed her against the wall. "You evil sicko!"

"You think you have the right to judge me just because I killed someone you loved without hesitation or remorse?" Regina rolled her eyes. "Pfft, you're just like your mother," she snorted. "Look, you may as well just let it go and try to let bygones be bygones. You need my help to save Henry, after all."

"No I don't. Gold very specifically said so."

"All right, fine, but think about all the flak you'd get from the Evil Regals if you killed me off."

Defeated, Emma released her and stormed off. "You've got ten minutes to say your goodbyes to Henry. Try not to poison him again while I'm gone."

Regina moved to her son's side. "So listen, I'm really sorry about that whole killing you thing. Snap out of it and I'll buy you a new dirtbike."

Jefferson appeared, wearing a broad smirk. "I could say I was sorry for your loss, but I wouldn't want the Blue Fairy mutilating my nose." He tossed a handful of confetti over mother and child, dancing in circles around the former. "Hehe! How does it feel to have now murdered not one, but two beloved Henrys?"

"Jefferson? Where did you come from?"

"Gold's been giving me lessons on how to pop out of nowhere. And speaking of kidnappers, when are you going to fork over my little bundle of motivation?"

"Sorry, but I grossly misused the item you sold me, so I figure I'm entitled to a refund."

"...Huh?"

"Allow me to clarify things for you. I'm screwing you over," said Regina helpfully.

"What, again? This is really starting to get old."

"So what are you gonna do about it?" Regina challenged. "Kill me? Kidnap me? Sic your old buddy Rumplestiltskin on me?"

At that, a wicked smile crept across Jefferson's face, and he set off toward the basement. Regina's eyes widened with alarm. "Uh oh. Jefferson, wait! You know I was just kidding about that refund thing, right?"
Emma rapped on August's door. "August open up! Come on, Henry's cursed and I'm emotionally vulnerable right now, so I might be persuaded into a makeout scene despite those two awful dates we shared."

"Even if I were interested, I'd have to say no. Such a thing would result in a hospital-grade case of splinters for you at this point," came the strangled response.

Confused and frightened, Emma decided to lift her spirits by breaking something. "Emma SMASH!" she roared, kicking down the door. "Yikes!" she yelped, finding a painted wooden version of August sprawled out in front of her. "I didn't think it was possible, but you just got even spookier."

"Thanks for finally noticing."

"How do I cure this curse? Would kissing you work?"

"No, but you could kiss Hen—" Before he could finish that thought, his lips turned to wood.

"Kiss a hen?" Emma frowned. "What good would that do? Eh, he's clearly delirious."

Emma followed Regina into Storybrooke's library with much trepidation. "What is this place, and what are those funny paper things stacked all over the walls?"

"It's called a library. I know you're normally too cool to be caught dead in one, but bear with me, it's for Henry."

"Lie-bare-ee?" Emma sounded out curiously. "Oh, the things you fairytale characters come up with!"

Regina placed a hand on the wall and it opened, revealing a hidden elevator. Emma gasped and recoiled in shock. "An automatic door? I never dreamed such wonders were possible!"

"Get in," Regina instructed.

"Who died and made you boss?"

"Your idiot grandfather."

Emma decked her. "Exactly my point. You've now committed or attempted murder on four consecutive generations of my family. You think I'm dumb enough to let you lower me into a mysterious cave full of monsters?"

"I don't see that you have a choice. I can't go with you because I have to lower the elevator. Besides, battling dragons is hero stuff," she added disdainfully. "My rep would never recover from such a thing."

"Hold up. Did you just say dragon?"

"Don't worry, you have a genetically-inherited immunity to death by dragon. And if you get into any trouble, just break into 'Once Upon a Dream'. That never fails to rattle her."

"But we've got her trapped in an enclosed space. Can't we just throw some dynamite or poisonous gas down there and bypass the heroic battle?"

"No, that would be boring."
The savior sighed. "Fine, but if Henry dies during this epic waste of time, I'm killing you. And even if he doesn't, I'm still beating you up pretty badly."

Regina looked unworried. "Kill your archnemesis after one season?" She laughed. "Sure, Swan. I'll be living in fear."

Maleficent sat on a throne in her big, empty castle, staring blankly at the walls. "I could really use a TV to pass the time between boss fights," she grumbled.

Luckily, an armed prince presented himself before she could die of boredom. "Where is the horrible monster that reigns over this green screen?" he demanded.

Annoyed, Maleficent Force-Pushed him against the wall. "What, just because I'm an attractive woman, you automatically assume I can't be a powerful monster? The only thing lower than a sexist pig like you is a narcoleptic princess!"

"You know my Snow?"

"Not her, a different narcoleptic princess."

"There sure are a lot of those around these parts, aren't there?" Charming mused.

Maleficent raised a paw and quenched all the lights in the room, then paused for a moment. "You are afraid of the dark, right?"

"No."

"Well, that was a complete waste of time." She morphed into a dragon. "You've got to be afraid of dragons, though! Everyone's afraid of dragons."

Charming glanced down at the oversized egg in his hand. "No, actually that transformation was very convenient for me. Thanks!"

"I'm in over my head here," the hulking reptile lamented, charging him.

Meanwhile, back in Storybrooke, Princess Charming was feeling a lot less enthusiastic about the upcoming battle. She emerged from the elevator, regarding her father's sword like a poisonous snake. "Okay, I think I'm starting to figure this out. The pointy end goes in the other guy, right?" She made her way through the gaping cavern, stumbling across a glass case. "Regina uses a tanning bed? Hah, I knew nobody could look that fabulous naturally." She turned to the hulking lizard crouched behind her. "Am I right, or am I right?" She froze. "Wait a minute. AHHHH!"

But the dragon made no move to attack. "Eh, don't worry, I didn't come out to eat you. I heard you bashing that jerk Regina and figured you were someone worth knowing." Maleficent coughed fire on a cigarette and offered it to Emma. "Wanna talk about it?"

Alas, her father was having less luck. Incredible as it may seem, he had managed to misplace the colossal monster with the glowing flesh. "Yo, Maleficent?" he called out. "I know how this looks, but this particular knight in shining armor honestly isn't planning to kill you." He whistled. "Hello? Ollie ollie oxen free?"
Emma, her hair done up in curlers, was applying polish to her draconic chum's claws with a paint-sprayer, while they shared a ten-gallon bucket of Hagen-Daaz. "So anyway, after I hacked down her stupid apple tree and chopped the head off her hedge sculpture, I filled her high heels with superglue. She's had to wear them absolutely everywhere ever since; even to do yardwork!" The savior doubled over laughing.

"Oh, Emma honey, you're such a character!"

Regina's voice echoed down the elevator shaft. "Emma! Are you bonding with the person you're supposed to be killing? Geez, you and Graham really were made for each other," she growled.

"Aw, come on, do I really have to do this?" Emma whined. "She's done way less to provoke me to murder than you have. Can't we just slip her some ipecac syrup and call it a day?"

"Emma, she's a dragon and you're a gorgeous blond action hero! This isn't rocket science! She must die!"

"Oh fine," the savior pouted, grudgingly drawing her sword. Backwards. "Ow! Pointy end goes in the other guy," she reminded herself, nursing a bloodied hand. "Screw rules of genre, I've had enough of this!" She pulled out her gun and began firing.

Maleficent didn't even bother to set aside her ice cream, the bullets bouncing off her like lead spitwads. "Em, haven't you ever read your Monster Manual? Dragons have damage reduction 15/adamantine."

"Reading is for nerds, coma patients, and Henry!" Emma screamed, picking up her sword, after some deliberation, by the hilt.

In desperation, Charming tried dumping a bottle of barbecue sauce over his head. "Come on, I don't like to brag, but I've been told I'm finger-licking good!" he coaxed. "Sure you don't wanna open up that mouth and find out for yourself?"

Maleficent looked puzzled. "I'm not sure what you're trying to imply, but it's making me a little uncomfortable."

With even the Charming Family Charm failing him, the quasi-prince was forced to try his secret weapon of last resort. He pulled an ostrich feather from his pocket. "Hey Maleficent? Tickle tickle tickle tickle tickle tickle!" he squealed, attacking her foot.

"Ah! Quit it!" the monster laughed helplessly.

"Think fast, sucker!" He tossed the egg into her open mouth and down her throat.

"Was that an egg? I'm on a low-cholesterol diet, here, you creep!" She spewed a plume of fire at him. "Now you die!"

"No thanks," he declined easily, diving out a window and into the lake below.

Unable to formulate a more effective strategy, such as morphing back into a human and slipping through it, or simply blasting it down with her explosive breath, Maleficent repeatedly banged her head against the window frame and cried about how unfair it all was.

As he floundered there, rinsing the last of the barbecue sauce from his hair, Charming blew a low whistle. "Damn, I never thought I'd meet a stupider villain than King George, yet somehow, here she
Because neither his parents, nor his doctors and nurses could be bothered with him, poor Henry had been left to be comforted on his deathbed by his schoolteacher. "…And then Prince Charming leaned down to make out with the corpse, but instead of getting arrested and shipped off for a psych evaluation, he got the girl and lived happily ever after." Mary Margaret read aloud, looking thoughtful. "Hm, maybe kissing you out of your coma in the same manner would be worth a try. It worked on David, after all." She bent over to peck the boy's forehead, but stopped short. "Or maybe not. While my intentions are noble, I worry that this could be construed as child molestation. You know how the people in this town love to invent sex scandals involving me." She patted his hair regretfully. "Sorry, kid, you're on your own."

Perhaps finally realizing, on some subconscious level, just how hopeless the people he was trying to save were, little Henry finally gave up the ghost and died. "Dr. Whale!" Mary Margaret cried.

"What?" An exhausted Whale, whose hair was stiff with dried lather because he still hadn't had time to rinse it, appeared in the doorway. "Why are you calling me so frantically? Are you desperate for some action again?" He began to strip down. "Fine, but don't expect anything spectacular. I haven't slept in ninety-six hours."

"Ew, no, it's not that. I think Henry's dying."

"Then you'd better get out of here," he commanded, shoving her out the door. "The last thing a dying child needs is the comforting presence of a familiar adult during his final moments."

Dressed in scrubs, Jefferson made his way to Regina's secret padded basement. "Hey Ratched, I brought your tea. Two sugars, one morphine, and a splash of milk, right?" He presented a cup to the nurse on duty.

Nurse Ratched eyed him warily. "Who are you supposed to be?"

"I'm Jefferson. I work here in some capacity or another."

"Then why haven't I ever seen you before? And why are your eyes all dark and mischievous? And why does your ID badge say 'Hi, my name is Molly'?"

"Look, I'll level with you," said Jefferson quietly. "I'm actually an actor named Sebastian Stan. I'm trying to do some research for my upcoming guest role on the hit series Scrubs, but keep it under wraps, okay? I don't want this to turn into some kind of media circus."

"My lips are sealed," the nurse promised, talking a sip of the alleged tea and promptly fainting.

Jefferson snatched her keys. "Moron. Scrubs was cancelled over a year ago!" He made his way down the hallway, waved to Chief, slipped a pamphlet on male abuse awareness under Sidney Glass' door, and then opened the door to Belle's cell. "Come with me if you want to live."

The disheveled beauty was lying motionless in bed, because what else was there to do? "Hey, are you in charge? Who do I have to screw to get a hairbrush around here?"

"I'm going to give you something even better than a hairbrush: freedom!" he declared, throwing the door open grandly.

"An attractive man with sad eyes and a softly seductive voice is coming to my rescue at great
personal risk?" Belle grinned. "Is it just me, or does this sound like the start of a beautiful romance?"

Jefferson shrank away from her as if he'd been burned. "Are you kidding me? You may be hot, but if Rumplestiltskin didn't gut me alive, the Rumbelle shippers definitely would!" He held up his fists defensively. "Get away from me right now!" He turned to face the camera. "I never touched her, I swear!" Warily, he looked back at Belle. "You need to go find Mr. Gold, kiss him passionately, and never speak to or of me again. Tell him that Regina locked you up, beat you mercilessly, and gave you thrice-daily doses of electroshock therapy."

"But Regina never—"

"Just do it! He's going to protect you, and more importantly, slaughter her like a hog."

"Okay, but can you tell me who this guy Gold is? Maybe give me an address or a vague physical description so I'm not wandering aimlessly around town in what amounts to underwear for who knows how long?"

"Sorry, but there's no time. I have to go raid the medicine cabinets before they figure out that Molly is missing."

Maleficent's whining was getting downright painful to watch, so Charming swam to the shore, where Rumplestiltskin was waiting, looking deflated. "Well, that was a bust. For some reason, the cops all ran off screaming and barricaded themselves into the bomb shelter when I showed up to file that report. Did you have better luck?"

"I'm Prince Charming. Do you really have to ask?"

"No, I guess not." He forked over the ring. "I wish you and your Snow the best. Allow me to offer one last piece of advice before you go. If you want a happy marriage, keep her away from pirates at all costs – no matter how adorably sexy you may be, a pirate will always be more so."

"That's very helpful advice. What gives, are you trying to get my defenses down so you can harvest my organs?"

"No, I want to harvest your embryos, so go find your woman and get cracking!"

Charming brightened. "I'm all for that!"

He took off eagerly, but Rumplestiltskin held him back. "Wait. That's not what you were wearing in the premiere."

"What? Who cares?"

"Trust me, if we don't fix it, there are people out there just crazy enough to notice." He zapped the quasi-prince into a frilly, ruffled, brightly-colored ensemble that may or may not have been stolen off a circus performer. If Charming hadn't just counted coup on a freaking dragon, he'd have looked like a complete sissy.

Back under the so-called "library", Emma was still duking it out with the dragon. "Is it just me, or is this taking forever?" she griped.

"I'll say!" Maleficent agreed impatiently. "Look, we both know that, no matter how lame you are with a sword, you're the hero and this is the fantasy genre, so I'm not coming out of this alive. I'm
tired of fighting it. If it'll speed things along, I'll rear up and expose my soft underbelly to your blade." Listlessly, she spread her limbs and stuck out her chest.

Emma looked at her blade for a long moment. "Can you remind me…?"

"Pointy end goes in the other guy," the dragon growled.

"Thanks." The savior tossed her sword, and Maleficent dissolved into a puff of soot. "Blech!" Emma coughed, retrieving the enchanted Faberge egg from a pile of ash. "Worst egg hunt ever."

Charming spurred his white horse furiously through the forest, staring intently at his magic ring. "My preciousssss," he drooled, then shook himself abruptly. "I mean, my precious Snow, please don't be dead! Or worse, shrill and antifeminist!"

But when he finally reached his destination, all he found was seven suspiciously tall dwarves standing around a glass case. "You're too late, homie, she's a goner."

Prince Charming frowned. "Was this falling snow always here? Eh, I guess it doesn't matter. Open up the case so I can give my true love one last kiss."

Happy recoiled. "You want to make out with your girlfriend's dead body? Creepy."

"It's not creepy, it's romantic!" Charming defended. "Just shut up and open the damn coffin!"

"Fine. Sicko."

Prince Charming leaned down for a kiss. "You're so cute when you're comatose. Smooches!" Suddenly, a shockwave exploded through the forest. Charming jumped. "Did the earth just move?"

Snow White sat up. "That's got to be the lamest pickup line I've ever heard."

"Snow, you're back!"

"Yes, Jam—uh, I mean Charm-, uh, I mean Shep—uh, I mean, honymuffin. You found me!"

They sat there, gazing tenderly into each other's eyes for a long, beautiful moment, until Charming broke the silence. "I hate to kill the mood, but is there a bathroom around here?" he whispered.

A few minutes later, Charming emerged from a beachfront Porta-Potty and swung an arm around his girlfriend's shoulders. "So how did you find me?" she finally decided to ask.

"I didn't, it was all Rumplestiltskin."

"What's up with that guy, anyway?"

"Eh, who cares? Wanna get married?" He held out his mother's ring hopefully.

"Well, on the one hand, we haven't spent more than a couple of days, total, together, but on the other hand, that makes us the most deeply-developed couple in fairytale history."

"Is that a yes?"

"You know it, baby!"
"Sweet!" He smooched her while she was in her right mind for the first time ever. "Where do you want to go on our honeymoon? Disneyworld? Disneyland? Disney's California Adventure? The choices are endless."

"Actually, I think I'd prefer to go visit our families. With napalm."

"Just when I thought I couldn't possibly love you more," the quasi-prince sighed dreamily. "But while we're on the subject, I think I should inform you that King George isn't my real family. I'm actually a shepherd boy whose twin brother got adopted by the king and then killed by some kind of man-troll-thingy. Then I got roped into stealing his identity and killing a dragon even though I'd never even picked up a damn sword before, and then King Midas made me marry his daughter, even though I wasn't named Frederick, and then—"

"But I can still call you my prince and sing songs about how you'll come someday, right?"

"I don't see why not."

"Then your identity crisis doesn't affect me. Now shut up and let's enjoy this lovely view of Neuschwanstein Castle. Hopefully none of your father's guards own telescopes."

Emma climbed into the elevator. "All right, Regina, hoist me up, I've got the Devil's Eye Diamond — I mean, the magic egg. Hello? Regina? Regina! Are you off kissing Henry without me?" she demanded angrily.

Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Hey Emma. Brace yourself, for I've come to deliver some shocking news. The woman who just tried to kill you has just tried to kill you again."

"And left the only cure for her dying child behind?"

"Dearie, I know she may seem like a caring mother, but she doesn't have a really good track record with guys named Henry. Now toss me that egg so I can totally not betray you."

Emma quirked an eyebrow. "And why should I trust you?"

"Because of my warm smile and honest demeanor?" Taking a deep breath, Gold forced his atrophied cheek muscles into a benign smile. "Ow."

"Hm, I know I shouldn't give in so easily, but your smile kind of reminds me of Henry's, and it's really softening me up." She tossed up the egg.

Gold caught it and giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Excellent. So, I had my fingers crossed behind my back, and I'm going to betray you now. But don't worry, Henry's going to be fine. You've still got the option of kissing him."

"You're a bastard!"

"Is your name Bae or Belle?"

"No."

"Then why should I care what you think of me?" He dipped a little bow and skipped off.

Up in the so-called "library", Emma found Regina bound and gagged in a chair. "Of all the times for you to let go of your chronic skepticism, you had to pick now?" the former queen ranted. "Damn it all, I can't believe Gold manipulated everyone! I mean, you'd think he'd be getting bored with that by
"No, he's probably a million miles away by now, barricaded into some impenetrable fortress. Or sitting openly in his unlocked storefront. But no, he'd never be that stupid – there's no point in even checking. Let's go see if the Blue Fairy has any ideas. She doesn't have much talent for keeping families together, but she's all we've got at the moment."

Luckily, before they could pursue this asinine plan, their phones rang. "Whale," Emma reported. "Either Henry's miraculously recovered, and he wants to hit us up for some celebratory sex, or Henry's dead, and he wants to offer us some cheering-up sex."

Regina sighed. "Well, either way, we'd best head over there and get this awkward conversation over with."

Whale met Henry's two mommies outside the operating room door. "Sorry, we did everything we could." The Mother Superior shot him a dirty look. "All right, I can't lie in front of a nun, we went most of the day in the lounge playing Wii golf while Mary Margaret took care of him. Please don't sue! I'll sleep with you!" he offered. "In fact, even if you do sue, I probably will."

Emma ignored him, walking in to weep over her son's cold, dead body, but Regina pitched herself into the doctor's arms, apparently giving the offer serious consideration.

Gold cracked open the Faberge egg and clapped his hands delightedly. "Wow, an enameled replica of Tsarina Aleksandra's personal carriage! Ooh, and the Love Potion #9! I almost forgot about that. Could this be the best day of my life?"

As if in answer to that question, he heard a female voice outside his front door. "Excuse me, are you Mr. Gold? No? Well how about you, are you Mr. Gold? No? You? How about you?" Belle poked her head through the door. "How about in here? Is anyone in here Mr. Gold?"

Gold didn't look up, still engrossed in playing with his toy carriage. "Not now, Belle, I'm busy with….guh?" Surprised for absolutely the first time ever, Gold edged toward her and poked her shoulder tentatively. "Belle, you're alive? Looks like I owe a certain florist an apology."

"Um. Okay." Belle said uncertainly. "So are you Gold or not?"

"Yes and no." He swept her into his arms.

"Oh. That's nice." She patted his back awkwardly. "So, a guy named Jefferson told me to kiss you passionately and tell you that Regina locked me up, but you're kind of weirding me out, so I'm just gonna do the second one for now. Regina locked me up…er, and beat me mercilessly and gave me thrice-daily electroshock treatments," she added dutifully. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"It means that apple-swilling skank is going down," Gold seethed. "But I'm sorry, my unexplained bloodlust must be making you nervous."

"No, it's the fact that my protector has turned out to be a scrawny little man who can't stop crying that worries me."

He just smiled. "Don't worry, dearie. You'll remember me soon enough, and then it'll be my turn to worry."
Emma approached Henry, who appropriately enough, was looking as white as snow. "Wait. I just had the craziest idea. What if I kissed you?" Caught up in the grips of epiphany, she leaned down to peck him on the forehead.

A shockwave rippled through town, and Henry awoke with a smile. "Jeez, finally!" He rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "You're still an amateur compared to me, but maybe there's hope for you yet."

As he sat up in bed, dazed-looking townsfolk began to pour into the room. "Don't you people have families and loved ones you want to reunite with now that the curse is broken?" Henry asked. "No? You'd rather hang out here and stare at some kid you've never met?" The boy shrugged. "Fine, whatever floats your boat, I guess."

"My curse has been undone by that charming clan of necrophiles again?" Regina swore lavishly. "I should have just mowed them all down with a machine gun while the mowing was good."

"Coulda, woulda, shoulda," said the Mother Superior. "Now get out of here, or face the shame of having to tell people you were beaten up by a bunch of nuns."

"Fine, just let me say goodbye to the kid first." Regina turned to Henry. "Son, I know I brainwashed you, isolated you, and grossly underestimated your brilliance, but I do love you. It's just that I was raised to express familial love through psychological abuse and eventual murder. At least I narrowly managed to avoid the latter with you."

"Duly noted," Henry replied.

Meanwhile, David had cobbled together a suitable cape out of some tarp and tie-downs, and gone searching for his lady love for the umpteenth time. "Snow!" he cried, spotting her across the only intersection in town.

"Charming!" She ran to him and he threw out his arms to receive her embrace, but got a smack in the face instead. "You slimy bigamist!"

"Ow!" David was wounded in both an emotional and physical sense. "What was that for?"

His wife looked purely livid. "Us being Snow White and Prince Charming doesn't change the fact that you wrongfully accused me of murder. If anything, it just makes it worse!"

"But I—"

"Shut up! I want a divorce! And there is no way in hell you're getting custody of Emma!"

In desperation, her prince swished his makeshift cape and flexed his muscles heroically. "I will always find you!"

Mary Margaret melted, appropriately enough, like snow. "Aw, I can't stay mad at you. You remind me of our darling grandson when you're working the Charming Family Charm. He was dead last time I saw him, by the way."

"Well, we can mourn his loss and comfort our heartbroken daughter later. Right now, we've got twenty-eight years of making out to catch up on.

Seeing as how an angry mob would be convening to hunt her down and torture her to death at any
moment, Regina decided to go hang out in her big, conspicuous house with the drapes open. Weeping bitterly, she buried her face in her son's pillow. "I've lost my little boy, just because my criminal behavior almost killed him." She pouted. "Life is so unfair."

Belle was following Gold through the forest, somehow managing to lag behind the gimpy old man, when the curse lifted. She faltered. "Rumplestiltskin, is that you? I can't quite tell—didn't you used to be all sparkly and green?"

Gold took a tube of green glitter glue out of his pocket and smeared it all over his face. "Does that help, dearie?"

"It is you!" She ran at him, and he held out his arms to receive her embrace, but got a smack in the face instead. "You spineless liar!"

"Ow!" the Dark One whined petulantly.

His girlfriend was unmoved. "I just spent three decades locked in a dungeon because of your stupid trust issues, and you're not even going to offer me a token apology? Do you have any idea what you've put me through?!"

Gold took a sudden interest in his shoes. "I guess this isn't a good time to mention that I recently tried to beat your father to death?"

She slapped him again. "Oh, that does it, you and I are so over!"

She stormed off, and Gold heard the familiar click of shotguns behind him. Team Rumbelle descended on him, each of their faces more livid than the last. "Fix this, old man, or we'll fix you!"

"Eep!" Petrified, he ran after his girl. "Um, I love you too?"

"Damn right you do." Softening, Belle fell into his arms. "So, now that we've been reunited and confessed our love after all those years of pain and loneliness, do you think we should kiss?"

Gold considered it. "Nah, I've got better things to do."

He led her to a well at the edge of the forest and held up a little vial. "This is a very special place, Belle. The waters here have the power to return that which has been lost. Except, of course, for memories. That would be too easy."

Belle was looking disappointed and confused. "That's great, Rumple, but when you said you knew of better things to do than kissing, I thought you were going to seduce me."

He waved her off. "Yeah, yeah, I'll get to that when I get to it." He tossed the vial into the well, and a big mysterious cloud billowed forth.

"The Smoke Monster!" Belle screamed, jumping back. "Save me, Charlie!"

Back at the only hospital in town, Henry was shivering in his underwear. "Hey, c-c-can I get some pants here?"

"I'm afraid we have more important things to worry about," said Emma. "But on the bright side, at least I'm finally listening to you."
"Th-th-th-there is that, I g-guess," the boy choked out.

"So why aren't we all sipping victory margaritas in the hallowed halls of Neuschwanstein Castle? Was that kiss of ours defective?"

"I…I don't know," Henry admitted. At that, everyone in the room let out a collective gasp of horror. "And I'm afraid it gets worse," said Henry, pointing out the window.

"Ah!" Emma yelped, hand straying to her firearm. "Can you shoot a cloud? Eh, screw it, I'm gonna try either way."

Back at the well, Gold was attempting to comfort his girlfriend. "Belle, calm down! We don't even have a baby, and even if we did, this cloud would have no desire to steal it. It's just a little something I cooked up to bring magic to Storybrooke, so I can cling to the accursed power that tore us apart for three miserable decades." He beamed proudly. "Isn't that exciting?"

Belle stared at him for a long moment, finally coming to the conclusion that he was, in fact, serious. "Do you even remember me?" She grabbed his cane and thumped him over the head with it.

Seeing magic pour through the streets of Storybrooke, Regina fired a Glare of Evil at nothing, just to make sure she still had it. "Bwa hah hah! I'm BAAA-AAACK!"

Down below, Mary Margaret peeked over her husband's shoulder. "Honeymuffin, there's a rather ominous enchanted cloud hurtling toward us. Should we head indoors for a minute?"

"Nah, I'm comfy."
On the streets of New York City, a guy we're all going to pretend not to recognize for a while strolled along in a business suit, singing innocently. "Workin' nine to five, what a way to deny your past -- make a living! I meant make a living!" He glanced around nervously, then ran home as fast as his completely muggle feet would carry him.

Inside, he found his window wide open, with rain pouring in. "Damn it! I'll bet this is my father's fault, just like everything else that's ever gone wrong in my life," he brooded, going to close it.


He froze. "What did you just say?"

"Coo," the bird replied innocently, dropping a postcard in his hand and flying home to help his master fight off woodpeckers.

Unsettled, he looked down at the post, which read "BROKEN" in big, bold letters. Alas, because he wasn't wearing his reading glasses, he missed the fine print at the bottom that said, "P.S., you have a son."

Meanwhile, in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Prince Philip rode toward an surprisingly drab fairy-tale castle on horseback, followed by a girl we're all going to pretend not to recognize for a while. "I'm too sexy for my spurs, too sexy for my spurs, so sexy it hurts!" he crowed. Outside the castle, he jumped off his horse, looked tenderly down at the comatose princess who was his true love, and leaned down to kiss her.

"Copycat," his companion chided. "Is it me, or does this premiere look an awful lot like that last premiere?"

"Hey, Charming stole my epic swordfight against Maleficent," Philip defended. "The least he can do in return is let me borrow his True Love's Kiss bit." He smooched his princess stubbornly.

"Mmph, five more minutes," she yawned, rolling over.

Luckily, Philip had come prepared. He took a bucket of ice water out of his saddlebags and dumped it over her head. "Ah!" she yelped. "All right, I'm up, just knock it off!" she groused. "Philip, what are you doing here, besides looking fabulous? I told you not to come for me!"

Her prince laughed. "And you really thought that would work? Honey, I'm a handsome prince. I could no more stay away from a damsel in distress than you can stay away from a spinning wheel." He hefted her to her feet. "Now let's go back to my place."

"Ooh, okay!"

"Get your mind out of the gutter, I meant my secret rebel hideout."

Aurora looked worried. "This hideout of yours isn't flammable, is it?"

"Oh, you don't need to worry about Maleficent anymore."
Aurora brightened. "Really? Did you, like, slay her in some kind of epic battle?"

"No," he admitted, hanging his head in shame. "I was totally planning to, but Charming and Regina ruined everything! Don't worry, though. I'm sure I'll find something suitably epic to do battle with soon enough. I know I've got to earn my keep."

"Darn right you do," she scolded. "So, if you weren't fighting for me, where exactly have you been all these years?"

"Bonding with a beautiful, heroic woman who appears to be on the rebound."

Aurora was horrified. "What?!"

"Oh, and being rescued by another beautiful, heroic woman who appeared to be on the rebound," he added obliviously.

Alarmed, she pulled him into a smoking-hot kiss. A wave of magic rippled through the air, and she breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew. Just checking."

On the streets of Storybrooke, David and Mary Margaret clung to each other as the smoke around them disappeared into Sneezy's industrial-strength air purifier. "So, should we go mourn our dead grandson now?" Mary Margaret wondered aloud.

"Priorities, baby," her husband admonished. "Let's go catch up with all your friends, and maybe take in a movie first."

They found Ruby and Granny embracing around the corner. "My name isn't Eliza!" Ruby sobbed blissfully. "Oh, Granny, this is the happiest day of my life!" Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted her buddy. "Hey, Snow, now that our memories have been restored, do you happen to have the hundred bucks you owe me from that round of poker we played right before you went into labor?"

"Sorry, I left it in my other dimension."

"Ah, well, it's good to see you anyway, I guess." She pulled her bestie into a reluctant hug.

David approached Granny. "So, how about a hug for me?"

Granny hesitated. "Uh, have we ever actually met?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm feeling kind of left out here, aren't you?"

"Hm, good point." She embraced him like a long-lost son.

The seven dwarves appeared behind them. "Your Highness?"

Mary Margaret was confused. "Guys, I think you're a little mixed up. I'm a reigning monarch. You're supposed to address me as 'Your Majesty.' 'Your Highness' is what you would call my daughter…"

She froze. "Holy crap, I have a daughter!" she finally remembered.

"Yo," said Emma, conveniently appearing inches away.

Mary Margaret studied her daughter's face, cursing their genetic predisposition to chronic skepticism. "Dude, I can't believe this! A girl who looks exactly like me turns up at my door with no knowledge of her family, forms an instant bond with me, and I never even suspected we might be related?" She
sighed miserably. "I've been as stupid as Sidney. But none of that matters now." With great
difficulty, she managed to haul the larger woman into her lap. "Mommy's here, pumpkin!" She tried
to bounce her daughter on her knee, but just wound up dislocating it. "Ow."

David waved meekly from the background. "Yo, you also have a father, if anyone cares." Everyone
ignored him.

Henry, who had miraculously managed to disconnect himself from all those life support machines,
dress himself, pack up his rucksack, and get downstairs in the last few seconds, gave a little wave of
his own. "Yo, I'm alive again, if anyone cares." He put a hand to his ear. "What's that? Thanks for
bringing you your savior and sacrificing my very life to help break your curse? Aw shucks, it was
nothing," he demurred sarcastically.

David sadly draped an arm around his grandson's shoulders. "Champ, I think you're old enough to
hear the truth. Nobody cares about male royalty. Heroes are always princesses, and villains are
always queens. We used to get some occasional screen time by rescuing princesses, but women's lib
killed that. If you honestly want to be a prince, you're going to have to get used to standing aside and
letting the women in your life have the spotlight."

Henry's shoulders slumped. "Fine." He tossed a handful of confetti into the air and began chanting
halfheartedly. "Emma, Emma, won of course! By smooching herself a cold, dead corpse!"

David mussed his daughter's hair affectionately. "She's a chip off the old block, this one!"

The savior recoiled. "I am not! Stop loving me!"

Leroy turned to leave. "Well, it's been great seeing you all again, but I really ought to at least go and
touch base with my long-lost true love now that we're free, so—"

Doc seized him by the collar. "I don't think so, bro!"

Happy ran to stand in his path. "Leroy, you can't leave! You're the only one with character
development!"

"With Stealthy's tragic demise, we've already lost about seventy-five percent of our awesomeness
reserves. Please don't rob us of what little remains!" Dopey pleaded.

The Mother Superior appeared, shoving him aside. "Please, Leroy, nobody cares about that subplot
anymore."

"She's right, you know," said Sneezy. "So what was up with that puff of smoke? Do you know if it
contained allergens?" He readied his inhaler.

"No, just magic," she replied.

"Cool!" exclaimed Henry, looking up at the sky. "I wish upon a star that I had a jet ski!" He turned
expectantly to the Mother Superior.

"Sorry, kid, but I'm fresh out of wishes," she apologized.

Leroy sighed. "Well, you're as useless as ever. Come on boys, it looks like we'll have to waste the
Queen ourselves."

Emma held him back. "There's no need for that, Leroy, we all know Regina's harmless. The woman
was undone by a ten-year-old and a blond! It's Gold we should be worrying about."
In an ecologically-anachronistic forest, Gold was staring in awe at his true love. "My darling Belle, did your hair just get darker?"

She examined a lock of said hair. "Yeah. Did yours just get shorter?"

He felt around on his head. "So it would seem. I'll have to look into that." He brushed it off. "So where have you been all this time? Did some creepy chauvinist force you to marry him by threatening to lock up your father?"

"No, I was out taming this other beast, when - -"

Gold froze. "Hold up. You've been seeing other beasts?"

"Relax, honey. If it makes you feel any better, I barely knew the guy."

"No, that does not make me feel better!" he shrieked, panicking.

"Rumplestiltskin, let it go! The point it, I was on my way home to expose myself to more of your lies and abuse, when Regina captured me and locked me up. Some BS about protective custody."

"Interfering in my love life? How dare she? She knows interfering in people's love lives is my job!" Fuming, he conjured up a sledgehammer. "That does it, her head's going in my trophy case, right along with that punk Gaston!"

Belle sighed wearily. "Baby, you know I don't like you slaughtering people."

"Still?" the Dark One whined.

"Fraid so."

"Aw, even if they really have it coming?" he wheedled.

"Do you want to score tonight or not?"

"I'll be good!"

Back in town, Mary Margaret was clinging to her daughter's leg. "Can I call you pudding pop?"

"Hey, cute nicknames are the daddy's job." David shoved his wife aside. "Wanna play catch, sport?"

"Ugh." Emma shuddered. "I need booze. Where's a dwarf when you need one?" She waved Leroy and his brothers over. "Leroy, I want a septuple dose of your favorite drink. That's lethal, right?"

Unfortunately, an unruly mob was blocking the path to the only bar in town. "Kill the Queen, then swipe her outfits, razor-sharp ones! Bring chainsaws, finish off her apple tree!" they chanted, marching toward the Stepford House.

"Sweet, I'm there!" Leroy swung his trusty pickaxe over his shoulder and followed the crowd.

"No!" Henry wailed. "You can't hurt the woman who loved, raised, and abused me for ten years!"

"Sure I can, kid," said Leroy. "I don't even know you."

"Em-ma!" the boy whined. But Emma had put on her iPod, maxed the volume, and was pretending
not to hear his pleas.

Archie ran up to them. "Hey Henry, congrats on being right again," he panted. "Snow, Charming, I need your help."

The happy couple frowned. "Who are you supposed to be?"

"Guys, it's me, Jiminy."

"No, Jiminy's a cricket."

"It's a long story, just take my word for it!" the good doctor pleaded. "Guys, you've got to stop this angry mob from killing Regina!"

"Why?"

Archie's mouth opened and closed soundlessly for several minutes. Finally, in desperation, he looked to Henry. "You got anything, kid?"

"Yes. People love her wacky antics, and we'll lose tons of viewers," the boy pointed out. Unable to argue with that, they all ran to the rescue.

While Philip and Aurora made out, Mul—uh, Philip's faceless Asian chum put her - - uh, its ear to the ground. "Guys, the earth is moving."

"Mm, you bet it is," Philip mumbled against his girlfriend's lips.

"No, literally!"

A ghostly black thingy burst out of the ground. "All right, a vicious monster! It's Prince Philip's time to shine!" Grinning from ear to ear, Philip charged it with his sword. "Please be solid, please be solid, please be solid," he whispered, swinging at it until he noticed a tacky medallion slung around its neck. "Hey, nice bling. Yoink!" Miffed, the creature flew off to report his pickpocketing to the cops.

Aurora paused to reapply her mangled lipstick, then flew to her prince's side. "Baby, what was that creature? Something from the Negative Energy Plane?"

"No, dear, just a dementor." He produced a Crunch bar. "Here, have some chocolate. I hear it helps."

Gold led Belle into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. "This is my new evil lair. Not as nice as the last one, I know, but there are slightly few blood and tearstains on the walls."

Belle looked around the shop in dismay. "I see you still haven't sought treatment for your hoarding problem."

"Belle, you don't get to call other people slobs. I mean, have you ever even seen a comb?" She shot him a dirty look. "Just teasing, honey, I'll go get you one."

"Okay." She started to follow him into the backroom.

"No!" he yelped. "Uh, that is, my creepy puppets are in there."
"Oh." Paling, she backed away from the door. "Thanks for the warning, then. I'm brave, but not that brave."

He ducked into the back, pulled on some gloves, and dug out an old shoebox labeled, "Accursed Bling and broken Christmas ornaments.'

An angry mob under Dr. Whale's leadership bounded up to the Stepford House. "Open this door so we can kill you."

"No," came the muffled reply.

Stymied, Whale thought a moment. "Okay, you win," he said, making loud footsteps on the porch. Then, a few seconds later, "Yo, It's Girl Scout Troop #0327. We've got your Thin Mints."

Regina opened the door. "Dude, you suck at this whole angry mob thing."

"Cut me a break, I'm used to being on the other side of the mob," Whale snapped. "Now, while my cursed persona feels that murdering you is a terrible waste of hotness, I'm afraid we're going to have to take you out anyway."

"I'd like to see you try," sneered Regina, raising her hands to conjure…a very slight breeze. Miffed, she gave her hands a little shake. "Are these things on?"

"I'm not waiting around to find out." Clearly a changed man, Whale slammed her against a wall, pressing his whole body against hers, and didn't even try to cop a feel.

Emma shoved her way through the crowd. "Yo, move it, savior coming through. Whale, put her down!"

"Why?"

"Because we have a moral objection to the death penalty," Mary Margaret explained.

"I thought you guys were supposed to be medieval?"

"We're medieval progressives," said David. "Therefore, we're going to put her protective custody and focus on rehabilitation."

"Dude, but she just tried to kill your daught—"

David cut him off. "Your prince has spoken!"

Whale pouted. "Monarchy blows."

At Mayberry Jail, they shoved Regina into the cell she had already demonstrated her ability to break out of. "So, I'm your prisoner now?"

David and Mary Margaret both snickered. "Irony sucks, doesn't it?" The prince grinned. "Now let's cut to the chase. Now that the curse is broken, why aren't back in our beloved homeland full of magic and fifty percent infant mortality?"

"Because I had the Smoke Monster drop some A-bombs for good measure after we left."

David frowned. "We're going to need radiations suits, then, and something to fight off mutants with."
"We can probably find those things at Gold's, like every other object that matters." Mary Margaret shepherded her family out the door. "And maybe we can steal back our kid's mobile while we're there."

As soon as they were gone, Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Stripped of your magic and imprisoned by the Charmings?" He chuckled. "Oh, I've been there, dearie!"

"Rumple, I'm not in the mood for more of our hilarious banter right now, so can you please just hurry up and kill me?" Regina grumbled.

"No can do. Belle says if I kill you, I won't be scoring tonight."

"Ew, TMI! Uh, I mean, Belle who?" she stammered.

Gold rolled his eyes. "Dearie, lying really isn't your strong suit. Stick with your tried-and-true threats and bullying method. Or don't. Since you'll be dead in an hour, it doesn't really matter."

"Aw, come on!" Regina protested. "I may have imprisoned your girl, convinced you she was dead, and made you think it was your fault, but in all fairness, it's mostly your fault for being dumb enough to believe me."

Gold's face reddened. "Shut up!"

"I mean, seriously, you never even tried to visit her grave? Never sought out the guys who 'killed' her? What the hell is wrong with y - -""

"I said shut up!" Gold roared, grabbing her hand and pressing his accursed bling into it.

"What are you doing?"

He smirked. "Stamping your hand so you can get free admission. To Hell!"

"Drama queen."

Back at the surprisingly-drab fairy-tale castle, Mula-, uh, some exotic extra- -suddenly blurted out "Cretin!"

"I know you are, but what am I?" Aurora retorted.

"No, that's the monster's name. Legend states that its parents were total sadists."

Aurora turned to her boyfriend. "Who is this guy, and why does he have a better figure than me?"

The stranger removed her helmet. "My name is Mulan, but my friends call me Ping."

Aurora stared. "But…you're a girl."

"Wow, you noticed, huh?" Mulan applauded sarcastically. "And to think, there are those who say classic Disney princesses are unintelligent." She snickered. "Now then, we're in trouble. That monster Philip just pissed off has been known to devour people's souls."

"Yep, definitely a dementor," Philip decided. "I've heard of these guys. They like to stamp your hand, fly home to watch some cartoons and grab a snack, then come and finish killing you when there's nothing good on. Short attention spans, I guess."
"Probably." Mulan climbed on her lovable dragon-hating horse. "But I'm unmarked, and so's Aurora, and you're male royalty, so you don't matter."

Back in an ecologically-anachronistic forest, Gold was clutching his Achilles dagger in one hand and his favorite piece of bling in the other. He stabbed the former into the ground, dulling it horribly. "Heh heh, nobody's going to be stabbing me with this thing now! They'll be lucky if they can stab a balloon with it!" He tossed it aside. "Now, for my second piece of business." He tossed the medallion on the ground. "Calling all cretins!"

A ghostly black thingy emerged. "Dude, you know that term is politically incorrect. We prefer to be called Incorporeal-Americans."

"Fine, sorry, now hurry up and start sucking face. I told Belle I was going out for a smoke, like, two hours ago."

Regina awoke with a start in her cell. Upon feeling a searing pain in her hand and seeing a hideous burn in her palm, she glanced around hopefully. "No scantily-clad stable boys?" Her face fell. "Rats, then this isn't a dream."

Emma loaded her son into Ruby's car. "Try not to eat my boy tonight, Ruby, but feel free to eat Regina if she turns up."

"Will do," the werewolf promised cheerfully.

David and Mary Margaret were looking on, the latter snapping photos to put in her daughter's scrapbook under "Baby's First Crusade." Three rolls of film in, David finally snatched her camera. "Will you give it a rest?"

"Sorry, honeymuffin, but I'm a mother now, so I'm within my rights to be overbearing." She turned to her daughter. "Sweetie, I don't know if you've noticed, but there are so many elephants in the room right now that we could start our own freaking circus."

"I choose not to notice that," Emma replied.

Mary Margaret sighed. "Look, Emma, I know our being mother and daughter is kind of strange, given the way I'm always giving you sweets before dinner, you're always encouraging me to screw Dr. Whale, and those sickos on the internet keep shipping us..."

"You slept with Whale?!" David shrieked.

"Who hasn't?"

"AAAAHHH!"

"You don't get to be offended about this, Mr. 'Oops, I Think I Knocked Up My Other Wife'," she snapped. "But I'll deal with you later. Emma, I know you're busy with this whole crusade to prevent a murder and all, but can't you spare an hour or two to help Mommy bake some cookies?"

At this point, Emma was making Grumpy seem positively perky. "Mary Margaret, according to Henry's book, Snow White was terrible at noticing when family members were angry with her, so I'm going to help you out. I hate your collective guts."
"What? Why?" her father demanded.

"Because you put me in foster care, just to save my life, your own, and countless others that you were responsible for." The savior shook her head reprovingly. "Someone needs to get their priorities in order."

David and Mary Margaret exchanged confused glances. "Huh?" they said in unison.

"If you hadn't sent me away, at least we would have been together!"

"Um, no," Mary Margaret corrected gently. "If we hadn't sent you away, the Queen and her soldiers would have murdered you the day you were born."

"But on the plus side, I wouldn't have suffered near-fatal wounds getting you to safety and spent twenty-eight years in a coma," David added sarcastically.

"I CHOOSE NOT TO NOTICE THAT!" Emma screamed, covering her ears and running away.

Mary Margaret glared at her husband. "She gets it from your side of the family."

Philip and Aurora rode through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia on his noble steed, loudly debating who wuvved whom more, while Mulan followed, clutching an airsickness bag. "Hey Phil?" she ventured. "As much as I love to interrupt you two, I think we should stop to cower in fear like the legendary warriors we are."

Philip thought it over. "Well, I guess even if I kill a hundred wraiths, it'll never compare to Charming counting coup on Maleficent. Maybe you're right. I should just stop trying." Defeated, he dismounted and started pitching a tent for his girl.

Aurora was unimpressed. "Thanks, but I'm pretty sure that decades-long nap I just took will have screwed up my circadian rhythms for at least a couple of days." She snuggled up to him suggestively. "However, if some dreamy guy wanted to hold me in his strong yet gentle arms and soothe me with kisses, I might be persuaded to give it a try."

"Aw, I've missed your attempts at flirting," her prince said dreamily.

"Well, you don't have to anymore."

"Nope. Soon it will be your turn. Word of advice, when the sorrow and loneliness become too much to bear, torching innocent people's crops is an enjoyable way to blow off steam."

"Philip, what are you talking about?"

He panicked. "Uh…talking is for losers! Here, I know of better things to do with our lips!" He swept her into his arms, kissed her until she fainted, then stepped over her semi-conscious body and ran like hell. "I, er, have to go out for a smoke. Later!"

At the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold was chugging a cup of tea. "I wonder if it's too early in our relationship for me to finally admit I hate Belle's tea?" he mused idly.

Picking up the slack in Regina's absence, Emma and her parents barged in. "Gold!" the savior growled. "You just double-crossed me for the umpteenth time, overturned the laws of physics, and nearly cost me my kid's life! What do you have to say for yourself?"
Gold looked bored. "Oh please, we all know Henry's too cute to die, so get off my back. After all, it's not like I created the curse, manipulated Regina into casting it, and ruined all your lives." He laughed nervously.

"Hm, fair enough," Emma conceded. "But what about that freaky smoke monster you just conjured?"

"The only people who need to be afraid of that are Belle, Regina, and King George. If you're going to worry about something, worry about that dementor I sent after the Queen. Now either buy something or shoo; I'm in the middle of trying to score."

"Ugh, I don't even want to know." Emma rounded up her parents and left.

Belle emerged from whatever plot hole she'd been hiding in. "You lied to me."

Gold shrugged. "Yeah, so what else is new?"

"You're a jerk!"

"You finally noticed, huh?"

"New, and a bit alarming. Who'd have ever thought that this could be?" Belle looked stricken.

"Oh, come on!" said Gold incredulously. "You're willing to overlook all the people I've murdered and babies I've kidnapped, but you can't forgive my visiting justice on the woman who tried to destroy us?"

She smacked him. "That does it, buster! No sex for you tonight, and what's more, no ballroom-dancing!"

"Actually baby, now that you mention it, I am feeling sort of remorseful - -"

"Oh, save it for your fangirls!" Belle smacked him one last time for good measure and stormed out.

At their campsite, Mulan was unsuccessfully trying to start a fire. "I miss Mushu."

Aurora was finally regaining consciousness. "Hey, where's Philip? He told me he was stepping out for a smoke, like, two hours ago."

Mulan frowned. "He told me he was going to go buy some lottery tickets."

"Why would he lie?" The princess gasped. "Do you think he has another other woman?"

"No, nothing so awful as that. He's probably just marked for death. I guess that's my cue."

"Let's get down to business, to defeat the wraith!"

"Cool, count me in."

Mulan raised an eyebrow. "And what do you think you're going to do against that thing, Sleeping Beauty? Drool on it until it drowns?"

"No, but these high heels of mine could probably inflict some damage if I got close enough."

Mulan stomped off. "I'm not going to dignify that with a response."
Down at Mayberry Jail, all the lights flickered out and mysterious rustling was heard in the darkness. "Ugh, this is just like the beginning of every bad horror flick." Regina shuddered. "All right, Mills, whatever you do, don't get in the shower, climb any stairs, or nervously ask who's there."

"Hey Regina?" a voice whispered in the darkness. "Knock knock."

"Who's there?" She realized her mistake about two seconds too late. "Damn it!"

"Heh heh, works every time!" the dementor gloated, emerging to tear down her cell door.

"Hey, you'll have to pay for that! That's city property!" the mayor informed it indignantly.

"Fine, fine, send the bill to the Negative Energy Plane." The monster puckered up. "Now think happy thoughts. I'm starving!"

Emma and her charming parents charged in. "I don't think so!" David roared, picking up a chainsaw. "Charming SMASH!"

"Please, you call that smashing?" The dementor flung a barrage of furniture at the walls. "This is smashing, loser!"

Emma gave a low whistle. "This new life-form has much to teach us," she breathed in awe.

Mary Margaret picked up a splinter of wood that had once been part of Emma's desk and waved it at the creature. "Hey cretin? Expecto Patronum!"

"NOOOOOOOO!" it screamed, flying out the window.

Emma stared after it. "What the hell was that thing, and how would I contact it about some martial arts lessons?"

"Forget it, Swan," said Regina. "I've looked into that, and it charges upwards of a hundred bucks a session, plus the fabric of your soul."

"Darn. I was hoping it could give me some tips on how to kill it."

"If only it were that simple," Regina lamented. "Unfortunately, it can't be killed, and it can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until I am dead."

"Sounds like my kind of guy," said David brightly, draping an arm around Emma's shoulders. "Well, since it sounds like he's got everything wrapped up here, we'll just be leaving. Goodnight, Regina, and be sure to send us a postcard from Hell."

Regina was offended. "How dare you leave me to suffer and die just like I did to all of you? You're setting a terrible example for your daughter!"

"Can't be worse than the one you set for your daughter," Mary Margaret snorted, raising her hand.

Emma shushed them. "Look, I understand how you guys feel, but let's be realistic. If we try to let her die, Henry's just going to bombard us with the Charming Family Charm until we cave in. So why don't we just skip all that drama and save her now?"

"But what are we supposed to do against that thing?" Mary Margaret wondered. "The Patronus Charm didn't have much of an effect on it, and it seems to be impervious to chainsaws. Should we lure it into a deserted factory and attack it with homemade pipe bombs?"
"I have a better idea," Regina offered. "I'll send my Huntsman to take care of this new threat to me, just like I did with...no, wait, I killed him, didn't I?" She frowned. "Okay, let me think for a minute..."

They wound up at the Mayoral Lair, where Regina produced a very mad hat. "So Emma, did Henry really ask you not to take my life?" She smiled tenderly. "In that case, maybe I won't murder the little brat for endangering it in the first place."

But Emma's attention was focused squarely on the hat. "A magic top hat? That's really a thing?" She looked sheepish. "I guess I owe Jefferson an apology, and maybe an icepack or two for his battered head."

Regina patted the hat. "Yeah, I swiped this little beauty from him in the multiverse's most epic game of keep-awa...uh, I mean, Jefferson who?"

Emma shook her head, looking tired. "Regina, that's the dumbest lie I've heard since 'I didn't inhale.'"

David and Mary Margaret entered with some ratty old brooms. "Hey Regina, if something goes wrong, we figured you could use these to fly to safety." Mary Margaret went over to inspect the hat. "So what are you planning to do with this thing? Pull a gazillion rabbits out of it, dump carrot juice all over the wraith, then sit back and watch the carnage?"

"No." Regina tilted her head thoughtfully. "Though I'll definitely file that away for later—it's not bad. Actually, my plan was to open a portal to the charred, glowing remains of our homeland, and send the creature through to be eaten by whatever mutants are lying around."

"And how are we supposed to convince it to go through?" David wanted to know.

Regina shrugged. "I was hoping our Snow would volunteer to serve as live bait." The Charmings looked decidedly unamused. "What, you don't want to die to save your mom? Pfft, some heroine you're turning out to be."

"Eh, screw it, I'll use the same strategy I've always used." David brandished his broom heroically. "Jab it till it falls over!"

Mulan followed Philip's trail uncertainly. "I always was pretty lame at tracking. Oh, if only Belle hadn't deserted us to go cuddle the prince of darkness." Hearing the clatter of hooves behind her, she drew her sword. "Who's there? The Xiongnu? Haven't you punks learned your lesson yet?"

"No, it's me." Aurora appeared on horseback. "I charmed this beast into submission using the innate powers of animal command possessed by all Disney Princesses. Now, then, let's get down to business to defeat the wraith."

Mulan groaned. "Will you please go somewhere I'm not? You might get dirt on your cute little dress or something."

Aurora stuck out her tongue. "You're not the boss of me."

"Come on, Philip left you behind to keep you safe. You should respect his wishes."

"Mulan, I don't know if you've noticed, but he left you behind too."

Mulan slapped her. "Shut up."
A light bulb went off in Aurora's head. "Oh, I see what this is about. You're into my man!"

The warrior's face flamed. "Please, you're just playing into a tired old stereotype, assuming that a young Asian woman is automatically going to fall for the first attractive white guy she meets." She laughed nervously. "You've watched one too many performances of Miss Saigon."

Hearing the screams of the dementor in the distance, the two heroines put their argument on hold. "My man!" they cried in unison.

The Incorporeal-American opened the front door of the Mayoral Lair and knocked politely on the doorframe. "Madam Mayor, I hate to disturb you at work, but you've got an eight o'clock appointment with doom."

"Regina," said Emma steadily. "Tell me, from one parent to another, do you think it was a mistake for all four of us to face this thing together, potentially costing our son two families at once?"

Regina frowned. "Now that you mention it, yeah. One of us really should have invested in a father for him at some point. Oh well, I guess hindsight is 20/20."

Mary Margaret snatched a convenient bottle of hard liquor off the desk, silently praising her stepmom's closet alcoholism. She poured it on the floor and set it aflame. The queen and the two adorable princesses hunkered safely behind it, while the prince, who didn't matter, faced down the monster armed with nothing but a half-burned stick. "Hey Regina, any day now!" David screamed.

Regina peered into the hat, but all she found were some dandruff flakes. "Sorry, but this isn't working, just like every other spell I've tried since the curse broke. Go figure, huh?"

Meanwhile, in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, another prince who didn't matter was also preparing to face down the monster with nothing but a half-burned stick. "Yo, cretin!" he yelled. "I've resigned myself to the fact that you're going to kill me, but if it's not too much trouble, can you tell people that you were shapeshifted into a giant dragon when it happened?"

Mulan and Aurora chose this moment to ride to the rescue, making his obsolescence complete. "Philip, what are you doing?" the princess cried.

"Reclaiming my awesomeness," he replied.

"But we can help you fight! Or at least, Mulan can help you fight while I cheerlead," Aurora offered.

The wraith was becoming audible. "I'm on my way, but I don't take kindly to being ordered around," it hissed.

"That settles that, then," said Philip cheerfully, giving his girlfriends a little shove to send them on their way. "And don't worry, you two will find love again. Maybe even with two different guys this time."

"But I don't want to live without you!" Aurora bawled.

Philip blinked. "Um, baby, that's called co-dependency, and it's really unhealthy. Maybe spending eternity apart will be for the best."

"Mental health is overrated, Philip," Mulan scoffed. "Here, pass that bling my way and I'll give my life so you two can be happy together."
Aurora eyed her calculatingly. "And you said I've been watching too much Miss Saigon?"

The dementor appeared, tapping its watch impatiently. "Hey, come on, I'm a busy monster. Which one of you guys had the date with doom?"

Philip raised his hand and came forward. "Yo." He stopped to wave goodbye to his girlfriends. "I love you!" Alas, before they could ask which one of them that remark was addressed to, the creature was sucking out his soul.

"Stop!" yelled Aurora.

"You're not the boss of me," the creature mumbled around a mouthful of soul.

She glanced at Mulan. "You know, I see your point. That is kind of annoying."

The wraith licked its ghostly lips. "Yuck, tastes like heroism!" The creature dropped Philip's broken body and went home to rinse out its mouth.

Meanwhile, back in Storybrooke, Regina was still fumbling with the hat. "Damn it, I'm not used to sucking!"

"There there, don't beat yourself up. I want to do that myself." Emma patted her shoulder.

The moment they made contact, a surge of magic set the hat to spinning. Regina looked alarmed. "Did we just make beautiful magic together?"

"If you don't tell the Swan Queen shippers, I won't," Emma promised.

The wraith charged toward its mark. "Will you both shut up? I hate mouthy food," it complained. In response, Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on it, forcing it to seek a new target. "Fine then, I'll take your girlfriend instead!" It seized Emma by the ankles, took some ketchup packets out of its spectral pocket, and dove through the portal.

"She is NOT my girlfriend!" the savior screamed, hurtling into the abyss.

"Oh no!" Mary Margaret cried in dismay. "Our daughter is as good as dead! Well, I suppose the only responsible thing to do here is go and die with her, leaving her beloved child in the clutches of a homicidal maniac." She donned a nose clip and jumped in.

"I'm with ya, baby!" David shouted, diving in after them.

However, as he fell toward the portal, a voice boomed forth from it. "Male royalty? Bah, we don't need any more of your kind cluttering up our dimension!" It slammed shut behind Mary Margaret, leaving him to crash face-first into the floor.

"Mmph!" the unlucky prince grunted, gathering up his teeth. "I really hope there's a dentist in somewhere in this town that I just don't know about yet."

On a dais at the surprisingly-drab fairy-tale castle, Aurora was snuggling with her lifeless lover, as was customary among the royalty in their culture. "Well, Philip, I guess it's only fitting to lay you to rest here after all the good times we had in this place, what with me being kept in a state of constant torture and you being polymorphed into a pyrotechnic beast."

"About that," Mulan interrupted. "Are you or anyone else ever going to explain how you two
lovebirds wound up cursed and in different countries? Because I'm incredibly confused."

"Oh, probably," said Aurora noncommittally.

"I'll hold you to that, homie." Mulan offered her the medallion. "By the way, now that we're friends, would you be willing to take this hideous piece of bling off my hands?"

Aurora eyed it suspiciously. "Are you trying to curse me?"

"Yeah, I really don't want to risk losing another guy to you," the warrior admitted. "But props for figuring it out. Maybe I could learn like you after all."

David dug frantically into the floor where the portal had been. "No, no, no! I wanna come with you, Bae! I mean, Emma!" He rounded furiously on Regina. "Where are they? Are they dead?"

Regina shrugged, lazily leaning against a wall and buffing her nails. "I dunno. Probably."

"I should have killed you when I had the chance!" he roared.

"Agreed, you really should have." Regina laughed, conjuring up some Narnian dryads to strangle him. "Definitely not a mistake I intend to make!"

Henry walked in, trailed by Ruby. "Oh, hell!" he groaned. "My estranged mom is murdering my grandpa, who is also my brother-in-law? That's something a kid should never have to say."

David, his skin now bluer than his eyes, wiggled his fingers urgently at Ruby. "Hey Rubes, would you mind using those magic teeth and claws of yours to get me out of this mess?" he choked out weakly.

Ruby didn't look terribly worried. "Nah, I think I'll just wait and let Henry fix everything. That usually seems to work."

Regina looked over her shoulder. "Henry, what are you doing here?"

"I'll tell you what I'm not doing. I'm not murdering an innocent man. It's a lot of fun. You should join me."

"Whoops, my bad." She released David and he fell to the floor, losing several more teeth.

Ruby helped him to his feet. "See? I told you you had nothing to be worried about."

Henry's voice trembled. "Where's my mom?"

Regina waved at him, confused. "Honey, what are you talking about, I'm right...oh, you're talking about Swan, aren't you? She and Mary Margaret are lost forever, and for once, it's not my doing. I'm sorry, Henry."

"Then why are you dancing an Irish jig?"

She glanced down, and found her feet were bouncing happily. "That's a reflex action, sweetie; I can't help it."

Henry was unmoved. "Well, I don't need a mother who delights in the deaths of my loved ones!"

Regina sighed. "I, of all people, can certainly understand that."
"Bring them back or I'll hold my breath until I turn blue!"

"Henry, son, are you trying to emotionally manipulate me into using my magic for your own gain?"

"Yeah."

She beamed. "You're a chip off the old block. Fine, fine, I'll give you your stupid relatives back."

He shouldered his backpack. "Well, in the meantime, I guess I'll go crash at Hansel and Gretel's old place. Now that Emma's out of the picture, who's going to stop me?"

David stopped him. "Henry, I know we don't know each other that well, and I'm not sure if we've ever officially met, but seeing as how I have several hours of parenting experience under my belt, why don't you come live with me?"

Henry thought it over. "Can we have cupcakes for dinner?"

"I insist on it."

"I'm in!"

They ran off, leaving Regina standing alone in her office. "His bedtime is ten p.m., he's allergic to shellfish, he requires extra homework help in math and science, and he has a dental appointment at noon on Tuesday, if anyone cares." The only response came from a couple of chirping crickets. "Also, you might want to think about getting some clothes and a toothbrush for him." More chirping. Regina sighed. "Screw this. Next time I want a baby, I'll find a man and make one myself."

At the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Mr. Gold, who was losing faith in the American dollar, sat at his wheel making gold. "Today I bake, tomorrow I brew, today for one, tomorrow for two. Little knows my royal dame—"

Belle walked in. "You've got a royal dame on the side? And to think, you had the nerve to call me out about Philip!"

"Um, of course not, dearie, it's just an expression." He coughed nervously. "What are you doing back here?"

"Well, where else was I gonna go?"

Gold shrugged. "You could always go home to you fath—no! Don't go home to your father!" He began sweating profusely. "And just for the record, that guy's a damn liar." He attempted to collect himself. "So, I guess you've heard my dementor bombed big time?"

"Yeah. On the one hand, I'm glad you don't have Regina's blood on your hands, but on the other, I can't stand to see a vicious monster suffer." She noticed her old friend Chip perched beside the spinning wheel. "You still have my chipped cup?"

He stroked the cup tenderly. "How could I bear to part with this? It's a tangible reminder of that beautiful moment when I terrified and revolted you for the first time. Now get out of here before I do it again."

"But I can change you!"

"That's what Bae said. You wanna end up like him?"
"Rumplestiltskin, I'm not leaving you. The last time that happened, I ended up spending thirty years in a cage."

Gold considered this. "Well, when you put it like that, I guess I see your point. So, now that we've torn down the emotional wall between us and affirmed our love for one another, should we kiss?"

"Nah, I've got better things to do."

David and Henry arrived at Emma and Mary Margaret's apartment, for which they had somehow obtained the keys. Henry surveyed the badly-worn paint and rickety old walls with dismay.
"Gramps, don't you have a spacious two-story tract house that's just sitting there vacant?"

"Yeah, but there's no way in hell I'm taking you there. The last thing I need is some kid scribbling on my walls and spilling Kool-Aid all over my carpets."

Sighing wearily, Henry turned to a picture of his mother and grandmother. "Hurry home, you two."

David patted him on the back. "Relax, kid, I'll get them back. I'm sort of a savant when it comes to tracking princesses. Seriously, I was in a freaking coma and I still managed to find them. I don't even see why you're concerned about this.

Aurora was still clinging to Philip's lifeless body. Mulan appeared with a crowbar. "Don't make me use this!"

"But I'm still grieving!"

"Can you please find a way to grieve without lying on top of the corpse? I don't know if you've noticed, but he's starting to stink. Plus, we're probably going to end up getting devoured by mutants if we hang around here."

"Mutants? But this is fantasy, not sci-fi," Aurora protested.

"Things have changed while you were having your epic little nap. Ever heard of the Evil Queen?"

"Which one?"

"The younger one. She cast a terrible curse on this land, that ripped everyone away to another world. Except us, because we hadn't been cast yet. Anyway, time stood still for twenty-eight years. I know this, because I set my stopwatch right before the curse hit. And now, the land is fraught with dangers more fearsome than you can imagine."

Aurora gasped. "Like what?"

"Eh, not important. The point is, Philip and I had a secret base set up to defend against these dangers. A little place I like to call Hoth." Fed up, she raised her crowbar and pried the princess away from the corpse. "We'd best be getting back, before night falls and the tauntauns come out."

As they got up to leave, the earth began to move again. "Another cretin?" said Aurora. "Eh, big deal. As long as we're not dumb enough to touch its bling, we'll be fine."

Mulan dug into the heap of rubble that had appeared, while Aurora, who had just done her nails, stood back and cheered her on. "Mulan, what is that?"

Mulan gave her a funny look. "Uh, they're called women. You see them in your mirror every
morning, genius."

"Cut me break, I'm distraught." She looked down at Emma and Mary Margaret, who were somehow managing to remain unconscious with several sticks of jagged wreckage poking them in their spines. "Wow, these chicks are heavy sleepers. Definitely my kind of people."
Leroy, aka Grumpy, aka Dreamy, aka Fun_Size62 yahoo . com, was marking the town line in bright orange paint, just in case someone managed not to notice the city limits sign right next to it. He faced his brothers grimly, seven straws in hand. "Our mission, should you choose to accept it—"

"Wait, we actually have a choice? Then bye!" Sneezy turned to leave.

Leroy grabbed him by the ear and brandished a big, meaty fist. "You're gonna choose to accept it, and you're gonna like it! Hear?!"

"But-!"

"No buts! It's our duty as dwarves to subject ourselves to unnecessary danger in order to impress our fearless leader's husband."

"I thought our duty as dwarves was to mine fairy dust?"

"Oh, please, that's so ten episodes ago."

The dwarves reluctantly chose their straws. Sneezy held up the short one, dismay and Vapo-Rub written all over his face. "I call a do-over!"

"No do-overs!" his brothers proclaimed in unison.

"But this is crazy! You're giving no regard to proper experimental procedure! As a pharmaceutical professional, may I suggest we do a preliminary trial? Maybe send some white mice over the line and make sure they don't explode before we risk the life of a sentient being?"

"What is this? You don't want to risk your life for the sake of the Prince's curiosity?" Doc rolled his eyes. "Wimp."

"Besides, Ashley Boyd would never forgive us if we risked the life of an innocent mouse." Leroy shoved the pharmacist over the line. "Think fast, bro!" Sneezy was immediately enveloped by a sinister purple haze. "Uh oh. Sneezy?" He glanced back at the rest of his family. "Hey guys, I just had a thought. Maybe we should have done a preliminary trial before risking the life of a sentient being."

Meanwhile, the civilians of Storybrooke had been left to clean up the wreckage left by the wraith, as their emergency services consisted of a single person and she'd just been eaten alive by a magic hat. In front of the only diner in town, Ruby was having a heated argument with an insurance agent.

"What do you mean, no coverage? We have undead insurance!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Lucas, but I'm afraid your policy only covers cadaverous undead. You know, zombies and stuff?"

She bared her teeth and snarled. "Cut me a check or I'll eat your young!"

He gulped, handing over his checkbook. "Just write in whatever you think is fair."

Upstairs, August's wooden form lay prone on a bed, eyelids fluttering weakly. "Ohhh, I can barely move," he moaned weakly. "I still can't believe I managed to get up to write and mail that postcard."
Marco stood outside the Mayoral Lair, posting a crude drawing of a seven-year-old Pinocchio. "Ah, if only I had some clue as to what my boy looks like as a thirty-five-year-old man. Maybe that nice thirty-five-year-old man who recently turned up at my door, full of stories about the carpenter father to whom he swore a vow long ago, could help me. He has a Photoshop app on his phone."

Ruby wove her way through the frantic crowd of refugees, decked out in a beautiful new fur coat and diamond necklace. "All right, people, if you're looking for a family member, come to the front desk. Or just pick a street and run down it yelling their name. There's only, like, two of them in the entire town," she pointed out. "If you need counseling, you'll fit right in, and if the wraith damaged your home, feel free to ask me for a loan. I'm positively rolling in green right now."

The Mother Superior approached her, looking worried. "This is absurd. Everyone is panicking, just because they've awoken from a twenty-eight-year slumber to find their homes and loved ones gone and an extra personality residing in their heads. Sheesh, what a bunch of crybabys."

Ruby shoved a wad of cash into her hand. "Here, go buy some morphine and slip it into the town's water supply. By the time it wears off, Charming will have solved all our problems."

"How do you figure?"

"As Emma's father, solving everyone's problems is in his blood."

Regina opened the door of her Stepford House to find an infuriated quasi-prince standing on her porch. He shoved his way inside. "Dude, barging in is my gimmick," she complained.

"Yeah, yeah, rest assured, I'm wracked with guilt," he apologized insincerely, holding up the tattered remains of Jefferson's hat. "Now tell me about this."

"It's a fashion statement you don't want to make. Now beat it, before I turn you into a toad and send you on a wild ride down my garbage disposal."

David looked unworried. "Go ahead."

"...No. You're not the boss of me," Regina stalled. "But as long as you're here, could you tell me how my son is doing?"

"Eh, he's fine. He's at the Mayoral Lair enjoying the company of an unruly mob."

"Nolan!"

"Relax, he's perfectly safe. I left him in the loving care of my favorite bloodsucking werewolf."

She groaned. "I don't know why I expected good parenting from the guy who gave up his longed-for child just to save her from being butchered by me."

"Say what you will," David sneered, "but at least I never poisoned my kid."

"I only did that twice!" Regina defended. "Now leave me alone so I can formulate my strategy for ripping out your heart and stealing my kid back."

"Regina, put yourself in Henry's place. Could you honestly feel any sort of love or filial loyalty to a woman who tore out your loved one's heart and kidnapped you using black magic?"

"Have and will. It's sweet little girls who worship me that I have trouble loving."
David gave up and walked out. "You need therapy, and you need it now!"

The Proto-Evil Queen spurred her horse on through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia. "Faster, Rainbow! There's got to be a bathroom around here someplace! Oh, and freedom, too."

But before she could reach the border, some trees reached down and grabbed her. "Ow! Let me go!" she cried, squirming violently. "I can get you Miracle-Gro! Lots of it!"

Her mother Cora appeared, an open spellbook in her hands. "If I'd known you'd be this much trouble, I'd have skipped all the drama and let Rumplestiltskin keep you," she grumbled.

"Mom? Don't you ever get tired of being evil?"

"You think this book is evil, just because I got it from a manipulative satanic weirdo who swore he'd bring me nothing but darkness?" Cora rolled her eyes. "You're so narrow-minded, but that's your husband's problem now." She blew on one of the book's pages, and a cloud of dark smoke wafted off of it. She inhaled deeply. "Mm, smooth."

"What did you do that for?"

"Just emphasizing the parallels between dark magic and drug addiction," Cora replied cheerfully, releasing her daughter. "Now then, as punishment for trying to flee an unwanted marriage, I order you to go home and write "I wuv King Leopold" a hundred times on the blackboard."

"But Mom, I don't wuv King Leopold! I wuv Daniel, but since he's no longer an option, I'd settle for not being terrorized."

"Being terrorized builds character! And you now owe me two hundred lines!"

"But I want freedom from your evil clutches, not power that I could use to free myself from your evil clutches!"

Cora facepalmed. "Let's just go home. I need to check your birth certificate and make sure you're really my child."

David ran up to his grandson over at Doom Central Station. "Henry, where's Blue? The Mother Superior, I mean."

Henry was insulted. "Gramps, I know who the Blue Fairy is. As you may recall, I'm the one who told you. Loudly and repeatedly, for several months."

"Sorry, I forgot about your omniscience for a second."

"You can apologize later. Right now, there's a desperate mob with your name on it."

Right on cue, Ruby pounced. Fortunately, her claws were retracted, so David wasn't seriously injured. "David, where's Mr. Gold? Now that I'm flush, I want to buy those creepy puppets of his and see them safely destroyed."

"Have you checked his shop? You know, the one with his name written all over it?"

"Wow, I never would have thought of that!" Admiration shone in Ruby's eyes. "See, that's why you're the ruler and I'm the subject."
Archie ran over. "Chirrup? Chirrup?" He cleared his throat. "Sorry, old habits die hard. I meant to ask if Regina still has powers."

"Are you dead?"

"No."

"You just answered your own question, brainiac."

Marco tugged impatiently at David's sleeve. "Have you seen a guy who may or may not be thirty-five years old, may or may not go by Pinocchio, may or may not be made of wood, and may or may not be a redhead?"

David shrugged helplessly. "I may or may not have."

Dr. Whale tapped him on the shoulder. "Hey David, are the nuns still nuns, or can they get down and dirty with Dr. Love now?"

David decked him. "Dude, you slept with my wife and you've got the nerve to ask me for dating advice?!" He rubbed his throbbing head. "What the hell is wrong with these people?"

"I know," said Henry, his little voice dripping with false sympathy. "Looking to you for aid and guidance in this time of hardship? Why, what do they think you are, some kind of monarch?"

"I'm starting to see why my daughter hocked you all those years ago," the quasi-prince grumbled. "Blue!" He ran over to the Mother Superior. "Are there any magical trees in this world I could use to reunite with my wife and daughter, and more importantly, escape my grandson's incessant nagging?"

Blue sighed. "Your Highness, what part of "a land without magic" do you not understand?"

Henry slapped him on the back. "Aw, don't worry Gramps. It'll all work out."

"How do you know?"

"Because I just said so, and I'm physically incapable of being wrong."

Leroy appeared, a vacant-looking Sneezy in tow. "Hey kid, while you're at it, would you mind saying that all amnesia is temporary?"

Sneezy looked around him, a confused frown on his face. "Why is Granny Lucas snarling at that mailman? And why is the Orkin Man chasing Dr. Hopper? And why are those people over there burning our mayor in effigy?"

"None of your damn business!" Leroy snapped, shoving him aside. "See what I mean? If you cross the town line, you lose all memory of our horrifying, angst-riddled pasts! Isn't that the worst thing you've ever heard?"

Having temporarily shaken the Orkin Man, Hopper dropped by to ask another question. "And coming back here doesn't fix it?"

"Of course it does. That's why my brother thinks he's a pharmacist." Leroy thumped him over the head with his axe. "Moron! You're even worse than Dopey, and that's saying something!"

Archie rubbed his fractured skull with a wince. "Hey, cut me some slack, I'm still a little woozy from whatever that guy just sprayed me with."
"I need a drink," David muttered, wandering off to find an undamaged liquor store. The townsfolk, who were sorely in need of booze themselves, followed. "This again? Look, I'll make you people a deal. Get off my back for a couple of hours, and I'll meet you here with the solution to all your problems."

"All of them?" Whale challenged. "Even this weird rash on my foot?"

"Especially the weird rash on your foot," the quasi-prince promised.

Mollified, the crowd scattered. David seized Ruby and Henry by the hand. "Phew, they fell for it! Quick, let's go hide under my bed until this all blows over."

Ruby gently withdrew. "Now now, that's just David Nolan talking."

David squared his shoulders. "You're right. Henry, my boy, fetch me a cape and a sword. It's time for me to reacquaint myself with the Charming Family Charm."

Regina sat on her couch glaring at a candle. "Come on, light, damn you! If my magic isn't setting you on fire, then surely the Glare of Evil should be?"

The candle sprouted a face and looked reprovingly up at her. "Watch your language, mademoiselle."

"Lumiere?" Regina threw the candle out the nearest window. "Get out of here, and tell Rumplestiltskin to keep his lackeys away from me!" The former queen rose and went to the door, carefully surveying her surroundings for threats. "Let's see. Mobs: absent. Trees: sedentary. Mom: theoretically deceased." Relieved, she made her way to her car.

Archie suddenly sprung forth from the bushes "Yo."

"Ah!" Regina screamed. "Hopper? Don't you know the old saying? 'Never startle a spellcaster, lest you become an amphibian?" She attempted to collect herself. "What are you even doing here? I suppose you've come to offer me a series of moralistic platitudes, because the Blue Fairy is too scared to do it herself?"

"No, actually I was looking for Pinocchio. Everyone seems to have forgotten I'm his conscience, but I still haven't!" the good doctor proclaimed. "But as long as we're both here, we could take a minute and have a long, heartfelt chat."

Regina considered his offer. "Or, we could dig out our own eyeballs with a rusty spoon."

The Proto-Evil Queen sat braiding her future stepdaughter's hair, because apparently their kingdom was too poor to hire a royal hairdresser. Little Snow White admired herself in a hand mirror. "Mirror mirror, in my hand, who's the fairest in the land?"

"That's catchy," Regina praised. "You mind if I use it?"

"Knock yourself out." She rifled curiously through Regina's jewelry box, fishing out Daniel's ring. "Hey, I thought you were supposed to be royalty. How come you've been reduced to wearing horse tack as jewelry? Was it a gift from some kind of centaur prince or something?"

"No, I got it from the guy you killed."

Snow looked puzzled. "What are you talking about? I've never killed anyone. Mind you, I tried, but I
was just too sweet.” She fluttered her eyelashes adorably.

Regina seized her by the neck. "I'm talking about Daniel, you little twit! My mom killed him after you spilled the beans about our makeout spot!"

The child's face had gone from snow-white to Caribbean-blue. "Then maybe you should be strangling her!" Snow wheezed.

Regina thought it over. "That's...actually a really good point. This fantasy is over!"

______

Back in good ol' reality, a stably-breathing Snow was still examining the piece of alleged jewelry. "Hey, I thought you were supposed to be royalty. How come you've been reduced to wearing horse tack as jewelry? Was it a gift from some kind of centaur prince or something?"

Regina snatched it back. "Mind your business, go to your room, lock yourself in, and barricade all the doors and windows!"

"But—"

"Just do it!"

______

She decided to go have a talk with her father, since he'd proven so adept at keeping the evil impulses of his family members in check in the past. "Daddy, I'm having these horrifying impulses to brutally murder innocent children, and I really think I could use some professional help."

Henry the First just chuckled and gave her a pat on the head. "Oh, that's just pre-wedding jitters talking. Your mom spent the night before our wedding lusting for blood, too, but...hm, actually, she never did get over that, did she?" He forced a smile. "But don't worry, that probably won't happen again."

"Daddy, I'm reaching out to you, here. I'm telling you that the long years of abuse you've so spinelessly allowed me to endure have caused serious damage to my psyche, and begging you to help me before I flip out and hurt someone. And you're just going to brush me off?"

"Yup."

The Proto-Evil Queen groaned. "And yet, you're still the most loving parent I've got." She sighed. "Allow me to add extreme depression to my list of psychological complaints."

"Don't be so hard on Mommy, pumpkin. Sure, she may have murdered your beloved fiancé, pimped you out like a high-priced hooker, and magically strangled you on multiple occasions, but it's just her idea of tough love."

"Well, where did she get such freaky ideas from?"

"Same place everyone around here gets their ideas from. A dude named Rumplestiltskin."

______

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Regina barged in, as usual, and began rummaging through a display of old books that had appeared in the shop overnight. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Hey, knock it off, you're cluttering my clutter."

"Shut up and give me The Book!"
"All right." He placed a Bible in her hand.

"Ow! It burns!" she screamed, dropping it. "I meant my mom's spellbook, wise guy. I need it to get my estranged son back, a problem you couldn't possibly understand."

"Go to hell." Gold giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Whoops, where are my manners? I meant please go to hell."

"No, Rumplestiltskin." Regina grinned. "Oh, how I've missed saying those words!"

"Whatevs. You're still not getting the book. I know you, you'll just use it to plot my downfall, extort my secrets, and kidnap my girlfriend some more."

"Speaking of Belle, fork over the book, or she's going to hear all about your creepy little fling with my mom," Regina threatened.

Hanging his head in defeat, Gold produced the book. "Well-played, dearie. Well-played."

Regina peered nervously into the secret spellbook her mom hadn't bothered to lock up or enchant against prying eyes. "Rumpelstilzchen, I summon thee."

The Dark One appeared, looking pained. "Why are you addressing me by my original German name? This isn't Grimms' Fairy Tales, dearie. In fact, those two are probably spinning in their graves right about now."

Regina giggled and pinched his cheek. "Aw, aren't you just the cutest little thing?" she cooed. "You remind me of my old pet iguana, Snickerdoodle!"

Annoyed, he batted her hands away. "Hey kid, I'm the Dark One, unholy scourge of this land and countless others. Show a little respect."

"Sorry, sir."

"It's cool, just don't let it happen again." He genuflected theatrically. "In this language, I go by Rumplestiltskin."

She waved obliviously. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Rumplestiltskin. I invited you over because I hear you taught my mother magic?"

"Yes, along with some other things you probably don't want to hear about." Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Aw yeah, she was wicked sexy and sexily wicked, though after that two-century dry spell, I'll admit, my standards were pretty low." He circled her slowly and deliberately.

Regina cringed. "Er, and do you find me 'wicked sexy' too?"

"No, don't worry. The reason I keep leering at you is because I bought you as a baby, and I'm trying to appraise your approximate resale value."

David stood in front of a mirror at the Princess Pad, crossing his fingers and hoping there were no genies inside. "Mirror mirror, on the wall, our chance of survival is looking small," he rehearsed.

"No, no, all wrong," his performing arts coach Henry scolded. "You were supposed to say, 'we won't be horribly slaughtered at all.'"
The quasi-prince looked longingly at his sword. "Can't I just stab some bad guys instead? We already know I'm good at that."

"Sorry, but I seem to be related to all the bad guys, so I'm going to have to ask you to refrain."

David pouted. "Fine." He took the Mad Hatter's hat out of his bag. "Maybe the insane levels of charisma emanated by this hat will dazzle the crowd into believing my hype."

Glancing at the hat, Henry consulted the Big Book of Deja-Vu. "Actually, that's the Mad Hatter's hat, and if you're not going to use it to get Emma and Mary Margaret back, you should probably give it back to him. He has a history of kidnapping us Charmings at the least provocation."

"Wait, go back to the part about getting Emma and Mary Margaret back," David instructed. "Do you think we could convince him to help us?"

Henry thought it over. "Maybe, if I dyed my hair blond, put on a little blue dress, and introduced myself as 'Alice.'" He got out a tape measure. "Here, take my measurements, and we can go shopping after you finish leading your people."

David's face fell. "Oh yeah. The monarch thing again." He picked up the hat and left.

Henry ran after him. "You're not going to do any of that, are you?"

"No," David admitted.

"You're going to go to Gold for a quick, cheap solution just like you always do, right?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"And you don't want the help of the precocious young hero who arranged for you to be freed from not one, but two curses?" the boy prodded.

"Correct."

Henry sighed. "Wow, you really are related to Emma, aren't you?"

Because his home was being fumigated for psychiatrists, Gold was forced to pack for his journey in the front room of his shop. "All right, Gold," he said to himself, stuffing maps into a suitcase. "You've got approximately two hundred million square miles of planet to search, and your only assets are some cheap drugstore maps that you're too lazy to enchant." He tapped his chin thoughtfully. "This could take several hours, or maybe even days. I'd better bring along a change of underwear," he decided.

David stormed through the front door, and Gold scowled at him. "Barging into a shop in the middle of the afternoon on a weekday, while the owner is present? What do you think this is, dearie, some kind of business?"

"Sorry, I don't know what I was thinking," the quasi-prince apologized.

"Eh, no biggie. Sorry about your kid getting sucked into another dimension before your very eyes. I'm starting a support group for that, if you're interested." Gold handed David a business card. "So, I couldn't help but notice that there's panic in the streets. As our monarch, shouldn't you be doing something about that?"

"I will, but right now, I figure my need to immediately see my family outweighs my subjects' need
Gold sighed, looking tired. "And I suppose you expect me to miraculously track them down for you, just like I did the last two times you and your girl carelessly misplaced each other?"

"Yes, please."

"Okay, I'll make you a deal. I'll do it, but only if you promise not to thank me with a prison cell like you did last time."

David stared him down coldly. "That's totally unreasonable, but I'm desperate. Fine, I agree."

Gold reached into a box labeled 'Deus Ex Alchemica' and fished out a little blue bottle. "Here, put this on an object owned by the person you're looking for, and it'll lead you right to..." He gave the bottle a double-take. "What the hell am I doing? I've got my own kid to find! I could pour this on that old shawl of Bae's and avert this stupid quest completely!" He snatched the vial back. "Sorry, Charming, deal's off."

David took a moment to consult the Big Book of Deja-Vu, then pointed over Gold's shoulder. "This may not be any of my business, but your girlfriend is making out with some pirate."

"She's a corpse!" he thundered, turning around and tossing the bottle aside so that he could fill his hands with lightning bolts.

David caught it in mid-air. "Sucker!"

Gold's shoulders slumped in defeat. "Well-played, dearie. Boy, I'm really off my game today," he observed. "Oh well. Can you do me a favor before you get out of my face?"

"What?"

"As a feared and hated monster, I like to keep up-to-date on the movements and objectives of local mobs. Tell me, what's up with all those people at the border?"

David paused in the doorway. "Well, Sneezy lost all memory of his old life while trying to cross the town line, and everyone thinks it's some sort of curse. However, it could also simply be that his life wasn't all that memorable to start with."

As soon as he was out of sight, Gold started going to town on the display cases with his cane. Belle walked in, surveying the carnage and looking annoyed. "Jeez Rumplestiltskin, that's the third time today! I'm not cleaning this up again, damn it!"

Back at the palace, Regina was still being circled by Rumplestiltskin, and rapidly coming down with a case of motion sickness. "Oh yes, dearie," he whispered darkly. "I know everything about you. Even the size of your original nose."

"How?" Regina wanted to know.

"Would you believe I'm your fairy godfather?"

"No, everyone knows that the fairy-godparenting sector is highly gender-segregated," she scoffed.

"True." He looked at her with new respect. "All right, the truth is that I've been stalking you since before you were born."
Regina screamed. "Help! Police!"

Rumplestiltskin clamped a hand over her mouth. "Oh, will you get a grip? I may be a creepy old psychopath, but next to your mother, I should look positively cuddly.

"True." Regina relaxed a bit.

"Atta girl." He mussed her hair affectionately. "So, who should we kill first? Your mom, or do you want to practice on some schoolchildren first?"

Regina screamed. "Help! Police!"

The Dark One's face fell. "Nope, dearie, you're definitely not mine." He looked into Regina's eyes as though trying to stare into her soul. "Let's see, the warmth and compassion are going to have to go, and I don't like the look of this pesky respect for human life, either. Not to worry, though." He conjured up a full-length mirror. "Magic will set you free!"

"I thought the truth was supposed to set you free?"

"Eh, I like my version better."

"But I don't want to use magic!" Regina protested. "It's turned my mother into a murderous megalomaniac, and no offense, but it doesn't seem to have done you any favors either." She indicated his black claws and lizard skin.

Ignoring the jibe, since he'd already had escargot for lunch, Rumplestiltskin positioned her in front of the mirror. "Relax, kid, you don't even have to do anything. Just give her a little shove and the mirror will send her off to Wonderland, never to be heard from again." He laughed. "I mean, it's not as if she has the benefit of advanced magical knowledge which she could employ to somehow find her way back here and seek revenge on us, right?"

Regina, who had been staring intently at the mirror, blinked dazedly. "What? Sorry, I wasn't listening. I'm having the strangest urge to recite egotistical poetry into this thing."

Sitting under her bedraggled apple tree, Regina thumbed through her mom's book of spells. "Let's see now...Rejuvenating Your Hair For a Night on the Town With Your Favorite Imp...Restarting the Engine of a '92 Ford After It Has Been Filled With Sugar by Your Enemies...Returning to the Enchanted Forest to Seek Vengeance on a Matricidal Daughter...ah, here we are. 'Reviving a Honeycrisp Apple Tree Mutilated by Chainsaw Attacks.'" She blew across the page, kicking up a puff of smoke, which she inhaled. Her eyes began to glow an eerie purple. "Well, there's obviously nothing malevolent about this." Standing up, she triumphantly plucked a healthy red apple from the tree's branches. "All right! Time to make some pies and get my son back, in that order!"

David leaned on the hood of a car, glancing calculatingly from the Gold's potion to Jefferson's magic hat. "Hm, maybe I should put a leash on this thing before I enchant it, so I don't have to worry about losing track of it or falling behind it?" He dismissed the idea almost immediately. "Eh, screw it, I'm a doer, not a thinker." He dumped the potion on the hat and ran after it. This being Storybrooke, nobody even bothered to stop and stare at the guy chasing a flying top hat down the street.

It led him to an overturned car, where a muffled voice was calling out for help. "Hello? Is anyone there?" The voice sounded annoyed. "Damn it all, I absolutely refuse to die without getting the chance to tell Emma those three beautiful words. Told ya so!"
David opened up the mangled driver door. "Are you the Mad Hatter?"

Jefferson glared. "Seeing as how all that 'mad' stuff I was saying turned out to be a hundred percent true, maybe you should rethink using that nickname, pal."

"Sorry. I'm here because I need help. My child has been torn from my loving arms by magic most foul."

"You too?" Jefferson reached into his upside-down pocket and produced a business card. "If you're interested, there's a support group for—"

David tossed it aside and dragged him from the wreckage. "Not now!"

At City Hall, Henry was desperately trying to call his grandpa. There was a beep, and a tinny voice on the other line answered, "According to our billing records, the person you are trying to call is a figment of a nineteenth-century German storyteller's imagination. Please make a note of it." The boy flung the useless gadget away in disgust.

Meanwhile, the crowds were getting restless. "I thought the Prince said he'd meet us here in two hours?"

"You think he just said that to get reelected?"

"I would if we lived in a democracy."

As their monarch's favorite drinking buddy, Ruby was the closest thing they had to an authority figure. "People, please! I'm sure the Prince has not abandoned us to selfishly go search for his wife and child, leaving us completely unprotected from the rage of the Evil Queen." A nervous hush fell over the crowd. "What? I said 'not'!"

Her grandmother wandered by, toting a loaded crossbow. "Granny, do you really need that?"

Granny stared at her as if she was speaking Klingon. "Well, if you insist, I guess I could use my minigun instead."

"Um, never mind."

The doors suddenly slammed open, and Regina barged in, epic-style. "You know, if you people were going to meet and try to figure out how to avoid getting killed by me, my own freaking office really isn't the best location you could have picked."

Archie stood in her path. "Regina, don't kill us! It'd leave you no one to have epic battles with, and think how bored you'd get!"

She magically pushed him across the room. "Why should I listen to you? You're a bug!"

"And proud of it, baby!" the battered doctor bragged woozily.

"Hey!" Leroy protested. "You can't treat my friend's daughter's son's psychiatrist that way!"

Regina flung him out a window. "Next," she invited flatly.

"You're damn lucky the moon's not out right now!" Granny shouted, firing a bolt at her head.

Regina caught it and set it on fire. "Henry, can you try not to get hit by this?" she requested, hurling
"Lady, enough with the gloating, what do you want?" yelled Ruby.

"Let's see..." Regina tapped her chin thoughtfully. "My son, a hot stable boy, preferably immortal, two hundred and fifty My Little Ponies, my very own hall of mirrors..."

*Three hours later*

"...And a lifetime supply of Apple Jacks, and a new pair of high heels, and another hot stable boy in case the first one gets killed..." she continued hoarsely.

Henry shoved his way through the throng of bored, drowsy townsfolk. "I'll make you a deal, Mom. I'll go with you, if you'll agree to shut up for five minutes."

Regina brightened. "I'm glad you're being reasonable about this. I wasn't looking forward to having to brainwash you. It's really tedious." She draped an arm around her son's shoulders and hauled him off. "Enjoy your power vacuum, losers!"

David and Jefferson were seated at a table, trying to intimidate the mangled hat into working by staring at it. "Do you really think this will work?" David asked skeptically.

"No, I was just trying to get you off my back," Jefferson admitted.

David smacked him upside the head. "Can you make this thing work or not?"

Jefferson rolled his eyes. "Of course. That's why I chose to remain trapped in this hellhole for twenty-eight years with my hated enemy and a bunch of people who thought I was insane."

"But you're the Mad Hatter. Can't you just...hat?"

"Please see my above answer."

David studied him intently. "You had a cutesy pink tea set and stuffed bunny in your car. That means you've either got a daughter, or your mental issues are more severe than even Lewis Carroll could have imagined. Surely you, of all people, can understand my need to get my family back?"

"Well, if you do, your wife and daughter may try to tell you some silly story about how I tied them both up and threatened them with a gun." Jefferson laughed nervously. "Don't let it worry you. It's just an inside joke we have going."

David gave him a funny look, but let it go. "Isn't there anything you can do to help me?"

"Don't you ever hear the word no?" the hatter grated.

"Only from Kathryn." The quasi-prince grew pensive. "I wonder what ever happened to her?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," said Jefferson.

David seized him by the collar. "Look, I'm our ruler's favorite piece of man candy, and that somehow gives me political authority over you!" he thundered. "So be less useless, or I'll lock you up and throw away the key."

Jefferson just looked bored. "You know, you're the ones who destroyed my hat in the first place, so if you're going to be mad at somebody, be mad at yourself. And while you're at it, you might want to
consider offering me an apology for irreversibly ruining my most valuable possession."

David released him sheepishly. "Sorry, I guess you're—"

"Sucker!" Jefferson cried, running like an army of anthropomorphic playing cards was chasing.

"You dirty bastard!" David roared, giving chase. "How dare you try to resist an unwarranted, semi-legal arrest?!"

Luckily, Ruby stopped him before he could further trample the US Constitution. "David, stop persecuting that poor man and go save Henry. And then everybody else."

He brushed her off. "Not now, Ruby! I've got to get Emma and Snow back so that they can hate me for failing to go save Henry!" He paused, realizing how stupid that sounded.

"But your approval rating is at a catastrophic low!" Ruby informed him, holding up a file folder. "According to these public opinion polls, your subjects would rather cross the border and commit mental suicide than continue to subject themselves to your leadership. Or lack thereof."

Okay, the five minutes are up, now let me tell you all the reasons I'm right." Regina dragged her son into the Stepford House and quadruple-bolted the door behind them. However, because she clearly had no concept of her son's intelligence, she hadn't bothered to lock the windows.

Henry ran straight to his room and took out his Home Hostage Situation Emergency Kit. "Ugh, I really hoped I was just being paranoid when I made this thing," he lamented, grabbing an elaborate rope and ducking out the window.

Living vines grabbed him and deposited him back at his mother's feet. "That was the best plan you could come up with? Jumping out the window?" She shook her head sadly. "You could have pretended you were glad to be home, lulled me into a false sense of security, then simply walked out the front door while I was asleep and been halfway to Mexico by the time I realized you were gone."

"Is it too late to do that?"

"Yes."

"Dang it!"

She conjured a blowtorch and cut him free. "Relax, I only rescued you because I love you so much."

"If I needed rescuing, I'd have called the freaking Rescuers."

Regina was unmoved. "Argue all you want, but my life sucked, so I'm entitled to your unquestioning love and devotion."

"But you banished my mom and grandma!"

"Hey, that was an accident!" Regina protested.

"You killed me! Yesterday!"

"Also an accident!"

Henry was now shouting at the top of his lungs. "Mom, I really don't think it's safe for me to be around someone who has as many accidents as you do!"
"Aw, come on!" Regina wheedled. "Love me and I'll give you a cupcake!"

"A cupcake?" Henry snorted. "Well, that certainly makes up for the ten years of severe psychological abuse you put me through."

"It's a really big cupcake." But Henry still wasn't impressed. "You drive a hard bargain," said Regina. "That's my boy! Okay, I'll sweeten the deal. You can have the cupcake, an eleven o'clock bedtime, and I'll even give you magic lessons!" She conjured some lightning bolts. "So, who should we kill first? Your grandpa, or do you want to practice on some schoolchildren first?"

Henry screamed. "Help! Police!"

"Yes, that's it, lure the victims right to our doorstep," she encouraged, smiling proudly. "You're a natural at this, sweetie."

The Proto-Evil Queen had managed to dress in an elaborate wedding gown and apply a great deal of makeup without uncovering her mirror. She was just that cool.

As she wasn't evil yet, her mother had to do the barging in that day. "Hey sweetie." She uncovered the mirror. "Nice mirror, but it'd look better with a creepy talking face inside it." She tossed the cover aside. "By the way, on my way up here, I noticed that your subjects weren't groveling in fear. But don't worry, I fixed that for you." As they stood in front of the looking glass, she admired her daughter's reflection proudly. "Just look at you. You're going to be an awesome queen. You've definitely got the eye makeup for it. Just remember, the key to a high approval rating is to raise taxes to an all-time high, create an elite paramilitary organization to terrorize the population, and assassinate anyone they like better than you."

Regina gave her mother a sideways glance. "Mom, I'm glad we had this talk. I was worried that killing you would be a challenge, but now that I know how stupid you can be, I don't feel quite so nervous." She lunged at her mother, but was held in check by, you know, that whole "magic" thing.

As she stood there, frozen, Cora was positively gushing with delight. "My little girl's first murder attempt! Aw, this is the proudest day of my life. Hey Henry!" she hollered down to her husband, "bring the camera, quick!"

Rumplestiltskin appeared in the mirror. "No one dumps Rumplestiltskin and lives, baby! NO ONE!"

"Huh?" Cora turned around to investigate, and while she was distracted Regina managed to Force-push her through the glass, which shattered into a million pieces.

Regina surveyed the mess around her. "Daddy?" she yelled.

"Yes, pumpkin?"

"Mom won't be needing that camera after all, she's decided to go on vacation for the next few decades."

"Without us? Without packing? Without using the door?"

"It was a spur of the moment thing!"

David and Ruby zoomed down the road, placing themselves between the suicidal mob and the town line. "Stop fleeing my incompetent rule!" the prince commanded.
"Get out of the way, David!" Archie yelled. "Pinocchio's gone, so it's not like I have a reason to exist anymore!"

"Screw it, we can just walk around him! He's only blocking the road, not the whole border!" Granny observed.

David raised his sword heroically. "Comfort mode!" The crowd was temporarily dazzled by the Charming Family Charm, giving him an opening to make a grand speech. "Come on, you guys think you've got problems? I have to live with the shame of being David Nolan! If I can come to terms with that, surely there's hope for anyone!" A grudging murmur of assent rippled through the crowd. "Good, now that that's settled, let's get back to work and quit feeling sorry for ourselves, just because our town was destroyed by a rampaging monster and there are two evil sorcerers running wild in the streets. I know I really came off like a jerk today, carelessly leaving you guys to be roasted alive by my archenemy, but cut me some slack. It's my first day. I'm sure I'll be my awesome self again in a few days."

The crowd stood down. "That was pretty good, considering you haven't had a chance to hire a speechwriter yet," Archie admitted, eyes filled with grudging respect.

---

Regina was on her horse, attempting to run away for the umpteenth time, when Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Leaving, are we?" He sulked. "Bah, is that all you women know how to do?"

Regina handed him the spellbook. "Take this and go away. I don't want it anymore."

"Then why did you bring it with you?"

Regina faltered. "Okay, maybe I do want it, but I don't want to turn into a gibbering loon."

Rumplestiltskin clapped his hands, his face a mask of glee. "But being a gibbering loon is fun! You can terrorize people into doing whatever you want, things like war and murder become entertaining instead of depressing, and best of all, you get tons of action from lovestruck fans who think they can change you!"

"Really?" Regina looked interested. "And I won't turn out like Mom?"

"Not unless you persist with this weird determination to love and admire her despite all the sick things she's done to you."

"Hm. Tempting."

---

David barged into Regina's house for the second time that day, because something subtle like a break-in just wasn't his style. "I want to see my grandson!" he demanded, waving a sword in her face.

"I'm not even going to bother wasting magic on you." She pulled out a gun. "I don't mean to tell you how to do your job, but you should really consider joining the twenty-first century."

David dropped his blade sheepishly. "I'll take that under advisement."

She put away her gun. "It's cool, I'm going to let you off with a warning today. Henry!"

Henry came down the stairs, a ribbon tied around his middle. "I assume you guys are going to try
and settle this custody battle with an old-fashioned game of tug-o-war now?" He held out his arms limply. "Fine, just be careful with my spine. I'm still delicate from my near-death experience yesterday."

"No, no," said Regina. "I'm throwing in the towel. You're going home with David." She glanced over at David. "Just try not to leave him in the care of anymore angry mobs, okay?"

"Really? Why?" Henry wanted to know.

"Well, I realize that our relationship is turning into a carbon copy of my relationship with my own mother, and I really don't want you to end up killing me." She patted him on the back. "You're a smart kid. You could totally do it if you wanted to."

"Thanks for finally noticing."

"No problem. Anyway, I've been thinking a lot today about the dark side of magic, and I've decided I want to redeem myself, before I end up with teeth like Rumplestiltskin's." She sent him up to his room. "Now go get your stuff. You've been living on your own for two days with a stupid book as your only form of luggage, and it's not giving me a lot of confidence in your ability to keep it together without me."

As Emma's father, David was naturally skeptical about this and everything else. "If you really want to redeem yourself, you can start by answering some questions, and doing it without sarcasm for once in your life."

Regina looked uneasy. "Well, I honestly don't know if I'm capable of such a feat, but I'll try my best."

"Did your Smoke Monster really destroy our entire land?"

"No, I just said that to impress you," she admitted.

On Main Street, all the businesses had reopened, except for the insurance company, which Ruby had bankrupted. The Six Dwarves, formerly the Seven Dwarves, formerly the Eight Dwarves, were marching off to the mines in a desperate attempt to refill their rapidly depleting ranks.

A very amnesiac Sneezy was understandably disturbed to see the six nutcases who had shown an unhealthy interest in him marching toward him with axes. "Whatever you're doing has to be illegal!"

Leroy just clapped him on the shoulder. "Yeah, I guess the United Mine Workers of America would be pretty angry if they knew we were doing this without paying dues, but what they don't know won't hurt them. We're on a mission, here. I know everyone says there's no magic in this land, but they're just not looking hard enough! There's bound to be some fairy dust deposits somewhere in the tiny patch of Earth this town encompasses, and we're going to find them for you, bro!"

At the only diner in town, Marco was enjoying a coffee and trying to avoid objects made of wood, which made him cry. David and Henry walked in, and the latter tapped him on the shoulder. "Hey Marco," Henry whispered into the old man's ear. "I know where your son is."

"What?!" Marco jumped out of his seat. "Then why didn't you say something earlier?! I've been running around like a maniac all day!"

"Sorry, I just naturally assumed you'd figure it out for yourself. I mean, the guy is the exact same age
as your son and has been making a concentrated effort to bond with you ever since he came to town."

"Oh, August." Marco frowned. "Are you sure? He has brown hair and blue eyes, and Pinocchio had red hair and brown eyes."

"Have I ever been wrong?"

Marco couldn't argue with that, so he ran upstairs to August's room. But alas, all he found of his long-lost son was a hideous hat and a splinter-riddled mattress. "Damn kid," he grumbled. "I knew I should have whittled a girl instead."

Meanwhile, Gold was standing at the town line in the forest, staring woefully at a world now closed to him. "I never thought I'd say these words, but I didn't plan for this."

Back at the diner, Henry and David were pigging out on their third round of Zoloft cupcakes. "The Enchanted Forest still exists, Henry!"

"And Emma and Mary Margaret are still alive," said Henry confidently.

"And we're going to get them back!"

"And I'm going to get straight A's this quarter, even though I never go to class and probably never will!"

"And we're going to win the lottery this week! And every week after that!" David giggled around a mouthful of frosting. "Man, Snow was right, these things really pack a wallop."

Back in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Mary Margaret and Emma were being dragged behind Mulan's horses as punishment for existing. "What is this place?" Mary Margaret asked.

"A benighted hellhole, but we're working on that," Mulan replied, leading them to Ye Olde Refugee Camp.

Mary Margaret suddenly decided it would be a good idea to kick one of her captors, since they seemed like such reasonable and forgiving people. "Eminem SMASH!" she roared, nailing Aurora in the ribcage.

Emma's face shone with pride. "That's my mother," she informed the onlookers smugly.

"Emma, run!" Mary Margaret cried, making a break for it.

Mulan was unimpressed. "You really think you can out-fight me? I destroyed an entire army with nothing but a rope, a lizard, and a stick of dynamite!" She reached out and knocked Mary Margaret unconscious without even bothering to look up from the crossword puzzle she was working on. "Amateurs."

Emma ran to Mary Margaret's side. "Mary Marg-, uh, Mom—uh, Sno-, uh whoever the hell you are, wake up! You can't die now! You were just starting to get cool again!"

"Take them both to the pit," Mulan instructed her troops coldly.

"You're in a really bad mood, whoever you are," Emma observed. "What's up with that? Did you
just lose your boyfriend or something?"

"NONE OF YOUR DAMN BUSINESS!" Mulan thundered, picking her up by her belt and throwing into the hole.

In the darkness, Emma tried desperately to awaken her mother. "Come on, don't do this! The Disney Corporation would be furious if you died! Think of the children!"

"Do you need help?" said a voice in the darkness.

"No, I actually enjoy crouching in the darkness of a third-world dungeon while my mother lies dying on the floor. It's a hobby of mine," Emma sneered.

"Ooh, you're a feisty one. I can work with that."

"Who are you supposed to be? Are you my attorney? Because if you are, I want to inform you that I was not read my Miranda rights, and I think we should move for a mistrial."

"No, I'm a friend." Cora stepped out of the shadows. "My name is Trouble. Bwa hah hah!"
Lady of the Lake

Little Red Riding Hood raced through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia at approximately Mach II. "It's good to be leggy!" she crowed.

She made her way to Snow White and Prince Charming's portable clubhouse, which was decorated with a large sign reading "No Parents Allowed." Inside, Snow and Charming were talking strategy with their trusty Cartoon All-Stars. "Okay," the quasi-prince began, "I've never been to military school or actually seen an army before today, but I believe in the power of positive thinking." He joined hands with his advisors. "Now repeat after me: we are going to win this thing. We deserve to win this thing. The negative forces of the cosmos have no power over us."

"Actually, I'm afraid they do!" Red interrupted. "Just a heads-up, guys—King George and his cronies are hurtling towards us as we speak, and worst of all, they have woodcutters with them!" She collapsed in abject despair. "It's all over now! We don't have a prayer!"

Charming folded his arms haughtily. "Red, I have bested a dragon, an evil witch, and an obscene dragon-evil witch mash-up. Do you really think I'm going to run and hide from an elderly bald guy who wears a dress?"

"No, not him! He's got himself a new hitman! A dude called the Leviathan."

"The Leviathan?" Snow's face screwed up. "I don't get it, is he really fat or something?"

"No! It's supposed to be intimidating!" Red was getting ticked.

"Fine, fine, I'm quivering with fear," Snow said dutifully.

"I'm not," Charming denied stubbornly. Then an arrow slammed into the table in front of him, and he gave in. "All right, I'll quiver, I'll quiver!" he cried.

They ran from the clubhouse and found themselves face-to-face with the evil army du jour. "We should split up and divide them," Snow suggested.

"So we can fight the troops with superior numbers and equipment all alone?" Prince Charming raised his eyebrows. "What good will that do?"

"I don't know, but at least it'll make for some interesting stories," Snow pointed out.

"True," he conceded.

The villains were tapping their feet impatiently. "Can we attack yet?"

"Just give us one more minute, okay?" Charming requested politely. "Now, Snow, you must go on without me. You'll be safer that way. I know King George has a history of attempting to hurt me vicariously through you, but hopefully he won't be stupid enough to try it again." He kissed her goodbye. "Meet me at the cabin you've never visited and lack a map to."

Snow White gasped. "The cabin? Will She be there?"

Charming nodded. "I think it's time you met Her."

"Agreed," said Snow, "but before I go, can you tell me Her name so I don't have to keep referring to Her using capitalized pronouns?"
"I'm sorry, but that information has been classified for years now."

"Like mother, like son." Snow tousled her fiancé's hair affectionately.

"Aw, to hell with manners, this is taking forever!" a masked knight on horseback griped, charging the happy couple.

"Run, Snow! Save yourself!" Charming cried.

"Okay." Snow bolted without hesitation. Her man took off in the other direction, trying not to be disappointed. However, as karma would have it, the knight ran after her, not Charming, braining her with a baseball bat. "Home run!" he gloated.

"Where's a knight in shining armor when you need on?" Snow slurred grumpily.

"I'm right here," said the knight with a little wriggle of his fingers.

"It was just an expression," the princess snapped. "Why are you hiding behind that mask? Are you some kind of coward?"

"No, just trying to avoid blows to the face," he replied conversationally, nodding at the goose egg on her forehead. "A brand of cowardice you might want to consider adopting if you intend on getting out of this mess alive."

Her face reddened. "Stuff it, Leviathan!"

"Leviathan? That's what they're calling me? How dare they? They know I'm sensitive about my weight!" He removed the mask, revealing a cute, miffed guy. "Call me Lancelot, or I'll sue you for defamation."

"Sir Lancelot? Of the Round Table?"

"Not anymore, thanks to that skank Guinevere." Lancelot's eyes darkened. "Illicit relationships with married people never end well. Remember that."

Snow shook her head violently. "Sorry, I didn't quite hear that. My ears are still ringing from that beating you just laid on me."

"Eh, never mind. It wasn't important."

Down in an unusually well-lit prison pit, Cora was examining an unconscious Mary Margaret. "In my professional opinion, she'll be fine as long as she doesn't piss me off."

"Cool. So what is this place?" Emma asked.

"A dank, dirty hole in the ground. You hadn't noticed?"

"Well, they can't keep us in here!" the savior proclaimed stubbornly. "I've read Henry's book, and I know that Stealthy will be coming to the rescue at any minute!"

"Stealthy's dead, dear."

"We're doomed!" Emma wailed, collapsing in abject despair.

"I know how you feel," said Cora soothingly. "These jerks say I'm a danger to society, just because I
created a rampaging megalomaniac who almost destroyed the world."

"You're Regina's mother?" Emma instinctively went for her chainsaw, but found it had been confiscated. "Aw, nuts!"

"Oh don't be afraid," Cora reassured her. "The apple fell very far from the tree." She surreptitiously tossed an apple across the room to keep it from being a complete lie.

Mary Margaret came to, and in a panic, threw herself between Emma and Cora. "Get away from her, Grandma! Unlike some people in this family, I don't want my daughter to die horribly!"

"Relax, Snow," the elder evil queen replied serenely. "All that stuff Regina said about me was a lie, and that grave she showed you was probably just full of crash-test dummies."

Mary Margaret recoiled. "Stop smiling at me! Word on the street is, every time you smile, somewhere a puppy drops dead!"

"Mary Margaret, let's hear her out," Emma interjected.

"Why should I do that?"

"Because this cell is only like six square feet, and short of sewing our ears shut, there's no way to avoid hearing if she wants to talk," Emma pointed out. "Besides, maybe she'll help us get back to Henry instead of brutally murdering us."

"Why are you so anxious to get back to Henry?" Cora pulled out a shiv. "You got something going on with my husband, tramp?!

"No, adulterous affairs are my mother's department. I was talking about my and Regina's son."

Cora relaxed, putting the knife away. "You and my daughter have a kid? Huh, I didn't know she swung that way." She held out her hand. "Well, welcome to the family, Emma. I'll try not to slaughter you like I did with Regina's last crush, but no promises."

Mary Margaret covered Emma's mouth before she could deny it. "Stop giving our family secrets to the supervillain!" she screamed. "She's Cora, so she will find out eventually, but you could at least make her work for it a little!"

"You're overreacting," Emma scoffed. "After all, she specifically said she'd try not to slaughter me."

"Stop trusting the supervillain!"

Cora just laughed. "Ah, like mother, like daughter."

"So," said Henry, cheerfully strolling down the street with his latest pet adult, "what's on the agenda for Operation Scorpion?"

"What's Operation Scorpion?" David asked.

Henry shrugged. "That's for you to figure out. I just supply the cool names."

David pulled him to a stop in front of a woefully non-magic school bus. "Henry, I know this is unorthodox, but I'm making you go to school."

Henry gaped at him in uncomprehending horror. "This...this has never happened to me before."
Then horror gave way to confusion. "How am I supposed to learn anything, anyway? My teacher's
trapped in another dimension, in case you've forgotten. Which reminds me, you really should start
working on getting her back, before she and Emma start bonding without you."

"I know," David replied, "but Jefferson's turned out to be a total dead end. Who'd have thought
someone so cool could be so useless?"

Henry raised a hand timidly. "And you don't want the help of the boy genius who's solved every
problem you've had to date because…?"

"Because this is going to require magic, of the kind that saved your mother's life, reunited me with
my True Love on multiple occasions, and just released thousands of innocent people from a terrible
curse. And what kind of guardian would I be if I subjected you to such horrors?"

Henry sighed in mock defeat. "Okay, you win. I guess I'll just run along to the video arcade and get
in a round of Whack-A-Mole before class."

"Brushing up on your beast-smashing skills? That's my boy!" David gave him a handful of change
and went on his way.

Henry snickered, pulling some sleeper darts and a set of high-end lock-picking gear from his
backpack. "Amateur."

Emma and Mary Margaret, having discovered they were related, were now obligated to fight over
every petty thing that happened to them. "For the last time, stop hanging around with murderous
witches, or I'm taking away your Xbox!" Mary Margaret threatened as they were led through Ye
Olde Refugee Camp."

Emma steadfastly ignored her. "I'm not about to take adventuring advice from a woman who spends
her days making birdhouses out of Popsicle sticks."

"It was egg cartons!"

"Did you come through that portal just to nag me?"

"Partly, yes, but also partly because I love you and partly because I'm trying to avoid Whale right
now."

Lancelot emerged from one of the straw shacks that were just waiting for a big bad wolf to come and
blow them down. "Snow, is that you?" His eyes drifted to Emma. "Or is that you? I can't quite tell."

Mary Margaret raised her hand. "Over here."

"Snow! It's great to see you again!" He scooped her into his arms. "Well, naturally, since you're a
friend of mine, whatever you did to get yourself arrested no longer matters." He beamed. "Ain't
anarchy great?"

Emma looked on quizzically. "Sir Lancelot of the Round Table? You're fictional?"

Meanwhile, Mulan and Aurora were watching the reunion, wearing glares that would have made
Regina herself jealous. "Why is he embracing them?" Aurora demanded. "They were accidentally in
the general vicinity of Philip after he was already dead. They deserve to fry!"

"Aurora, get a grip. As long as you're not a man in a committed relationship, you have nothing to
fear from Lancelot."

"But I want revenge!"

"You should really rethink that position. Revenge has an unusually high rate of complications around here."

"Fine. No revenge." Aurora pouted, drawing a long dagger. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go dice some really big potatoes."

Lancelot invited his guests to a long, wooden table and sat a platter of freaky meat in front of them. "Cool, just like Medieval Times," Emma observed, filling her plate. "Say, what is this stuff, anyway? One of the radioactive mutants the queen warned us about?"

"No, it's chimera. A hideous, fire-breathing monster that's incredibly dangerous to hunt and not very fun to eat, either, but vegetarianism is for sissies, so we're stuck."

Mary Margaret looked confused. "I don't get it, Lance. Regina told us that this land had been completely destroyed, and I simply can't imagine her telling a lie, especially to me!"

Lancelot chuckled. "That's my baby girl."

"What?"

"Never you mind. We're all completely safe here, unlike the late Prince Philip."

Mary Margaret raised her eyebrows. "Even if I bought that, which I don't, I couldn't stay. The male half of our family is home alone, and I don't even want to think about the mess they're probably making of my bathroom. Can you help us find a portal home?"

Lancelot blinked. "Er, no. You seem a little confused. I'm Lancelot, the tortured, sexy guy who stabs stuff, not Jefferson, the tortured, sexy guy who navigates portals. Besides, it's really not safe to leave this place right now. Those pesky glow-in-the-dark ogres have invaded yet again."

The young monarch groaned. "What is that, like the fourth time now? I know this isn't politically-correct, but can't someone just pull a genocide on them, already?"

"Ogres?" Emma repeated incredulously. "As in, 'onions have layers'?"

"Kind of, but a little more deadly and a lot less entertaining," Lancelot explained. "That's why we live here on this island, where it's safe, except for the wraiths, and the chimeras—"

"And Cora," Mary Margaret added.

"I was getting to her," the knight snapped. "You don't need to be concerned. The curse stripped her of her powers, but since she's retained her sparkling personality and killer good looks, I've had to keep her locked up as a precaution."

She eyed her old friend nervously. "Uh, Lance? Have you suffered a head injury recently?"

Lancelot glared daggers at her. "I've decided to grant your request to leave. Because I'm your friend and I believe in you, of course, and not because you irritate the crap out of me. I just have one condition." He waved Mulan over. "Take my best warrior Mulan with you."

Emma stared at the foreign heroine. "Mulan? You're fictional, too?"
Sir Lancelot, his shining armor now riddled with teeth marks, dragged a kicking, screaming Snow before her phony father-in-law. "I'm not going to tell you where Charming is! If none of your cronies were smart enough to listen while he was shouting his destination at me last night, they don't deserve victory!"

King George yawned. "Relax, honey, I didn't bring you here to snitch, although I don't blame you for thinking so, since you're such an expert in the field. No, I'm here to take advantage of your other area of expertise: foolishly ingesting gifts from your archenemies." The king snapped his fingers, and Lancelot produced a cup. "If it tastes poisoned, it's probably just because you expect it to."

Snow took a swig. "I hope whatever you've spiked this with will at least get me high, because I'm having the day from hell."

"Boo hoo," the king sneered. "You think you've got it bad? I'm such a lonely old bastard I had to resort to buying a guy to keep me company. And even he deserted me in the end!" The old man burst into tears. "I wasn't always like this, you know. I was in love, damn it!"

Snow looked disturbed. "With what?"

George glared. "Hey, if a demented reptile like Rumplestiltskin can find love, surely no one is past hope, right?"

Snow couldn't argue with that. "Sorry. So what happened?"

"Somebody put a curse on her so she couldn't have children."

"Really?" The princess was intrigued. "Why?"

"Don't ask me that."

"Okay, who?"

"Don't ask me that, either."

"Okay then. How?"

He threw his scepter at her. "Knock it off! Do I go around prying into your personal life?"

"Constantly. And something tells me you just did it again." She nodded to the cup.

"Correct." The king smirked. "Consider yourself sterile, punk!"

Snow frowned for a moment, then shrugged. "Eh, no biggie. We can always adopt."

"No you can't!" George gloated. "I've already been down that road, and discovered that orphans and foundlings no longer exist in our dimension! If you want to adopt a child, you'll have to either sell your soul to Rumplestiltskin, or swipe some kids from a woodcutter."

"NOOOOOOO!!" Snow wailed.

"Now that's the reaction I was looking for."

Mulan presented Emma and Mary Margaret with an array of weapons. "I wasn't sure about your character classes and proficiencies, so I brought you a little of everything."
Emma rifled around, looking for her chainsaw. "Hey, where's my chainsaw? I need it for smashing stuff."

"Sorry, but Paul Bunyan took one look at it and fell madly in love," Mulan apologized, handing over her pistol. "Here, you can have this back as a consolation prize."

Emma strapped it on with a sigh of resignation. "Better than nothing, I guess."

The warrior examined the weapon curiously. "What is that thing, anyway?"

Emma gave her a double-take. "You don't know? Didn't your nation invent gunpowder?"

She shrugged. "Beats me. So anyway, is that thing magic?"

The savior grinned evilly. "Why yes, it is. Make a wish, put this barrel in your mouth, pull this trigger, and I guarantee you, your days of wishing for stuff will be over for good."

In the meantime, Mary Margaret had chosen her weapon. "Ah, a bow and arrows. Score! I'm great with these things, as long as they're enchanted to never miss their target."

"Enough dilly-dallying!" Mulan barked. "Time is racing t'ward us, till the ogres arrive, so heed my every order and you might survive."

"Don't you mean, 'please heed my every order, Your Royal Majesties?" Mary Margaret corrected gently.

Mulan rolled her eyes. "More deposed royals? Jeez, how many of you are there around here?" She looked Emma over uneasily. "Have you ever even seen an ogre?"

The savior looked unworried. "No, but I'd never seen a dragon before yesterday, and it didn't keep me from pwning her."

The warrior smacked her upside the head with the flat of her katana. "Stop being so courageous, damn you! Steadfast feminine bravery is my schtick!" She stormed off, about ready to make a wish on Emma's gun. And yes, she knew what that really meant.

Mary Margaret patted her daughter on the back. "There there, dear, don't let her rattle you. We have ogres, wraiths, chimeras, and Cora for that."

"True." Emma relaxed. "So, where exactly are you taking me? A hat store?"

"No, that would be far too simple. You know how I had you stuffed into that magic closet and it scarred you for life and made you hate me?"

"Yeah."

"I'm doing it again. Last time, I promise." She gave her daughter a Boy Scout salute.

Emma frowned. "But Henry said the Blue Fairy said that it only had enough energy in it for me and August?"

"Oh please!" her mother scoffed. "Whose magical knowledge are you going to trust? The ancient fairy queen of the night, or a woman too stupid to tell the difference between water and the world's most powerful healing potion?"

Emma just looked tired. "Fine, whatever, so where is this wooden longshot of yours located?"
Mary Margaret shrugged. "Last time I saw it, it was in Geppetto's workshop, but for the sake of irony, the Evil Queen probably moved it into your nursery before she left. Say what you will about Regina, she has a keen sense of the dramatic."

Jefferson sat on a bench at the docks, staring woefully at a missing poster bearing a hand-drawn likeness of either him or an anthropomorphic woodchuck. "I wonder if I could anonymously advise Grace not to pursue a career in the arts?" he mused.

Henry, wearing heavy camouflage and a parachute, suddenly dropped into his lap. "Teehee! You'll never get away from Henry! NEVER!"

"Henry?" He groaned. "I might have known you'd show up sooner or later. Sorry about kidnapping and beating up your mother."

"Eh, don't beat yourself up. Her dogged determination not to notice stuff sometimes makes me wish I could lay the smackdown on her myself." He surreptitiously activated the spy camera and recording device taped to his chest. "So, my sources tell me you're cool, but useless. Is that assessment accurate?"

"Fraid so, kid," Jefferson apologized. "But maybe you could give your mom's vault a try. There was nothing in there that could facilitate interdimensional travel when I checked two days ago, but maybe you'll get lucky. You always seem to."

"Mom's vault? It's here in Storybrooke?"

"Um, yes? You knew that. You told Graham about it mere weeks ago, remember?"

The boy frowned. "How did you know about that?"

Jefferson grinned and held up a spyglass. "You think you're the only guy in town who knows how to snoop?"

Henry threw himself into the hatter's arms. "Will you be my new daddy?"

"Sorry, but I already have a kid."

"Speaking of which, when are you going to get around to reuniting with her, ya lousy deadbeat?"

Jefferson hefted the boy off his lap. "Go away."

Henry chuckled. "Better men than you have tried to make me go away. Now get over yourself, already! Grace probably wants to see you and the family that's been raising her probably wants to see some child support."

Jefferson regarded the child coldly. "Do you always go around making people confront their inner demons and reevaluate their personal priorities like this?"

"Constantly," Henry chirped. "So are you gonna go get your daughter now?"

"No." The hatter got up and walked away.

Henry scampered after him. "How about now?"

"No."
"How about now?"

"No!"

"How about now?"

"NO!"

"How about now?"

By this point, Jefferson was red in the face and clutching large handfuls of his own hair. "ALL RIGHT! I'll do anything you want, just shut up!"

The boy tossed his hair smugly. "Still got it."

Regina, who was disassembling her Mayoral Lair in light of the death of democracy, glanced down at her cellphone. "Henry! Aren't you supposed to be in school right now, honey? What do you mean, 'none of your business'? I'm your mo—huh? How am I? Well, I've been impeached on account of the whole Cursegate scandal, but I'm taking it in stride." A beat. "You say you want me to meet you for lunch, and there's no need to bring my skeleton keys?" She withdrew them from her pocket and tossed them carelessly in an unlocked drawer. "You know best, I guess."

Meanwhile, the newly-formed Girl Power Squad had found a clearing in the woods. "We can camp here tonight," Mulan decided, "as soon as we forage for some marshmallows, hot dogs, and pointy sticks."

"We're going to build a campfire?" Emma was skeptical, as usual. "What if the ogres see us?"

"Don't worry," said Mary Margaret. "Ogres are blind."

Emma blinked. "Seriously, blind? We've been living in fear of a creature with no eyesight and the IQ of a potato? Dude, I KILLED A FRIGGIN' DRAGON!"

"Hey, you think you're the only one around here who knows how to fight?" Mary Margaret challenged. "I'll have you know I once smacked my husband in the mouth with a rock," she bragged.

"And I once watched from afar while my incompetent friend did battle with a yaoguai," Mulan added. "You'd best leave this to the real heroines, Emma."

Mary Margaret mussed her daughter's hair condescendingly. "Yeah, don't be scared, pumpkin. Mommy will take care of you."

King George's men drove Snow White out into the woods. "So, what are our orders? Does His Majesty want us to turn her in to Queen Regina for the reward money? You know, what with the kingdom being destitute and all."

"No, knowing the Evil Queen, it's probably counterfeit. Just dump her in the woods."

They kicked her out of the paddy wagon and drove on.

She staggered to her feet and dusted herself off. "Well, I'm lost, alone, sterile, and wearing really impractical hiking attire. Ah, if only I had something to smash, maybe that would lift my spirits."

Lancelot conveniently rode by. "Yo."
Snow White smiled and picked up a big stick. "Things are looking up. HIIIII-YA!"

The disgraced knight went flying off his horse. "I knew I shouldn't have removed that masked helmet," he muttered, holding his concussed head.

"Eat elm, you dirty literary representation of the dark side of courtly chivalry!" she screamed, bludgeoning him ferociously.

"Ow! Ow! OW! Stop it, I've come to help you!"

"You think I'm dumb enough to blindly place my trust in a third villain?" She whacked him one last time.

"Ow! I'm not a villain, I'm an anti-hero, so lay off! I came to warn you. King George knows where Charming's mom is, and he wants to have her killed."

"Why?"

The knight shrugged. "Same reason he wants to have Charming killed. Because he can."

At a cozy little cabin in the woods, Charming's elderly mother was performing yard work while her strong and able son lounged under a tanning mirror nearby. "Mom, knock that off, you're making me look bad."

"You could help me, you know," she panted, shouldering a leaf-blower.

"Eh, my rep doesn't mean that much to me." The prince's ears perked up. "Do you hear that? It sounds like there's a horse in our general vicinity. That can mean only one thing. The Legions of Evil are coming to destroy us!" He drew his sword.

"Or, it could just be some kid looking to trade his faithful draft animal for some magic beans."

"With my luck? Not likely," Charming snorted. Immediately thereafter, an arrow slammed into the wall behind him. "See?" He shepherded her to the front door. "I'll handle this. You go on home and be heartwarming. It's what you're good at."

He faced the mounted knights surrounding him, raised his blade, and flashed a gorgeous white smile. "You found me. I never doubted you would."

The Charming-Family-Charmed knights lowered their weapons, utterly dumbstruck. Once that was done, it was a simple matter for Charming to walk over and behead them one by one. "Easy as pie."

His mom tapped him meekly on the shoulder, an arrow protruding from her chest. "Son, I didn't take your advice and now it looks like I'm going to pay a terrible price."

Charming grimly cradled her bleeding body in his arms. "Something tells me this is going to be an ongoing problem in our little clan."

Snow White and Lancelot finally arrived on the scene, the latter dizzily clutching an icepack to his battered head. "Oh no!" Snow cried in horror. "Your mom is going the way of every other mom in our universe!"

"Never you mind, dear," the dying woman slurred cheerfully. "I can die happy now that I've met you. I ship Snowing so hard!" With her last ounce of strength, she held up a "Team Snowing" pennant.
Mary Margaret was on her way back to the campsite, a sack of chimera-based hot dogs slung over her shoulder, when Aurora pounced on her. "Freeze dirtbag!" she hissed, pressing a knife to the other woman's throat. "There's only room in this town for one deposed princess cursed with narcolepsy by an evil sorceress! Plus, you killed my man!"

Yawning widely, Mary Margaret held the girl at arm's length while she punched and flailed in vain. "Stop attacking me, or at least do a better job of it. We had nothing to do with Philip's death. It was the fault of a dude named Gold, just like everything else that's ever gone wrong in this world."

Mulan appeared and pried them apart. "Don't talk to Aurora like that!"

Aurora blinked. "What, we're friends now? When did that happen?"

"Shut up!" yelled Mulan and Mary Margaret in unison.

A gunshot suddenly rang out behind them, meaning that either the Renaissance had finally come to the Enchanted Forest, or Emma had just done something incredibly stupid. One guess which one it was. "Get your katana away from my mother, Mulan, and go stand next to Sleeping Beauty with your hands up." She pulled a face. "Dude, that's definitely on the list of things I never thought I'd say."

"Emma," Mary Margaret interrupted. "As your mom, I feel obligated to remind you of the potential consequences of random gunfire, such as fines, jail time, and getting eaten alive by ogres!"

"Oh, right. Them. My bad."

Right on cue, a marauding monster crashed through the trees and roared in Emma's face. "GET OUT OF MY SWAMP!"

The savior was confused. "This isn't a swamp."

"Well how am I supposed to know that? I'm friggin' blind," the creature snapped, swooping in for the kill.

Emma readied her gun. "Well, this may not have worked the last time I did battle with a fairytale creature, but I choose not to notice that." She blasted the ogre with round after round.

The ogre deflected the projectiles with a mithril fly swatter. "Stop this. You're embarrassing yourself."

Mary Margaret tapped the creature on the back. "Excuse me, my name is Princess Fiona, and I was wondering if you were available for dinner tonight?"

"Am I?!!" The ogre tossed his club aside and started groping around in the grass for some flowers to present her with.

"Sucker!" She fired an arrow into the eyes he couldn't see out of and according to all laws of evolution, shouldn't have even had, which somehow harmed him.

"Ah! I'm blinder!" he screamed, falling over dead.

Mary Margaret glanced over at her daughter. "You know, I'm starting to see your point about no eyes plus tiny brain equaling instant victory."

Emma was staring in shock at her armed, bloodstained, adrenaline-crazed mother. "Hey Eminem?"
"Yeah?"

"Remind me to quit sassing you." She glanced around the clearing. "Hey, where are Mulan and Aurora? Are they alive or what?"

"Eh, like it affects us."

Lancelot, who had spent some time posing as a doctor in order to impress chicks, examined Charming's mom carefully. "She's been poisoned."

Charming sighed. "And again, something tells me this is going to be an ongoing problem in our little clan."

"We could go to the Blue Fairy for help," Snow suggested.

Lancelot rolled his eyes. "Come on, guys. Can you remember her ever successfully helping anyone?"

"Well…"

"Um…"

"There was my mo…" Snow began. "No, wait, that failed miserably and scarred me for life."

Charming snapped his fingers. "I've got it! We can go to Lake Plotspeed! Its healing waters will restore Mom and get rid of this pesky nail fungus I've been battling in one fell swoop."

"Did someone say 'lake'?!" Lancelot perked right up. "Count me in!"

The two noble warriors walked along beside a wagon they'd nobly swiped from some old lady. "So Lance," said Prince Charming conversationally, "how and why did you end up ruining your life?"

"Er, do I know you?"

"No, but you've got to tell someone, so why not me?"

"Good point," the knight conceded. "Well, I was having a fling with my liege's wife, and we were totally getting away with it, until those little brats Mordred and Agravain ratted us out."

"He scowled into the distance. "There's nothing lower than a snitch!"

Snow White nervously sank lower into the wagon bed. "Uh, Mom, how do you feel about snitches?"

"I love them!" the old woman gushed, patting her cheek. "Especially ones who give me grandkids. Hint hint." She elbowed the girl pointedly. "And don't worry, it doesn't matter whether it's a boy or a girl. All that matters is that you don't hock it to an evil sorcerer."

"She pulled a pendant from around her neck. "Check this out. This was enchanted by a gypsy—"

"A Gypsy? You mean one of the Romani people originating from the region of South Asia? They're fictional? And magical?"

"That is correct. Anyway, this necklace can predict the sex of your firstborn child, swinging north to south if it's a boy and east to west if it's a girl." She held the pendant over Snow's hand. "Huh. I guess your baby's going to be gender-confused."
Snow burst into tears.

"There there, dear. I'm sure my son will love the kid no matter wh...wait. Something's wrong, isn't it?" She squeezed her prospective daughter-in-law's hand. "Snow, I know you've had issues with mothers-by-marriage in the past, but I promise, I'm different." She took cookies, warm milk, and a box of Kleenex from the Comfort Mode Kit she always kept on hand. "Come on, tell mumsy what's eating you."

"Well," said Snow, blowing her nose and munching a gingersnap, "the thing is, I've been cursed by yet another evil monarch, and now I can't have kids."

"Drag. Well, you can still adopt, right?"

"No we can't. Nobody can."

"Damn, that's rough. No matter, though. The waters of Lake Plotspeed should be able to fix you up if all else fails."

Snow brightened. "You really think so?"

The old woman smiled. "Of course. Or you could just kiss my son again. It seemed to work fine the last couple of times you got cursed."

Mary Margaret and Emma were once again traveling with Mulan and Aurora, having graciously forgiven the pair for cravenly leaving them to die. "We're almost there. Almost there. People 'round here think I'm crazy, but I don't care."

Emma shook her gently. "Eminem, you're rhyming again."

"Sorry. That happens around here."

Meanwhile, the other half of their party was having problems as well. "Aurora, you've got to keep up!" Mulan commanded. "You're never going to attract a new knight in shining armor if you don't get in shape."

"Cut me some slack," Aurora griped. "I'm cold, poorly-dressed, and extremely groggy."

"You're not very awesome, Aurora," Emma observed. She shrugged off her cool leather jacket and handed it to the girl. "Here, this will fix that."

Aurora was touched. "You're helping me, after I tried to kill your mom?"

"I help a lot of people who have tried to kill my mom. I'm not sure whether that's because I'm incredibly noble and forgiving, or just because I'm not that fond of her at the moment, but when I figure it out, I'll let you know." She returned to her mother's side. "Are we there yet?" she whined.

"All in good time." Mary Margaret led her to the edge of the cliff, which overlooked Neuschwanstein Castle in all its glory. "See that magnificent castle? It's been our home ever since that proud day your daddy and I threw out King George and claimed squatters' rights."

Henry knocked timidly on the door of the Mills family crypt. "Anyone home? Actually, I'd rather you didn't answer that." He took a deep breath and let himself in. "Easy, Henry. Mom's not here, and even if she were, she'd never kill y—AH! She's built me a coffin!" Then he took a second look at the
casket with his name on it. "No, wait, it's just one of my many grandpas. That's slightly less disturbing."

He pushed the coffin aside and descended into the vault, where he could hear the hearts of various tortured souls beating away in their drawers. "Here, here! It is the beating of his hideous heart!" he screamed, then glanced over his shoulder, blushing. "I mean, uh, what a cheesy sound effect."

Moving farther into the chamber, he came upon a pile of locked chests and jars. "The secret stash of a criminally-insane sorceress? Hm, maybe I should wait and unlock these under adult supervision?" The pesky flicker of responsibility died almost as suddenly as it had been born, and he shuddered. "Whoa, that was weird. Back to business." He reached for a little box labeled 'Property of Pandora', rattling it curiously. "Is this thing hissing? Eh, it's probably just my imagination."

He opened it up and found himself face to face to face to face with an Agrabahan viper. "AH! I want my mommy! Either one will do at this point!"

David conveniently appeared and slammed the chest shut. "Yikes! Were the snakes of Earth simply not poisonous enough for Regina?" he wondered.

"Gramps? How did you find me?"

"All of us Charmings are born with compasses attuned to our loved ones embedded in our brains."

"Really?"

"Nah, your mom told me." He helped the child to his feet. "So what's with the heist?"

Henry was on the verge of tears. "All I want is to be back in our world with Emma and Mary Margaret, having swordfights, riding horses, and oppressing the unwashed masses!"

David wrapped his grandson in his arms. "I know exactly how you feel. The social enlightenment, technological advances, and widespread access to antibiotics in this world repulse me, too. But don't worry, together we can overcome such horrors. And by together, I mean 'get out of my face'."

When Charming and friends reached the lack, they found it devoid of water, magic, and to the disappointment of Sir Lancelot, beautiful sex-crazed demons. "This is all my fault!" the quasi-prince lamented. "I killed the siren who lived here for absolutely no reason." He broke down crying. "I was just trying to pad my resume!"

"Don't worry, Charming," said Lancelot confidently. "They don't call me Lancelot du Lac just for the alliterative value. Depending on who you believe, I grew up in, on, or by a lake, and I know my hydrology. There may be some water concealed inside a seashell, or even an underground aquifer leading to a magic wishing well in another dimension." His eyes fell on a seashell full of water. "Aw, how boring."

He picked up the shell and took it to Charming. "Praise God—uh, gods...uh, whoever the hell we worship around here in their mercy."

"Is there enough to unkill my mom?" the quasi-prince inquired.

"It's magical anti-jinx juice. Do you really think there's a recommended dosage?" Lancelot poured the contents of the shell into Charming's canteen. "Stop overthinking this. You're Prince freaking Charming. The only thing you should ever have to think about is how to find an excuse to take your shirt off."
Snow White and Charming's mom had been eavesdropping, since, after all, they were both related to Henry. "Snow," the old woman choked out weakly. "I want you to have that last sip of water. I'm the parent of a Disney hero. I'm going to end up dead whether we like it or not, so just stop fighting it. Besides, the SS Snowing needs a baby on board far more than I need to not die horribly." She waved her pennant and saluted proudly. "It will be an honor to die for the good of the ship."

"But you'll be making your son an orphan," Snow protested. "Don't you think he might object to that?"

She just smiled indulgently. "It's not the end of the world, dear. I may be abandoning my child, but at least I never stuffed him in a closet or sent him off to some freaky new dimension. Now that would be truly unforgivable."

Snow remained hesitant. "I don't know about this, Mom. I'm not great mother material. My only female role model growing up was a homicidal maniac, I'm pretty sure my dad was hooked on uppers, and my relationship with my future husband began with a fistfight. You really want me to bring a child into that kind of environment?"

Charming interrupted before she could answer, which was probably for the best. "Good news, Mom! Our nondescript, nondenominational prayers have been answered!" He handed her his canteen.

She looked regretfully at Snow. "I don't suppose you've warmed at all to the idea another True Love's Kiss with my son?"

"Sorry, but my lips are kind of chapped and I'm not really in the mood."

The dying woman sighed, touched the bottle to her lips, then handed it to Sir Lancelot along with a heavily-encrypted letter. "Have faith, Snow. Maybe there's some kind of magical fertility clinic we can try."

Snow looked a little uneasy at that. "'We'?"

"Or you and the baby's father. Whatever."

The Girl Power Squad wandered into Emma's old nursery, which was dark, dusty, and filled with enough creepy dolls to make Rumplestiltskin jealous. "Wanna play?" a redheaded puppet cackled, clawing at Emma's ankle.

She calmly kicked its head off and went to examine the wardrobe in the corner. "Hey, the wardrobe! Wait, how are two fully-grown women supposed to fit in this thing? I'm surprised the baby and seven-year-old even managed it."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, pumpkin," said Mary Margaret.

Mulan elbowed Aurora. "Come on, they're obviously about to have a profoundly emotional heart-to-heart, and those things make me sick." She hauled her apparent friend out the door. "Call us when the killing starts!"

With them out of the way, Mary Margaret dragged her daughter away from the wardrobe. "This room is the physical manifestation of my hopes and dreams for you. It'd be nice if you could show a little enthusiasm."

"If you insist." Emma reeled back and widened her eyes theatrically. "I lived here?"
Mary Margaret gave her a sideways glance. "Um, no, we stuffed you in the closet while you were still gooey from childbirth. Did you even read Henry's book?"

"No, I just glanced at the pictures before torching them."

"Well, if you weren't such a pyromaniac, you'd know that I wanted us to be a family. Almost as much as your grandma did, in fact."

"I already have a family," Emma snapped. "The father I've exchanged a total of four sentences with, and the son whose middle name I've never bothered to learn. So let's get home to them before they realize how dysfunctional we truly are." She nodded at the wardrobe. "So how do we get this thing to work? Play some Hide and Seek?"

Charming frowned down at his mom. "This isn't right. Triumphant violin music should be swelling."

"Maybe the water would work better if she swallowed it," Snow suggested.

"No," said Charming. "It probably just wasn't enough. Let's go check for that interdimensional wishing well Lancelot was going on about."

"Honeymuffin, give it up," his mother admonished. "What are the odds of that being true?"

He burst into tears. "This is all my fault! If only I wasn't so unfailingly sweet and optimistic, this touch of angst in my life wouldn't have been necessary!"

She patted her son's head tenderly. "Don't blame yourself, sweetie. After all, I set off this horrible chain of events by hocking your stupid brother in the first place." She smiled up at Snow. "My only regret is that I won't live to see you two get married. I had such cute ideas for your wedding! I was going to do a snowflake theme, and hang up a big banner reading 'It's Snowing Men!'"

"Maybe it's not too late," Snow turned to Lancelot. "Hey Lance, do knights have the authority to perform marriage ceremonies in this conflicted religion of ours?"

The knight shrugged. "For today, let's say they do."

Five minutes later, the three of them were gathered under an 'It's Snowing Men' banner improvised from wagon canvas, while the mother of the groom looked on, waving her Snowing pennant feebly.

Lancelot poured some water into a cocoa mug from Charming's mom's Comfort Kit. "In my land, which may or may not be England, there is legend of a cup that had the power to grant life eternal, until Monty Python swiped it." He handed it to them. "This ain't it, but enjoy your water anyway."

They shared a sip from the faux-grail, and Charming looked down at his feet. "Hey, my nail fungus just disappeared. Must be an omen. Things are looking up."

Snow nudged him gently. "Hey, your mom just dropped dead."

His face fell. "Oh. That." He went to her side and wept bitterly over her cold, dead body.

Snow wrapped her arms around him and rested her head on his shoulder. "I don't suppose this is a good time to ask what you've got planned for our honeymoon?"

Back at Neuschwanstein Castle, Emma was leaning against the side of the wardrobe and counting,
while Mary Margaret climbed inside. "...eight, nine, ten. Ready or not, here I come!"

"It's no good, Emma. There's no sign of a portal," Mary Margaret's muffled voice reported.

"Then why don't you come out?"

"I can't move, it's way too cramped. You'll have to butter my head."

Lancelot appeared in the doorway, toting a bucket of Crisco. "I had a feeling this might happen."

"Lancelot?" Mary Margaret rubbed some shortening into her hair and finally managed to pry herself free. "What are you doing here? If you've come to pursue me romantically, I'm sorry, but I don't like to have more than two torrid love affairs a year."

"No, my zombie scouts told me—uh, I mean, I just had a gut feeling you guys had been attacked by an ogre on your way to the destination you never divulged to me, so I can to check on you for purely selfless reasons."

"Where are Mulan and Aurora?"

"Outside discussing whether dragons should be good or evil." He caressed the wardrobe reverently. "So this is the portal you spoke of?"

"Yeah," Mary Margaret confirmed, "but it's all out of juice and the doorway definitely needs to be widened. What do you care, anyway?"

He smiled benignly. "I just want to get you home to your on again, off again husband, and Emma home to her on again, off again son. Oh, and her loving girlfriend Regina, of course."

Mary Margaret whipped out her sword and held it to his throat. "Stop shipping my kid with my mom! It's just plain wrong! Honestly, you're as bad as Cor—wait a minute, Cora? Is that you?"

A puff of the purple mood smoke that seemed to indicate evil enveloped Lancelot, leaving the Evil Queen 1.0 standing in his place. "I'm impressed. You managed to figure out that I was evil this time without me even having to murder anyone. Except of course for Lancelot."


Cora magically pinned her to the wall. "Eh, like it affects us."

Meanwhile, Emma was shuffling innocently past them, whistling the McGyver theme song. "Don't anybody mind me. I'm just going to go over here by the wardrobe and do some research for my new book, 'Bullets: The Weapon of a Thousand and One Uses'."

"Kay," they both replied obliviously.

"So Cora, why are you trying to get to Storybrooke?" Mary Margaret demanded. "Ruling over two dimensions just wasn't enough for you?"

"No, I just want to see my daughter. It sounds like she's in grave danger of becoming a loving parent and a useful member of society. Besides, I'm dying to meet my grandson Henry, who will henceforth be named Cory and wear this." She produced a t-shirt reading "Grandma's Little Villain."

"Over my gown-clad, Plague-ravaged body!" Emma roared, putting a torch to the portal.

Because she had only gotten her sorcerer's license by sleeping with her instructor, Cora didn't know
the spell for extinguishing fires and had to settle for tossing a fireball at Emma instead. "You know how I said I'd try not to slaughter you? I lied!"

Mulan conveniently appeared and swatted the fireball aside. "Save versus spells!" she cried.

Aurora waved from the doorway. "I don't know how to fight, but I'm with you in spirit."

Cora stuck her nose in the air. "I'm out of here. Not because I'm scared of you, of course. I'm just… uh, really racist against Asians! Yeah, that's it." Without further bigotry, she disappeared.

Mary Margaret ran to Emma. "You saved me!"

"You're welcome," said Mulan flatly.

Aurora returned with a bucket of water. "Shouldn't we try to put out that fire, now that she's gone?"

"When we want your opinion, we'll give it to you!" Emma snapped.

Charming sadly placed a Team Snowing pennant on his mom's tombstone. His bridge, while not the expert in comfort mode that he was, was doing the best she could. "I'm so sorry, Honeymuffin. I know she was the only non-murderous family you had left."

"Yeah, but I still have you and together we can start a new family. As soon as we get Lancelot out of the way, if I have my way." He spritzed his mouth, removed his shirt, and flashed her a heated look. "You in?"

"Hell y—actually, we should probably talk first."

"Aw, come on! Shut up and kiss me and I'll give you this necklace," he bargained, holding up his mom's pendant.

Snow decided to accept the offer, and when she held out her hand to take the pendant, it began swinging. "Oh my conflicting pantheons! We're going to have a baby!"

"What?! But we never even…" Charming glanced suspiciously from Snow to Lancelot. "Wait a minute, are you already cheating on me with Lancelot? Damn it, I knew he'd never be able to resist you now that you're married!"

"Charming, chill, I just meant in the distant future."

Charming frowned. "Okay, but if this kid comes out black, I want a paternity test." He composed himself. "In the meantime, though, we should focus on creating a stable home to bring the child into. Now, I know that you have your own palace full of beautiful memories and treasured keepsakes, but my foster dad's castle has a two hundred-square-foot hot tub, so I propose that we still that one instead." He whistled for his horse. "I'll call the dwarves and see if Stealthy left any maps of the place behind."

Snow went over to Lancelot, who was still hanging around for unknown reasons. "This is your doing, isn't it? Charming's mom didn't drink the water, she had you put it in that lame excuse for a grail so I would drink it!" She paused to reflect for a moment. "I must find some way to honor her sacrifice. Maybe I could posthumously give her the Shipper of the Year Award? Or even better, we could name our daughter after her!" She frowned. "Say, what was her name, anyway?"

"Ruth."
"Ew." Snow made a face. "Shipper of the Year Award it is."

The Girl Power Squad was in deep mourning for their fallen comrade. "Lancelot was the most noble knight I ever knew, apart from the whole adultery thing," Mary Margaret sobbed.

"How could I not see that he was Cora?" Mulan lamented. "His weird obsession with decapitation should have been a dead giveaway." She sighed. "Well, what am I supposed to tell the troops?"

"How about the truth?" Mary Margaret suggested.

Mulan stared at her incredulously. "What do you think this is, some kind of democracy?"

"Sorry, my bad."

"Never mind, we've got bigger problems right now. Cora seems intent on killing absolutely everyone, and since all the honorable men around here are dead, it looks like we're going to have to stop her."

"But who will lead us?" Aurora pointed to herself. "The golden-hearted princess?" She indicted Mulan and Emma in turn. "The accomplished military leader? The accomplished civil official? Bah, you're crazy!"

"No, I vote for Snow, or at least I would if we did that sort of thing around here," said Mulan.

"Me? Lead?" Mary Margaret laughed. "What do you think I am, some kind of monarch?"

"Fine, but this Girl Power Squad we've formed is simply too awesome to break up, so Aurora and I will come with you guys."

Aurora smiled and nodded. "I don't know how much actual help I'll be in a fight, but I'm great for morale."

Mulan shepherded her friend to the door. "Now, I can see you two have some unresolved issues to work out, so we're going to give you a moment, but don't be too long. Aurora and I have agreed to disagree on the nature of dragons, but it's just a matter of time before we find something new to fight about."

Once they were alone, Emma gestured sheepishly at the wardrobe. "I apologize for my latest bout of pyromania. I was just—"

"Forgoing the chance to be with your child in order to save it from an evil witch?" Mary Margaret finished dryly. "Yeah, I'm familiar with the concept."

"I'm sorry I've been such a cold, bitter ingrate to you lately," Emma sobbed weakly. "I've just been doing it for so long that it's going to take me some time to kick the habit."

"You'll get there, sweetie," Mary Margaret soothed, hugging her. "Heck, you should have seen me before your daddy got ahold of me."

Emma turned to leave, but Mary Margaret hung back for a moment, looking at the shattered remains of her daughter's childhood. "Estrangement sucked," she cried bitterly.

A headless puppet latched onto her leg. "HEH HEH HEH!"

"Ah!" She kicked it out a window. "All right, I'm going, I'm going!"
As soon as she was gone, Cora Apparated in with a fire extinguisher. "Damn it all!" she cursed, looking at the small pile of ashes sitting in the wardrobe's place. "How the hell did that thing manage to burn down so fast?" She tossed the canister aside and conjured a broom and dustpan. "On to Plan B."

Back in Storybrooke, Jefferson had abandoned his telescope to stalk his daughter at close range. Then he realized Emma was gone and nobody could arrest him for it, so he abandoned all attempts at secrecy. "Grace!" he hollered. "Get over here and hug me and be sure to tell Henry!"

Paige spun around. "Papa! You found me! It's about freaking time! I was this close to developing abandonment issues."

He scooped her into his arms and carried her off. "Oof! Is it just me, or have you grown unnaturally quickly in these last couple of weeks?"

The girl peeked over his shoulder. "Papa, where are we going?"

"Home."

"But shouldn't we work out a visitation schedule with my adoptive parents first? Or at least let them know I'm not dead in a gutter?"

"Eh, it's none of their damn business."

On the only street in town, Henry had somehow acquired the keys to Emma's car and was sitting at the wheel. David rapped on the window. "Hey kid! I know grand theft auto is in your blood, but I think I have a more productive hobby for you." He held up a pair of practice swords. "Henry, I visited the records office at your school today, and spent some time going over your IQ test results. In light of my findings, I've decided to make you my co-hero."

The boy grinned. "Will you teach me how to fight a dragon?"

David laughed. "Son, you're a Charming! When you meet a dragon, you'll instinctively know what to do."

As they laughed and played on the sidewalk, Albert Spencer drove by and honked his horn. "Stop coping so well with adversity, damn it!"
Since Gold's skills with women were seriously lacking, he'd taken his new girlfriend on a date to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. Reaching under the counter, he took out a diamond necklace and placed it around her neck. "I hope you like it, dearie. It was the only piece of jewelry to survive my temper tantrum with the display cases last week."

Belle smiled coyly. "If you're trying to buy my love, it's working."

"Score!" Gold smirked. "So, while I'm on a roll, shall we try going on a less inane date?"

They were interrupted by the ringing of Gold's bell—the inanimate one. Leroy barged into the shop. "Stiltskin, I've come to buy back that axe I hocked you for booze money."

"I don't suppose you care that we're closed?" Gold sighed. "No one ever does."

"Give me the damn axe!" Leroy fumed. "And while you're at it, you can throw in our drinking mugs, Emma's mobile, Charming's fugly windmill, and all the other stuff you inexplicably wound up with!"

Belle waved. "Hi, Dreamy! How's it going with Nova?"

Leroy sniffled sadly. "I didn't heed your wisdom and now I'm going to be miserably lonely forever."

"Really?" Gold looked at the dwarf with new respect. "I feel a sudden kinship to you, but I'm still kicking you out."

Looking unworried, Leroy glanced back at Belle. "You know, it may not be any of my business, but your boyfriend's mildly psycho. Why don't you ditch him and come crash with me and my bros for a while? It's no trouble. There's nothing we love better than the company of lovelorn heroines."

Before she could answer, Gold slammed him against the wall. "Stop frightening away my girlfriend! I can do it myself!" he roared, cutting off the dwarf's air with his cane.

"Rumplestiltskin! You know I like bad boys, but don't push your luck," Belle warned.

"Quit nagging me!" the Dark One in all his green-skinned glory snarled, baring his blackened, moldy teeth. "Or I'll kiss you with these!"

"NOOOOOO!" Belle screamed, jolting awake in bed. "Whew, that was weird. No more Disney flicks before bed." She rolled over. "Hey Rumple, I'm disturbed, here. How about some cuddles?"

But all she found on his side of the bed was an elaborate dummy programmed to giggle evilly every few seconds. Annoyed, she got up and ventured down the hall. "Rumplestiltskin, get back here! I demand fluff!"

Now equipped with the same internal True Love homing device that the Charmings enjoyed, Belle went straight to the basement where Gold sat indulging his magic habit. The sorcerer pulled a piece of his namesake off his spinning wheel and dropped it into a bottle of liquid, which began to smoke and change color. "Whoa, cool!" He giggled. "I wonder what would happen if I mixed baking soda with vinegar next?"
A younger, less diabolical Rumplestiltskin limped timidly through his front door. "Honey, I'm home. I won't ask you for a hello kiss, but can you at least try not to throw anything at me tonight?"

He found his little boy sitting alone at the empty dinner table, thumbing through the yellow pages in an attempt to contact Child Protective Services. "Bae? Son, where's your mom?"

Bae shrugged helplessly. "She said she was going down to the corner bar to work on getting me that baby brother or sister I've always wanted."

"Ah hell, not again."

The spinner found his wife surrounded by sailors, dice, and empty whisky bottles. "Milah, please stop gambling away our child's milk money and come home."

"Bite me!" Milah slurred. "You denied me the chance to live out my days as an impoverished single mother, and for that, I will never forgive you!"

Rumplestiltskin sighed wearily. "I know, you tell me every day, but can you please quit abandoning Bae? I think he's starting to take it personally."

"If he doesn't like it, he should have been born into a happier marriage!" she snapped. "Sell it elsewhere, Rumple. The woobie act just doesn't do it for me."

The pirate beside her threw back his head and laughed, and all the women in the room simultaneously fainted. "You're cold-blooded, baby," he observed. "I do so love that in a woman."

"Sweet. Let's go dishonor my marriage vows in the coat closet."

Little Baelfire tugged timidly at his mother's sleeve. "Mommy, I'm sorry to bother you while you're flirting, but if I have to see any more of this, I'm going to be permanently scarred and probably end up stealing cars for a living."

"Damn it, the junior woobie." Milah cursed. "Bae, get out of here! I don't want you to see what a slut I am!"

"Bae, get out of here! I don't want you to see what a wimp I am!" Rumplestiltskin echoed. In agreement for perhaps the first time ever, the dysfunctional pair grabbed their son and went home.

Back at their happy hovel, Rumplestiltskin whipped up a batch of his home hangover remedy, while Milah curled up in bed and tried valiantly to pass out before they could have another disastrous conversation. "Honey," said Rumplestiltskin gently, "you've cheated on me, insulted me, publicly humiliated me, and cruelly neglected our child. However, because I am a complete doormat, I'm willing to let all that go if you'll just stop telling me you wish I was dead."

"No deal," said Milah flatly. "I'm sick of this. Can't we just skip town and change our names? It would ease our family's shame and spare Bae the terrible burden of having to learn to spell 'Rumplestiltskin' one day."

"We can't leave. You know I'm agoraphobic."

"How the hell do you expect me to keep track of all your phobias?"

"The point is moot. We can't move." He gestured at their dismal surroundings. "Even if I were to
magically acquire a spine, we're peasants, and you keep blowing what little money we have on your gambling habit."

"That's probably your fault, too. Just give me some time and I'll figure out how."

"Okay, I'll sweeten the deal," Rumplestiltskin offered. "You can keep cheating on me and loudly wishing I was dead—just don't abandon Bae."

"No."

"I'll take that as a yes."

When Gold walked into the kitchen that morning, he found Belle awaiting him with daggers in her eyes. And we all know how the Dark One feels about daggers. "Hey baby," he said uneasily. "Uh, happy anniversary?"

"Wrong."

"Valentine's Day?"

"No."

"Birthday?"

She smacked him. "Stop playing dumb, you know why I'm upset! Did you really think I wouldn't notice you doing the walk of shame in here, wearing the same clothes you had on yesterday, with magic potion smeared on your collar? You're involved with magic again! And I know it's the evil kind, because it was purple!"

"Relax, baby." Smiling tentatively, he took a bottle of orange juice out of the fridge. "Why don't you let me get you a beverage in your favorite chipped cup?"

Belle was unimpressed. "You can only use that cup on me so many times before it gets old, Rumple! Now tell me the truth."

"The truth?" Gold stammered uncertainly. "I'm not sure I know how to…but for you, I guess I can try." He opened up his mouth, but nothing came out. "Sorry, it's been a while." He cleared his throat and gave it another go, but all that came out this time was a pitiful squeak. "Third time's the charm." He took a deep breath. "The truth is, I was using magic...to protect the house from invading zombies!" He paused. "Damn it! One more time..."

Shaking her head in disgust, Belle walked away. "Call me when you're through being a pig."

"...but the bottom line is, I probably won't use it to steal any more babies—Belle? Where are you going?"

A knock came at the door of Rumplestiltskin's happy hovel. "I already told you, I can't buy any raffle tickets; my wife drank all my money," he protested, opening the door.

"No, this is about Milah," the woman on the other side explained. "She's been abducted by pirates!"

Rumplestiltskin glanced heavenward. "Thank you, merciful gods!"

"Rumplestiltskin, knock it off! You've got to go save her!"
"Have you looked at me lately, dearie?" Rumplestiltskin stared at her. "What do you want me to do? Poke them with my crutch until they give in? Why don't you try contacting the authorities, or at least a guy with muscles?"

"All the other men in town have been eaten by ogres," she reminded him. "I'm afraid it's you or nobody."

Since their captain was too cheap to hire a security guard, Rumplestiltskin hobbled aboard the pirates' ship without interference. "Umph!" he grunted, falling face-first onto the deck. "I didn't think it was possible my sea legs are even worse than my land legs."

"On your feet for the captain," one of the pirates commanded.

"But I don't have feet!" Rumplestiltskin protested.

"Then on your foot for the captain, what do I care?" They hefted him off the deck.

Rumplestiltskin studied the captain's face. "I remember you. The teen idol from the bar. Say, if I promise to take this story to the paparazzi and give you some good publicity, will you let my wife go?"

"Sorry, but no," Captain Jones replied. "I need sex, and how am I supposed to get it if I don't kidnap an unwilling woman?" He gazed soulfully into a mirror. "Just look at me. I'm hideous."

Rumplestiltskin was on the verge of tears. "But we have a son, and he needs his mother around to teach him how to be a drunken gambler."

"No deal. However, I am an honorable rapist." Jones handed him a sword. "We'll settle this like mature adults, by whacking each other."

Rumplestiltskin looked at the sword like it was a vicious, two-headed snake. "Are you crazy?! I can't kill you! The women of the Enchanted Forest would never forgive me!"

"Excuses, excuses!" Jones sneered.

"But I'm a crippled old peasant! With a motherless child, thanks to you!"

"I choose not to notice that."

"Please, sir! What am I going to tell my painfully-adorable boy?" Rumplestiltskin whimpered.

"Tell him that if he doesn't like being abandoned, he should have been born into a happier marriage!"

Under Storybrooke, under the wise supervision of the mighty Henry, the dwarves and a sweating, shirtless David were mining for fairy dust. Ruby walked in with a camera to capture the moment. "Snow would never forgive me if I allowed her to miss out on this sight," said the werewolf, snapping photo after photo of the quasi-prince. "So, boss man," she turned to Henry. "Have you found any fairy dust yet?"

"Not yet," he reported, "but for those just tuning in, reunions will ensue when we do."

Starting to feel violated, David put his shirt on, then rubbed absently at a smudge on his hand. "Ew, I've got Chekov's Dust all over me." He wiped it off. "This job sucks. I think I'll go borrow my daughter's for a while."
Back at Gold’s, the pawnbroker was knocking timidly on his bedroom door. "Belle, it's me. I know you're angry, so I won't ask you for a hello kiss, but can you at least try not to throw anything at me?" No answer. "Belle, did you fall again, honey?" He opened the door. "There's no need to ashamed, I actually think it's kind of cute. Belle?" He glanced around the empty room, finding nothing but an open window and a phone number for Megalomaniacs Anonymous. "Damn it." He poked his head out the window. "Belle, if you get attacked by wolves out there, don't expect me to wrestle them for you!" He slammed it shut. "Aw, who am I kidding?"

He went over to Moe French's coolly-named flower shop and held up a badly-drawn missing poster. "I hate to be repetitive, but I've come to take your daughter."

"Dude, you tried to kill me!"

"Yeah, I'd say I was sorry, but Belle's got this crazy aversion to me lying," said Gold. "Besides, do you really expect me to believe that you care about your daughter?" He indicated the flyer. "You don't even know what color her eyes are!"

"Shut up."

"Look, if it makes you feel any better, I didn't kill her," Gold defended. "And in my case, that's saying something!"

"If you didn't kill her, then why hasn't she come to see me?"

"Well, she probably wasn't expecting to find a knight in a freaking flower shop. I mean, that's kind of a weird choice of motif, don't you agree?" Moe looked at him skeptically. "All right, fine, I lied to her again."

"You're a bastard! Stay away from my daughter or I'll steal back my van and run you over with it!"

Gold opened his mouth to tell Maurice that he had been in love with Belle for decades, and intended to spend the rest of their lives together making her happy. However, since he was so out of practice at truth-telling, all he could do was choke out another pitiful squeak.

Currently between evil lairs, the Dark One was meeting one of his contacts at a bar. The three-time champion of the annual World's Ugliest Hat Contest sat across from him. "Wow, it really is you. The Dark One, in the slimy green flesh."

"Yes, insult the most powerful and evil sorcerer in the world," Rumplestiltskin encouraged sarcastically. "That'll get you far in life."

"Sorry, sir. The point is, I called you here because I have a magic bean for sale."

"Where'd you get a magic bean?"

"I traded some kid a donkey for it. The poor boy actually thought he was getting the better end of that deal!" They shared a good laugh at that thought.

"That's brilliant. I'll have to remember that one," Rumplestiltskin chuckled, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. "So, how did you know I would want to buy such a thing? Did you read a certain leather-bound, illustrated book?"
"No, I heard you needed it to search for the son you stupidly dumped into a portal."

Rumplestiltskin seized him by the throat. "Damn that Blue Fairy! She's a worse gossip than even Snow White!"

"Hear me out!" the choking man gurgled pitifully. "I can get you the bean in exchange for eternal life O.B.O."

"What do you want with eternal life?" asked Rumplestiltskin curiously.

"I was hoping I could use the extra time to overcome my horrible fear of rats."

Rumplestiltskin shrugged. "Well, I've heard lamer reasons. Unfortunately, I'm bound by the same rules as genies. You can't wish for life, nor death, nor love."

The man frowned. "So what does that leave?"

"You could wish for ice cream. I don't think that's on the list."

"Pass."

"Okay, how about if I appeal to your Peter Pan complex by making you a little boy again?"

"Who's Peter Pan?"

Rumplestiltskin laughed darkly. "You'll find out."

Thankfully, the man was genre-savvy enough to know that when a villain starts laughing evilly, it's time to clear out. A waitress ventured over to Rumplestiltskin's table. "Are you going to stick around and have a drink?" She crossed her fingers. "Please say no, please say no, please say no…"

Before he could oblige her, Captain Jones came crashing in with his scurvy crew. Seriously, that's literally what he called them. "Where's my beer?"

One of his underlings nudged him. "Rum, you mean. We're pirates, remember?"

He shook his head. "I've always had an aversion to rum. Something about the name freaks me out."

Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "On second thought, I've been searching for my son all day. I think I've earned a short revenge break."

"Damn it," the waitress grumbled.

Ironically enough, Belle actually had run into a wolf. Luckily, it was the kind who waits tables and not the kind that eats runaways. "Hey, I can't help but notice that you're looking lovelorn and drinking heavily," Ruby observed, setting yet another iced tea in front of Belle. "Just in case you didn't know, these aren't Long Island Iced Teas. If you want to drink away your sorrows, you're going to need something stronger."

"No thanks," Belle declined. "The last time I got drunk, I wound up in China, wrestling a giant, flaming bear." Ruby gave her a double take. "Long story."

"I'm getting confused, can we change the subject?" Ruby pleaded. "You know, I've never seen you in here before, and there's nowhere else to eat in this town. How is it that you haven't starved to death?"
"I have a tendency to get locked up a lot," Belle explained cheerfully.

"Well, don't worry. I'd never do that to you. You can trust me."

"Thanks, homie."

"Any time," Ruby replied. "You know, with Snow trapped in another dimension, I'm in the market for a new bestie. You interested?"

Belle eyed her warily. "I don't know. I've had bad experiences with my past girlfriends. Tell me, would you ever consider sending me to fight a giant, flaming bear with no combat training?"

"What? No. The only beast my friends ever have to fight is me, on occasion."

Belle brightened. "You're a beast? I love beasts! Count me in!" She slammed another iced tea. "Your first official duty as my friend can be to help me find a job."

"You could be a sheriff," Ruby suggested. "There aren't a lot of requirements for that around here."

Belle considered it. "No, I'm afraid I would end up falling in love with the bad guys instead of locking them up."

"How about librarian?" Ruby suggested. "Word of Disney is, you like books."

"Oh yeah. I forgot about that."

Belle rattled the doors of the library. "Hello? Is anyone in there? If you are, get your stuff and clear out! I'm taking over!" She peeked in a window. "I smell brimstone." She took out a shopping list and put air freshener on it.

The three-time winner of the annual World's Ugliest Hat Contest approached her. "Excuse me, miss. I understand you have a habit of trusting people you shouldn't?"

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Could you do it one more time?"

"Okay," Belle agreed, presenting her wrists to be handcuffed.

He tossed her over his shoulder and carried her off. "Pity to think the first intelligent heroine in animated history has come to this."

Jones and his crew staggered out of the bar, singing drunkenly. "So try the life of a thief! Just sample the life of a crook! There isn't a boy who won't enjoy a'working for Captain Hook! The world's most famous crook!"

Jones looked up suspiciously. "Wait a minute. Somebody in this alley isn't singing." His eyes fell on a crippled beggar. "Yay! The perfect chance to prove how villainous I can be!" he practically squealed, knocking over the man's begging cup, kicking him to the ground, and laughing piratically.

"Hey boss, he has some kind of disfiguring skin disease," one of the pirates pointed out. "Don't forget to mock that."

"I was getting to that." Jones began to dance in circles around the injured man, pointing and
laughing. "Ha ha, you're ugly! Ha ha, you're ugly!"

"That's not fair," Rumplestiltskin protested, rising to his feet. "Everyone's ugly compared to you." He giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "But thanks for acting like such a pig. Now I won't lose fangirls for killing you."

Jones paled. "This is just like the time that kid I used to pick on in grade school ended up interviewing me for a job."

The Dark One smirked. "Hate when that happens. So where's my wife?"

Unfortunately, Jones suffered from the same lying problem as Gold. "Living a happy and fulfilling life with m—uh, I mean, we raped her to death. I hope that knowledge will ease your grief and anger."

"Wrong!" snarled Rumplestiltskin.

"Damn. I need to work on my people skills," Jones muttered.

"Better do it fast, then. I'm killing you in the morning," Rumplestiltskin informed him.

Gold banged on the front door of the Princess Pad. "Open up, Sheriff—uh, I mean Prince—uh, I mean, dude in charge."

A haggard-looking David reluctantly opened the door. "Gold, if you've come to ask me for a favor, the answer is 'go to Hell.' If you've come to offer me a favor, the answer is also 'go to Hell.'"

"Just hear me out," Gold pleaded. "I'll kiss your boot," he offered hopefully.

David blinked. "Why would I want you to kiss my boot? I just cleaned these things."

"Sorry, I forgot you're not evil. How about you help me because it's the morally correct thing to do?"

David couldn't argue with that. "Okay, I'm listening."

He handed David the awful drawing of Belle. "My girlfriend is missing. She looks kind of like this, but minus the pigtails and green eyes."

David studied the drawing. "Is this the girl you told me about? Your 'brief flicker of life amidst an ocean of darkness'?"

"Yes, but I'd appreciate it if you didn't repeat those words to anyone else. It'd kill my image."

"Your secret's safe with me. Didn't you say she was dead, though?" The quasi-prince's face lit up. "Are you into kissing dead chicks, too? Oh, it's such a relief to finally meet someone who understands about these things!"

"Ew, no! Regina lied to me, that's all."

"Saying 'Regina lied' is redundant," said David impatiently. "So what do you want from me?"

"I understand you have the same gift for finding people as your kid. I want you to use it."

"But why don't you just try that tracking spell you use at every opportunity?" the quasi-prince suggested.
"It only works if you have an object that the person owned, and I don't."

David raised an eyebrow. "Seriously? Not one? It's been, what, a week or two since the curse ended, and you still haven't bothered to buy your girl a toothbrush? A hairbrush? Some underwear?"

"No, and that lacy negligee she's been wearing is an old Halloween costume of mine."

"Ew, I really didn't need that mental image." David shuddered.

"Come on!" Gold wheedled. "I helped you all those times you lost your girl!"

Captain Jones arrived for his duel with Rumplestiltskin at the designated time, but the imp was nowhere to be found. "Does this mean I'm off the hook?" he wondered.

Rumplestiltskin laughed from a rooftop overhead. "I can see the future, and if you could, you'd laugh at those words, too."

Jones looked up. "'Stiltskin? What are you doing up there?"

"Just trying to psych you out. Is it working?"

"No, I'm not scared of you."

"Then you're a moron." He pilfered Jones' sword and dove past him. "Ships that pass in the night! Well, at least one ship!"

Jones glared, striking back at him. "Hey, I'm the pirate here. Witty one-liners are my domain."

"Shut up and die." Rumplestiltskin held the point of the sword against his throat.

"I'm going to die by the sword, after a lifetime of living by the sword?" Jones looked dazed. "Wow, I honestly didn't see it coming."

"You're right, it's too cliché," the Dark One agreed, reaching for his heart. "You took my beloved wife!" Jones shot him a quizzical look. "All right, fine, you killed my hated baby mama, but you're still a bastard!"

They were interrupted by Milah stepping out of the shadows. "Rumplestiltskin, stop killing him! I only like killers who are sexy!"

The man in the ugly hat had dragged Belle off to the world's most fragrant evil lair. When he took the gag out of her mouth, she snapped at him with her teeth. "You know, I'm really getting tired of being kidnapped every time I open my mouth. You'd better have a good explanation for this, buster!"

"Well, the thing is, your dad has forgotten that he's a professional warrior, so he's been reduced to getting help from me, of all people."

Moe waved from the doorway. "Hey sweetie. I love you, provided I'm the only one who loves you."

Belle accepted his hug, but still looked kind of annoyed. "Dad, if you wanted to get back in touch with me, I do have an email address." She nodded at her bonds. "This is inexcusable! I only put up with it from Rumple because he looks so fine in leather."

Moe facepalmed. "Oh great, not your bad boy fetish again!"
"Relax, Dad. You're not losing a daughter, you're gaining an attacker."

Her father sighed. "I obviously need to get you some counseling, but your boyfriend has all my money, so I'm going to have to go with a cheaper option."

He waved his flunky over, and the small, portly guy was easily able to drag her off. She groaned. "Man, if I make it out of this mess alive, I really need to look into self-defense lessons."

Gold and David were out questioning the townspeople, but alas, there was so much hate for Gold that not even the Charming Family Charm could balance it out. Scowling, David turned away from their latest interviewee. "Gold, do you remember turning a butcher into a pig?"

"No, but it sounds like me."

"You're a bastard!"

"Why does everyone keep saying that like I don't already know?" Gold wondered."

"Come on, let's try Granny's," David suggested. "Unless she wants to starve to death, she'll have to go there sooner or later."

Gold limped after him, a little hesitant. "David, can I ask you for some love advice?"

"Are you asking me for love advice?"

"Yes, you idiot!"

"Isn't that a little bit absurd?"

"Yeah, but so was Jiminy Cricket and the Seven Dwarves holding an intervention for Snow White, and nobody called them out on it," the pawnbroker pointed out.

"Well," said David, "I guess you could start by telling the truth for a change. Not your style, I know, but you've got to make sacrifices for love sometimes."

Gold's face fell. "Actually, I was hoping you'd teach me that Charming Family Charm thing."

"You're not a Charming. Sorry, but you're going to have to do the truth thing."

"But I don't lie," Gold was insulted. "I'm not August!"

David rolled his eyes. "That's the dumbest excuse I've heard since 'what I told you was true, from a certain point of view.'"

Rumplestiltskin dropped his victim on the ground, and a throng of adoring fangirls rushed to the pirate's aid. "Milah, you're alive? Damn it!"

"Milah, go away!" Jones cried. "We're all in grave danger of actually being honest with one another!"

"I'm not leaving," she declared stubbornly. "I love you, Killian, and now that Rumplestiltskin's turned evil and murderous, I find myself a little attracted to him, too."

"Thanks, dearie," said Rumplestiltskin. "You're looking surprisingly good yourself, considering
that it's theoretically been at least a decade since the last time I saw you." His lips curled into an angry sneer. "You really must give me the name of your stylist before I slaughter you both!"

"Please don't kill him!" Milah pleaded. "The Lost Boys would be so disappointed! I can explain all this!"

"Tick tock, dearie! Tick tock!"

"AAAAHH!" Jones screamed upon hearing the sound.

Milah glanced over at him. "What was that for?"

"I…don't know." The pirate shuddered.

"Whatever, honey, I'll love you no matter how erratic you get." She turned back to her husband. "The thing is, that night at the bar, Killian was looking really hot, and he just kept getting hotter with every beer I drank. We spent a few minutes chatting, and that convinced me he was worth faking my death and forsaking my own flesh and blood for."

"…Huh?"

"I have some really good pickup lines," Jones explained from the pavement.

"That's the most superficial, underdeveloped romance I've heard since Cinderella," Rumplestiltskin scoffed. "By the way, our son is doing horribly, thanks for asking." He turned his sword on Jones. "You ain't gonna be pretty anymore, dearie!"

"Wait!" the pirate cried. "Spare me and I'll teach you how to pick up chicks!"

"I don't need your help anymore! I have leather pants now!" the Dark One roared.

"How about the guy with the bean?" Milah offered, producing the world's ugliest hat. "I don't know what you want with a magic bean—"

"I need it to find our son, who is doing horribly, thanks for asking."

"Whatever. The point is, we'll give it to you if you promise not to murder us."

Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Sure, I'll promise not to murder you. Just like I promised to defend my country from the ogres and follow my son to the land without magic."

At the only diner in town, Ruby was pretending to study Moe's pathetic excuse for a missing poster. "Yeah, she was here. I killed and ate her, so no need to keep looking," the wolf girl lied.

"Ruby, come on!" David whined, jerking a thumb at Gold. "If I don't find this chick, he's never going to get off my back about it."

"I'm sorry, but he's a dangerous man, and I'm not emotionally ready to lose another bestie so soon."

David held up a sword. "Comfort mode!"

Awestruck, Ruby caved. "Okay, I saw someone who bore an incredibly vague resemblance to the girl in this picture. She suddenly remembered she liked books, so she decided to go take over the library before another dragon could move in." She handed Gold a sweater. "Here, I'm not sure
"exactly what season it's supposed to be right now, but on the off chance that it's winter, she might need this."

Gold studied it. "I remember this, it's mine. I told her the other night that she looked cold, hoping she'd let me warm her up the fun way, but instead, she just swiped my sweater."

"Wait, you own an article of clothing that isn't a black suit?" Ruby looked at him with new understanding. "I'm seeing a whole new side of you. Want some help?"

"What kind of help?"

"Well, since the curse broke, I've been hypersensitive to odors. Which reminds me, do either of you guys want a mint?" She held out a tin hopefully. "No?" Dismayed, she took back the sweater, sniffed it, and followed the scent straight to the laundry room. "According to my superhuman senses, either your girl has turned into a bottle of fabric softener, or I need to try again."

After ruling out the smells of detergent, yarn, and Gold himself, Ruby finally picked up the trail and followed it to Moe's coolly-named flower shop. "Aw nuts, not this guy again!" Gold groaned, leading them inside. "French! Why can't you be a benignly lovable crackpot inventor?"

Moe scowled. "Get out of here. This is private property."

"Which I own, genius! Now, where's Belle?"

"There's no such thing as Belle anymore, so you can stop looking," said Moe smugly.

"Don't worry, I won't let him hurt her, Moe," Ruby piped up. "In fact, I've been looking for a good excuse to eat him for years now."

"Comfort mode!" David added heroically.

"What part of 'stay away from my daughter or I'll run you over' do you not get?" Moe growled. "You'll destroy her, like you destroy everything else!"

Gold nodded reluctantly. "Yeah, probably, but it's not like she was destined for a long life anyway. You do remember how disastrously klutzy and trusting of dangerous strangers she is, right?"

"I take the Fifth."

Gold suddenly realized he hadn't beaten Moe up in a while, and decided to rectify that. "Cough her up or you'll be coughing up your own spleen!" he threatened, bludgeoning the guy with his cane.

"Yes, assault me some more," Moe grumbled between blows. "That'll definitely convince me you deserve my daughter." He looked over at David. "Hey, is this legal?"

David shrugged. "How should I know? It's not like I've had any actual training for this job. Besides, you're annoying."

They dragged him outside to continue the beating in broad daylight, secure in the knowledge that no one else in town cared about the rule of law any more than they did. "Where is she?" Gold snarled. "Tell me or I'll put duct tape over your mouth, just for the sadistic pleasure of ripping it off again!"

"No! Anything but that!" Moe whimpered.

"Talk!"
"Fine, fine, I'm sending her across the town line. Hopefully, she'll be lucky enough to wander back into a populated area before the wolves that frequent our borders eat her."

"I resent that remark!" Ruby protested, flashing her teeth menacingly.

"You can have what's left when I'm done with him," Gold promised, tightening his grip on the florist's throat. "Where are you sending her across? Do you want to be escargot?! ANSWER ME!"

David pried them apart. "Stop killing him, Gold. Murder is the one crime I actually care about." He took Moe's hand to check for a pulse, and noticed a dark smudge on the florist's hand. "Chekov's dust! I knew we'd meet again!" They piled into the van that Moe had swiped back and gassed up in preparation for his next meeting with Gold. "To the mines!"

As Captain Jones limped aboard his ship with Milah's assistance, one of the pirates ran up to them. "What happened to you, boss?"

"What happened is that I didn't get my butt kicked by a sniveling wimp!" Jones answered a little too loudly.

"Fetch the prisoner and get us some water," Milah commanded.

"Hey, who made you captain?"

"Shut up and fall in line or I'll beat you to death!" she snarled.

Rumplestiltskin climbed aboard. "You're as sweet and loving as ever, Milah, and that's not a compliment."

She snatched the bean from its rightful owner, since that was her professional duty as a pirate. She held it out for her husband, but when he reached for it, she tossed it over his head with a giggle. "Keepaway!" She and her boyfriend enjoyed a long, playful game of catch.

Rumplestiltskin gritted his teeth. "I'm still an omnipotent psychopath, in case you've forgotten."

Milah sobered. "Fine, you can have it, now go away."

"With great pleasure, but can I ask you a question first?"

"If this is about the remote control, I buried it before I left as an act of revenge."

"No, this question is about Bae."

"Who?"

"Your only son."

"Oh, him. What about him?"

"HE'S DOING HORRIBLY! THANKS FOR ASKING!" the Dark One screamed, summoning the Kraken to come and smack the ship around.

"Uh, how's Bae?" she ventured belatedly.

"How do you think?! You abandoned him just like I did, you evil hag!"
"Hey, I was in an unfulfilling relationship! Unfulfilling!" Milah defended. "What else could I have done but fake my death and blame it on you?"

"Ever hear of a little thing called divorce?"

Dollar signs sparkled in her eyes. "Say, that's not a bad idea," she said to her boyfriend. "Unload Rumple and walk out of it with half his stash of magic gold."

Rumplestiltskin looked hurt. "Why do you hate me so much? You left way before I became worth hating."

"Because you had the nerve to be alive, of course! How the hell am I supposed to love a guy who's alive?!"

"Being alive is a crime now?" Rumplestiltskin feigned shock. "Well then, for old times' sake, allow me to help you kick the habit!" He plunged a hand into her chest, ripped out her heart, and started playing hacky-sack with it.

"No! My chance at half the Dark One's gold!" Jones cried, gathering her into his arms.

Milah coughed loudly.

"Whom I love with all my heart," the captain saved. He glanced up at his crew. "Don't just stand there! Defend us!"

They shrank back. "Sorry, boss, but we're pirates. If you wanted comrades who would unselfishly risk death to defend you, you should have hired knights."

Seeing that her friends were useless, Milah decided to say her goodbyes. "I love you."

"That's all I wanted to hear." Cheered, Rumplestiltskin prepared to return her heart to her chest cavity.

"No, I was talking to Killian."

"Oh." The Dark One's face fell. "Squish!"

"No!" Jones wailed miserably. "You bastard!"

"Why does everyone keep saying that like I don't already know?" Rumplestiltskin sneered. "Now fork over the bean, pretty boy."

"Why don't you make me?" Jones sassed.

"All right." Rumplestiltskin conjured a lightsaber and chopped off his fist, bean and all. "To the pain, dearie!"

"Hey, I'm the pirate! That phrase is my domain!" he screamed, running at the imp with a hook.

Rumplestiltskin swatted it aside. "Please, Captain. You're embarrassing yourself."

"Even demons can be killed! I will find a way!" the pirate vowed solemnly.

"I seriously doubt that, but you're dear for trying." The imp chuckled, patted his head patronizingly, and disappeared.
"Hey boss, you want a tourniquet for that hand of yours?" one of the pirates offered.

He examined the bloodless stump where his hand had once been. "Naw, I'm good, thanks."

Down in the mines, the man in the ugly hat was chaining Belle to a mining cart. "Tying the love interest to a railroad track?" she scoffed. "Hmph, real original."

He glowered at her. "I'd say I'm going to miss you once your personality is erased, but I'm told you don't like being lied to." He nodded at the cart. "The key is in the bottom of the cart, though I don't know why I'm wasting our time telling you, since it's not like you'll remember this conversation in ten seconds." He gave her a push to send her on her way. "Happy trails!"

As she hurtled toward doom, Belle steeled herself. "Okay Belle, this is no time to be turning into some damsel in distress," she muttered, groping for the key. "You are a strong, modern, independent—" She accidentally threw the key overboard. "Klutz," she finished deflatedly. With a sigh of resignation, she pressed the back of her hand to her forehead and screamed for help. "Help! Help! Big strong man urgently needed!"

"I'm none of those things, but I love you!" Gold's voice echoed down the tunnel.

"I guess you'll have to do," Belle agreed reluctantly.

A wisp of magic pulled her back to the chamber where Gold, David, Ruby, and Moe were waiting. "Wow," said the werewolf, glancing at Gold. "That was impressive. Does he have a less evil brother?"

Being who he was, David instinctively stepped forward to sweep the damsel off her feet. Then he remembered that they were both in love with other people, and sat her back down. Gold shoved him aside, face-first. "Belle, are you all right? Do you remember me?"

"Yes. Rumplestiltskin, I remember."

He waited for the 'I love you' that usually followed those words, but it wasn't forthcoming. "What's wrong?" He checked his breath. "Was Ruby right about me needing that mint?"

"No, what's wrong is that my boyfriend is a bastard."

"Why does everyone keep saying that like I don't—I mean, no I'm not," Gold saved."

"Boy, do I hate being right all the time," said Moe with a smirk. "Okay, that's a lie, I love it. Come on, Belle. Let's go home. The Teletubbies are on in a few, and afterward, I'll put you down for your nap."

"Dad, I'm thirty."

Moe stuffed his fingers in his ears. "La la la la la la la! I can't hear you!"

She turned to David. "Sheriff, he just tried to destroy me because he doesn't like my dating habits. Isn't that illegal?"

David burst out laughing. "Wow, you really are new around here, aren't you?"

Filled with disgust toward the entire male gender, Belle grabbed Ruby and went off to drown her sorrows in some more non-alcoholic beverages. "And as a final punishment, you get to explain this to Team Rumbelle!" she called over her shoulder.
"Crap," grumbled Gold.

At the only diner in town, Ruby was serving Belle breakfast in the middle of the afternoon for some reason. "I can't believe the nerve of those two, treating you like a child. Here, let me teach you how to eat pancakes."

Belle banged her head on the counter. "There's just no escape for me, is there?"

Hoping to cheer her up, Ruby handed her a small box. "Your boyfriend dropped this off for you."

"This had better not be a wedding ring." Belle opened it up and found a key to the library instead. "Oh. Well, good, I guess."

Belle walked into the library. "Let's see now, do I read English?" She opened a book experimentally. "Yes! Thank heaven for plot holes."

Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Hey, baby. I know you said you didn't want to see me again, but I figured you were just playing hard to get."

Belle was unimpressed. "If you think you're going to win me over by giving me a library, think again. Like the cup, that trick can only work so many times."

"No." He held up the crow in its birdcage again. "I came so you could watch me chow down on this."

"What woman could say no to an offer like that?"

He took a deep breath. "Okay, here it goes. I'm a coward, as evidenced by my desire to be alive. And that whole business with me tossing my kid into a hellish green portal."

"Why would you do that?"

He waved his cane at her. "Because magic has become a crutch I can't function without, in case the symbolism wasn't obvious enough for you. Anyway, I want to go and look for my kid, but I can't, because my magic has ruined everything. Story of my life," he sighed sadly. "That night down in the basement, I was using magic to...f-find...the one ring to rule them all," he choked out. "Damn it!" He braced himself, took a deep breath, and tried again. "I need magic to look for Bae. There, I finally said it!" he gasped. "I have horribly destroyed so much that I love, and before I get a chance to do the same to you, I just wanted to give you a heads-up." He patted her cheek and left. "Bye, baby. Since I love you, I'll try not to murder you like I usually do with my exes."

On the verge of tears, Belle called out to him. "Rumplestiltskin, wait! Have you ever eaten a hamburger?"

"I've eaten butchers whom I transformed into hamburger, does that count?"

"You look hot in leather, so I'll overlook that remark. We should go out to dinner some time, provided you're not doing the cooking."

Rumplestiltskin sat Jones' severed hand on his desk, next to a framed drawing of a stick figure labeled "Baelfire." He glanced at the picture unhappily. "Oh, if only I'd paid more attention in that art class, instead of murdering the instructor for giving me an F!" Hoping to cheer himself up, he opened
the dismembered fist to get himself a bean, but all he found was a note scribbled on the palm reading, "Gotcha, loser!" Rumplestiltskin responded the same way he always responded to life's minor setbacks: by smashing all his stuff. "He tricked me! Yet again! Man, I really need to get more paranoid."

Aboard the ship, Captain Hook—like that surprises anyone—was chucking his girlfriend's body overboard. "Sorry, honey, but without your divorce settlement, there's no way we can afford a proper funeral," he apologized.

"Mmph! Mmph!" the man in the ugly hat mumbled through his gag.

"Let him speak," Hook commanded. "It could be entertaining."

"You have to give me my bean back!" he commanded once his mouth was uncovered. "I'm its rightful owner!"

Hook laughed good-naturedly. "Friend, in case the hook on my wrist and the Jolly Roger hanging from our mast didn't clue you in, we're pirates."

"But I thought you guys lived by a code!"

"We do, but it's more like guidelines than actual rules. Now, with Milah gone, I'm in dire need of a good sidekick. You interested?"

"Drop dead."

"Come on, it'll be fun! We'll go to Neverland, get eternal youth, plot my revenge, and maybe kill some little boys, if time permits."

"Hm, tempting. Can I have my hat back?"

Hook grinned. "Yes, and I'll even give you a hideous striped shirt to match it."

Smee saluted. "Oh Captain, my Captain!"

"That's the spirit!" Hook tossed the bean overboard, creating a massive whirlpool. "Now, I forgot to button down the hatches, so put on your earplugs, everyone! We're going in!"

"But Captain, I thought magic beans were for travel to Earth, not Neverland?"

"This is a special heirloom variety!" Hook hollered, piloting his boat through the portal and into the imagination of J.M. Barrie.

Now that Belle was out of the picture, Gold was free to tie up and kidnap people again, so it wasn't all bad. Entering his basement, he waded through the sea of rat traps he'd set out around poor Smee. "You kidnapped and terrified my girlfriend!" he accused.

"And now you've kidnapped and terrified me," Smee whimpered. "Can't we just call it even?"

"No, I've brought you here because I need some dirt on your boss."

"Moe?"

"No, the sexy one."
"I don't know! The curse didn't take him, for some reason. I'm not sure why, but knowing him, I suspect he flirted with it until it forgot why it was looking for him."

"That seems highly likely," Gold agreed. "So, where is he now?"

In the fulfillment of every nightmare Gold had ever had, Hook was conferring with Cora. "Hey, Hook," Cora greeted. "You're looking vengeful today."

"Same to you, Cora," he replied gallantly. "So, I hear you have something to show me." He spotted the bottle in her hand. "Ooh, is it a fairy?!"

"No." She showed him the vial of wardrobe ashes. "It's the remains of a magical wardrobe that can travel between worlds."

"Oh." Hook's face fell. "I guess that's good, too. So where exactly are we going? I'll need very precise directions; Jack Sparrow stole my compass."

"Well, you see, there is a town in Maine…"

The pirate perked up. "Is that where…?"

"Absolutely everyone of importance is, yes."

"Sweet! I know it's against the Nature Conservation Plan of 2007, but I'm gonna skin me a crocodile!"

Cora patted him patronizingly on the head. "I seriously doubt that, but you're dear for trying."
The Doctor

As the Girl Power Squad headed back toward Ye Olde Refugee Camp, Aurora discovered yet another thing she had in common with Snow White. "Just a heads-up, guys, I suck at lying. I'm even worse at it than I am at fighting."

"It's not really a lie, Aurora," Mary Margaret defended. "While we don't know anything about the circumstances of Lancelot's death, given that his name contains the word "lance", it's a safe bet that they were heroic."

"Just leave the lying to us." Emma glanced over at her mom, who was frolicking innocently with a passing flock of bluebirds. "Okay, leave the lying to me."

Mulan stopped, looking up at the empty guard tower. "Hey, where did my men go? They'd better not be having a sing-along without me!"

"No, Mulan, they're over there." Emma pointed grimly at a heap of bloody, mangled corpses that were just waiting for some intrepid young mad scientist to come along and make good use of them.

"This cannot be!" the warrior cried. "How could the ogres have done this? I mean, I know our camp was completely unfortified and comprised of flimsy lean-tos that even the most asthmatic wolf could have blown over, but they're freaking blind! It's not like we should have to put much effort into hiding from them!"

Mary Margaret suddenly noticed that the corpses' hearts had all been removed. "I know this spell. It's a favorite of Rumplestiltskin, the Evil Queen, and the Queen of Hearts, but the first two seem to be going anti-hero, so it must have been Cora."

"Her again?" Mulan groaned. "Can't we battle some other villain for a change?"

"Yo," came a feeble voice from the bottom of the corpse pile.

Wishing she'd had the foresight to bring some dwarves with her, Emma started digging. At the bottom of the heap, she discovered the most well-groomed, well-fed refugee ever. "Mm," I survive a massacre and hook up with four foxy ladies all in one day?" The man grinned. "Everything's coming up Killian!" Then, upon noticing their stares, he launched into his best Rumplestiltskin impression. "I mean, ahhh! A bunch of sweet little princesses!" He groveled pitifully at their dainty little feet. "Please don't hurt me!"

In front of the only diner in town, David sat doing an inordinate amount of brooding for a blond guy. Dr. Whale gave him a friendly wave. "Hi, David. I just dropped by to wish you a happy Halloween, since that's all the writers think I'm good for."

Without preamble, David punched him in the face. "You slept with my wife, you scumbag!"

Then, feeling a tap on his shoulder, the quasi-prince turned around and found a fuming Sir Frederick staring him in the face. "You slept with my wife, you scumbag!" the knight roared, socking him in the jaw and storming off.

Meanwhile, Whale had taken out his cellphone to report David's crime. "Hey, does it count as police brutality if the guy's not an actual cop?"
“Eh, who cares? There’s nobody for you to report me to anyway,” David pointed out.

“True. Well, to keep this conversation from being a total waste of time, can you confirm or deny the conspiracy theories about Emma and the lovely Eminem still being alive?”

“You don’t have to make up conspiracy theories. We have Henry for that, and besides, I’m an honest politician.”

At that, Whale started cracking up. “Honest politician? Wow, you really are from Fairytale Land, aren’t you?”

“You know it, homie. Now, speaking of Emma and Eminem, can you keep your face away from my fist so that I can get back to looking for them?”

“Sure. But tell me, if they still exist, does that mean my homeland still exists, too?”

David shrugged. “Maybe I could find out, if you’d drop the mysterious act and tell me where the hell you’re from.”

Horrified at the prospect of losing his Gothic mystique, Whale came up with an idea. “I’ll make you a deal, Your Highness. I’ll tell you where I’m from if you tell me your real name.”

David grew unaccountably nervous. “On second thought, maybe you should try Regina instead.”

Archie Hopper opened his front door and found Regina on his front step, surrounded by Doublemint wrappers. “My name is Regina, and I’m a magiholic!” she cried.

“Is that a real word?” the good doctor wondered.

“If it’s not, I’m inventing it. So, can I ask you for some advice?”

“That depends,” Archie replied warily. “Are you going to stop using me as a pawn in your evil schemes?”

“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” she grumbled, barging in, as usual.

Sitting on a highly stereotypical couch, she began pouring out her original heart. “Magic and my killer good looks are how I’ve always gotten what I want, and I’m not gonna stay beautiful forever, so what am I supposed to do?”

Archie stuck a pipe in his mouth and donned a smoking jacket. “Fascinating. Do you think these issues are related to your feelings about your mother?”

“I thought that was obvious!” She buried her face in her hands. “I can’t believe I’m paying two hundred bucks an hour for this.”

Dr. Whale stormed into the office, toting a suitcase full of lab coats. “Send me home at once, or I’ll kill you, reanimate you, and marry you to my brother!” he threatened.

“Use my powers for good instead of evil?” Regina blinked. “How the hell am I supposed to redeem myself by doing stuff like that?”

Archie started shoving Whale toward the exit. “Dr. Whale, I’m sorry, but you’re violating patient confidentiality and horning in on my precious few minutes of screen time, and I can’t allow it to continue.” He tossed him out and locked the door behind him. “Now then,” he said, turning back to
Regina. "I think we've spent enough time on your mother issues for today. Let's move on to your daddy issues. I understand you've been hanging on to his corpse for the past twenty-eight years. Not to judge you or anything, but isn't that kind of...well...creepy?"

Regina frowned. "How did you know about that?"

"My entomological spy network keeps me updated on every aspect of my patients' lives," he explained, snapping his fingers and summoning forth an army of crickets.

Regina raised an eyebrow. "And I'm the creepy one, here?"


The Proto-Evil Queen, garbed in a bright red robe and star-spangled hat, was tentatively animating a broom under the watchful eyes of Rumplestiltskin. "Congratulations, you've just earned your first 'O' in Charms," the Dark One trilled, conjuring a unicorn. "Now then, if you could just attack this age-old symbol of purity and innocence as an illustration of your descent into evil, we'll call it a day."

"But I don't wanna descend into evil!" Regina whined. "I just wanna cuddle with my snugglebear!"

"Listen to your friend!" the unicorn urged. "Evil is highly overrated!"

"Shut up, both of you!" Rumplestiltskin ripped out the creature's heart, picked up a tennis racket, and served it to his young apprentice. "Now kill the damn thing; I've already got the barbecue fired up!"

Regina began squeezing the heart uncertainly, watching the poor creature writhe in pain on the ground. "Are you sure we're the good guys?"

"For the last time, no!"

She tossed the heart aside. "Then screw it."

Rumplestiltskin shook his head ruefully. "You've got the queen part down, but the evil part needs work." He handed her a business card. "Call me when you lose the hang-ups, dearie."

"I'm afraid my disorder goes deeper than even you and your bug friends know," Regina was confessing back on the highly stereotypical couch. "In addition to my dead father, I've also got my dead lover magically suspended in a glass case." She looked up at Archie, and found him dialing his phone urgently.

"Hello, Nurse Ratched? This is Dr. Hopper. Is Belle's cell still vacant?"

Annoyed, Regina reached over and yanked the phone cord out of the wall. "What's the big deal? Charming did it and nobody questioned his sanity!" she defended. "At least I never made out with my beloved corpse."

"Doing it for a few minutes is cute," Archie replied. "Doing it for forty-plus years is just plain wrong." He studied her face thoughtfully. "Hey, can I ask you a question? You know how Prince Charming is also the pauper from The Prince and the Pauper, and Rumplestiltskin is also the beast from Beauty and the Beast? Are you also Miss Havisham from Great Expectations? Because that would explain an awful lot."

Regina stood to leave. "If I wanted to be insulted, I'd call my son."
"Regina, wait!" Archie cried, chasing after her. "I can help you."

"Do you know any unattached stable boys?"

"No."

"Then bye."

Normally, Regina was intelligent enough to know that driving home alone on a dark and stormy Halloween night was just begging for trouble, but at present, the effects of withdrawal were wreaking havoc on her brain.

She was forced to slam on her breaks, however, when a large, wooden crash test dummy that sort of resembled August jumped out in front of her. "Sorry, Madam Mayor, but I've got to get home before I start to warp in this rain!" he yelled over his shoulder, running like a non-capitalized whale was chasing.

Regina shuddered. "Man, it doesn't get any creepier than that." Then she looked up and saw her dead fiancé waving at her from across the street, scratching absently at his newly-acquired neck bolts. "Then again, never say never."

David pulled up to the stables that existed in Storybrooke for the purposes of this episode and hauled his dozing grandson out of the front seat of the pickup. "All right, Henry. With your grandma and her army of bluebirds so cruelly torn from us, I've decided to take over your veterinary training for now. Say hello to your noble steed."

"How on earth did you manage to buy me a horse on a cop's salary?" Henry wanted to know.

"I didn't buy him. I used the Charming Family Charm on the stable owner until she caved in and signed over the deed to me." The quasi-prince smirked. "All right, lesson number one is going to cover feeding and watering the horse, mucking out his stall, and singing him 'Run for the Roses' whenever he's feeling blue."

"But Gramps, we're princes. Don't we have servants for that kind of stuff?"

"Yeah, but they've all discovered democracy, so we're on our own for now." He headed for the door. "Well, I'll see you later, Henry. Enjoy your twelve hundred pounds of unfamiliar animal, and try not to get killed until I get back."

Henry stroked the horse's nose curiously. "So, anything you want to tell me?"

"A horse is a horse, of course, of course, and no one can talk to a horse, of course," the horse replied.

"I walked right into that, didn't I?"

Regina, having completely lost any semblance of genre-savviness she might have once had, was now entering a magical crypt on Halloween. "Hello? Dad, have you seen Daniel?" She made her way down to the tanning bed where she'd stashed Daniel's body and found it emptier than Graham's chest cavity. "He's alive? But how?" She gasped. "Has he been kissing Emma behind my back?" She burst into tears. "Danny, how could you?!"
At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, the Proto-Evil Queen was finishing up her Potions final, while Rumplestiltskin sat at the spinning wheel and continued in his quest to create a yarn ball worthy of the Guinness Book of Records. Regina cleared her throat loudly. "Um, boss, I hate to interrupt you while you're pretending to know how to use a spinning wheel, but I've been waiting on my report card for two hours now." She smiled, barely able to contain her excitement. "If it's good, I'm going to throw it through that mirror you gave me and hope it lands in Mom's face."

He handed her a piece of paper. "You failed Evil miserably, but if you'll answer this extra credit question for me, I could be persuaded to rethink that decision." He donned a pair of sunglasses and tossed a scarf around his neck. "What's your motivation?"

"Uh, I'm bitter and vengeful?"

"Liar."

"I think I'd look good in black?" she tried.

"Probably, but it's not enough."

"Okay, the truth is, I still want to cuddle with my late snugglebear."

"Oh, please, are you still going on about that?" Rumplestiltskin rolled his eyes. "Bah, true love is so pointless! Why would a sorcerer want to possess the ultimate form of magic, with the power to undo even the most terrible of curses?" He pointed her toward the door. "You've got a lot to learn, dearie."

Jefferson appeared out of nowhere. "Yo, Rumple!" He held up a baggie. "I've brought your daily dose of shrooms, as requested."

Rumplestiltskin blushed furiously. "That's not mine! You must be looking for Rump-el-stiltskin. I don't even know you, Jefferson! I mean—" He grabbed the bag and bolted for the door. "Bye!"

Jefferson shook his head sadly. "Poor guy. He just keeps getting worse every year." He went over to the spinning wheel and started stuffing his man-purse with gold. "So, Regina, I couldn't help overhearing that your sweetie-pie's caught a bad case of death. If you're interested, I know a guy who can clear that right up."

"If you're talking about Jesus, I don't think he's part of our cosmology."

"No, someone else."

"If you mean Aslan, I'm afraid he and I haven't been on speaking terms since I gave him that bad haircut."

"No, I'm talking about a dude named—"

Regina clamped a hand over Jefferson's mouth. "We don't need to know his name yet. Just go get him, please."

"Will do, but first, let's talk price. Can you get me a royal passport?"

"No."

Jefferson looked flummoxed. "Uh, the correct answer is 'yes'," he whispered into her ear. "You're married to the king, remember?"

"No, actually I don't. When did that happen?" She frowned. "And doesn't he care that I'm off
"From what I know of the king, he doesn't care about anything but his daughter and Prozac."

Regina couldn't argue with that. "And this guy can really bring back my man? Fully functional, without any weird sparkling or other side effects?"

"Let me put it this way," said Jefferson sagely. "If he can't, then you may as well give up any hope of ever being loved and just kill everyone." A loud coughing noise was heard from the next room, and Jefferson sighed wearily. "And Rumplestiltskin is always right." Another loud coughing noise. "And also incredibly good-looking," the hatter finished. A printed money sack appeared on the table in front of him. "Well, my work here is done. Later!"

Emma was observing Hook intently from a distance. "This is just to gather intel, this is just to gather intel, this is just to gather intel," she kept telling herself as she watched his muscles ripple. "Hey Mulan? What can you tell me about this guy?"

"Well, he showed up a few weeks ago, claiming to be a blacksmith, but I don't know if I believe that. I mean, what does he do? Hold the hammer in his teeth?"

"It is awfully suspicious," Emma agreed. "Plus, he's incredibly sexy, and everyone knows that evil is sexy." She prepared a beverage for the mysterious stranger, and was preparing to spike it with some poison, but then he flashed his cutest smile at her and she just couldn't bring herself to go through with it. "Here, drink up before I change my mind."

Hook sniffed the beverage warily. "Is this rum?"

"Yeah."

"AAAGH!" He threw it into the sea, cup and all.

Emma gave him a funny look. "Uh, how exactly did someone as mentally unstable as you manage to keep it together long enough to escape from Cora?"

"Would you believe I seduced her?"

"No, no man is that brave."

"It's the tru..." He cringed in abject shame. "Okay, I can't go through with this. Would you believe I used the Duck and Cover method?"

Emma was unamused. "For your information, I have a superpower that tells me when someone is lying."

"Then why didn't you use it on Lancelot?"

"...Shut up."

Mary Margaret dragged her daughter away from the pirate. "You two can establish sexual tension later. Right now, we need to work on finding a way back to Storybrooke, before my grandson gets sick of being constantly abandoned and decides to put himself up for adoption again."

Hook looked confused. "You have a grandson?"

"Yes, and the sad thing is, that's not the most confusing thing about our family tree."
"Enough chit-chat!" Lacking her chainsaw, Emma shoved a dagger in the pirate's face. "Tell us who you really are, or so help me, I'll cut off your goatee!"

"No! Anything but that!"

Regina entered the psycho ward under the hospital, pointedly ignoring Sidney's pleas for help as they rang down the hall. "Hello? Dr. Whale? Where are you?" She froze. "Wait, are you working with Hopper? Was this some kind of ruse to lure me into Belle's old cell?"

Because her husband was either the most oblivious or the most open-minded monarch in medieval history, he had allowed Regina to invite her dead lover, her mad scientist, and her dark magic practitioner over to the palace. "So Jefferson, this wizard we're off to see, is his name Oz, perchance?"

"No, it's-"

She crammed an apple into his mouth. "Shhh!"

"Sorry." He flung open the patio doors and made a grand gesture. "Allow me to present your salvation. Unless he's not, in which case, Rumplestiltskin was right about everything, always has been, and always will be." Another bag of gold materialized in his hands. "I love this job!"

The doctor bowed. "Always nice to meet a fellow corpse enthusiast, Your Majesty. Now, if you'll just introduce me to my patient..." he prompted, shouldering a large shovel.

"Uh, no grave robbing will be necessary, Doctor."

"Oh." He sat it aside, looking incredibly disappointed. "Not even a little bit?"

Regina gave Jefferson a sideways glance. "Are you sure this guy's licensed?" she whispered.

"Oh, you wanted a reputable necromancer?" said the hatter sarcastically. "Sorry, Reg, but I think it's a pipe dream."

The doctor peered down into the lipstick-smeared glass case containing Daniel's lifeless body. "Wow, he is hot," the doctor noted. "I can see your dilemma, Your Majesty."

"Can you help him?"

"Probably not, but what have you got to lose?"

"The last precious scrap of my sanity!" Regina screamed, seizing him by the front of his jacket and shaking him furiously. "And when the Queen ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!"

The doctor pried her off of him. "All right, all right, lady, chillen Sie out. If you want my help, I'm going to need yours. I understand that there are hearts in this land, transformed by magic into florescent-pink plastic. I demand one of those, a three million dollar research grant, and a fully-equipped lab."

"I'll give you a secondhand heart, ten bucks, and a tent in the backyard."

He sighed. "Deal."
Regina crept through the hospital, which had been deserted by all patients and personnel in order to help create a nice, spooky atmosphere. Because it was Halloween. Just in case you've forgotten. "Dr. Whale? Please don't be injured! There aren't any other doctors to treat you!" She wandered into an operating room, which someone had vandalized and filled with strobe lights. "Dr. Whale, have you been holding raves in here again?" She peeked under a sheet, and found a severed arm. "Ew! This is less gory than that village full of corpses that I slaughtered, but not by much."

She dragged Whale out from under the bed. "Doctor, how the hell did you survive this without a tourniquet?" she marveled, waving the arm at him. A plethora of tacky "do you need a hand" puns invaded her mind, but as she was trying to kick her supervillain image, she pointedly ignored them. "Where's Daniel? Did you bring him back?"

"I could really use some first aid," the doctor groaned.

"Info first, emergency medical care later!"

"Ugh..." Whale clamped a hand over his gushing brachial artery. "All right, I brought the patient back, but he's a monster. Again. You know, I'm starting to think I should give up the whole necromancy gig and become an ENT specialist instead."

The Proto-Evil Queen stood in front of a spacious fireplace, flanked by Jefferson and Frank...uh, the doctor. "Do either of you gentlemen have a bag of marshmallows?"

"No."

"Then we may as well get down to business. Listen up."

"I don't have time for the comforting ambience of crackling logs, Your Majesty!" the doctor snapped.

"Just listen."

The throbbing of a thousand ill-gotten hearts could be heard behind the wall. The thump of a broom could be heard on the floor under their feet. "How many times have I asked you to turn those damned things down after ten p.m.?" a shrill voice griped.

"Sorry." Regina produced a remote and lowered the volume.

"Incredible," the doctor breathed. "I had no idea The Telltale Heart was a fairytale."

"No, this is my mother's old heart collection." She clicked another button and the fireplace swung open, revealing a vault lined with loudly-thumping shoeboxes. She took down one of them, which was labeled "Hearts of the Damned, 1973-74," and handed it to him. "My mother was a hoarder. A habit she picked up from the Dark One, along with being an evil sicko."

He opened it up and took a look. "This is gross and unnatural. I love it!"

Regina stood outside the operating room watching, while Archie, as Storybrooke's only other doctor, nervously attempted to sew Whale's arm back on.

"Regina!" David barked at her. "I just got a call that Whale was attacked. What gives, did he 'accidentally' stick his tongue down your throat one time too many?"

"No, this particular dismemberment wasn't my doing."
"Then whose?"

"My boyfriend's, but don't judge him too harshly. Getting murdered and then reanimated in a weird new dimension can be really disorienting."

"Your boyfriend? You mean that stable boy you used to abuse one minute and make out with the next?" Sympathy flickered in David's eyes. "Poor dude. I'd be confused, too."

"Then you'll help him?"

"Hell no, he's creepy!"

"Aw, come on!" Regina pled. "If your true love was in danger, I'd—"

"Pop some champagne and laugh maniacally?"

"Probably," Regina admitted. "But that's no reason to kill him! If jumped off the Troll Bridge, would you do it, too?"

"No, I'd pop some champagne and laugh maniacally," David replied honestly. "Now tell me where he is, or I'll throw you in jail and order you not to blast your way out with your insane magical powers!"

As much as she loved Daniel, in the face of such a terrifying threat, she had no choice but to throw him under the proverbial bus. "Okay, he's at the stables. Just try not to kill him until I get some closure."

"The stables? Oh no, Henry's there!"

"You left a ten year old boy unattended in a building full of half-ton beasts?" She kicked him in the shin. "You're an even worse guardian than I was, and that's hard to do!"

"So, Ed, old buddy," said Henry, brushing out his new mount's mane. "Gramps said you'd tell me when I'm ready to ride you. Was that some kind of metaphor, or do talking horses actually exist in our continuity?"

"The second one," the horse replied, sniffing the air cautiously. "Hey, is it just me, or does it smell like undead in here?"

Daniel came lumbering into the stall. "Heeere's Danny!"

Ed kicked his master aside and ran for his life. "You're on your own, kid!"

The four lovely ladies of the Girl Power Squad had tied up Hook, and he was trying his best not to enjoy it. "I already told you, I'm just a simple blackguard—uh, blacksmith! Blacksmith!"

"With a badass goatee like that?" Emma scoffed. "Yeah right!"

An ogre staggered past them, tapping a cane. "Duh, I may be both blind and idiotic, but I'm bound to stumble across you eventually, if I keep at it long enough!" it threatened.

"Sounds good to me," said Emma. "Move out, ladies. Our large friend can handle things from here."

Aurora raised her hand timidly. "Excuse me, Miss Swan? I'm new to adventuring, so I could be
wrong, but isn't this murder?"

Emma folded her arms haughtily. "Hey, I have an unsubstantiated hunch that he's lying about his profession. If that's not a crime worthy of the death penalty, I don't know what is."

Hook's eyes narrowed. "You're from Texas, aren't you? Well, I'm certainly not foolish enough to mess with Texas. All right, here's the truth. My name is Hook—"

"Captain Hook?" Emma looked him over appraisingly. "You're a lot scarier and less hilarious than I've been led to believe."

"Thanks for noticing. Anyway, I've been working with Cora because I knew it'd really piss off Rumplestiltskin. But don't worry, I'm not a mass murderer." He nodded at the sea of corpses surrounding them. "I'm only an accomplice to mass murder."

"Oh? Why didn't you just say so?" Mary Margaret smiled brightly, going over to untie him.

"Wait," said Emma. "How is Cora planning to get to Storybrooke? We destroyed the wardrobe and even torched all the hat and mirror stores in the neighborhood, just to be on the safe side.

"Well, she's planning on using the ashes from the wardrobe and a magic compass last seen with a guy named Sparrow. Stop murdering me and I'll help you find it first," he bargained.

Emma brought her face closer to his, and he puckered up his lips out of sheer habit. "Knock that off!" she yelled. "I just wanted to ask you why you want to get to Storybrooke so badly."

"I'm going to get revenge on Rumplestiltskin!"

She gave him a pat on the head. "I seriously doubt that, but you're dear for trying."

Back at the stables, Henry and his future stepdad were having a little trouble bonding. "Hey, mister, do you think you could be a little less terrifying?" he requested meekly.

"Rrrrrr!" Daniel seized him by the throat.

"Urk! Is that a no?" the boy gurgled.

David and Regina arrived on the scene, the latter giggling dreamily. "Aw, isn't that sweet? He's murdering Henry." David gave her a weird look. "Oh, in my family, it's considered a gesture of affection," she clarified.

"And you wonder why I prefer the company of my birth family?" Henry croaked.

"Sorry." She tapped her late fiancé on the shoulder. "Hey, honey, drop the kid and let's go make a new one."

The monster perked right up. "Rrrrr?" he mumbled hopefully, releasing Henry.

David hauled his grandson out of the stall. "Are you okay?"

"I think so!" the boy gasped. "But I'm having this weird, genetically-induced urge to flee like a miserable coward."

"Go with it, kid!" David gave him a little shove to send him on his way.
Regina stared up at her True Love in delighted awe. "It's true! You're alive, and hotter than ever!"

"Rrrrrr!" he snarled in response, putting his hand around her throat and squeezing mercilessly.

"Oh, Daniel, I love you, too!" she cried blissfully.

"Regina, get a grip!" yelled David, zapping the zombie with a cattle prod and hauling her from the stall.

Daniel's fists could be heard thumping on the other side of the stall door. "But I was promised nookie!" a slurred, muffled voice complained.

David shuddered. "That was an image I definitely didn't need in my head. Regina, can you please kill that thing before it tells me anything truly traumatic?"

"Use my magic to protect innocents from an undead abomination?" Regina stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Why, that would be evil even by my standards!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, who writes this stuff?" the quasi-prince grumbled, drawing his gun.

"No!" whined Regina, ineffectively smacking him with her limp, girly fists. "Man, I'm really lame without my magic," she observed. "David, please! Just let me talk to him!"

"But he'll kill you, probably slowly and painfull—" A wicked gleam appeared in David's eyes. "On second thought, what the hey? Who am I to stand in the way of true love?" He opened the door for her, bowing gallantly. "Your prince awaits!"

The doctor set up his grossly-underfunded laboratory in the middle of a thunderstorm, while Regina watched with wide eyes. "Wow, are you going to harness the elemental power of lightning for this experiment?"

"No, I just think it looks neat." He held out his hand. "Now hurry up and make with the heart. I've got a date with Morticia Adams in an hour."

She forked it over and he went back to the tent. Regina and Jefferson looked on while his shadow hovered over Daniel's on the tent canvas. "Wait a minute, who's making that third shadow?" the Proto-Evil Queen wondered.

It floated over and waved at them. "Evening, folks, sorry to bother you, but I'm looking for a kid named Henry."

"Never heard of him," said Jefferson.

"Thanks anyway!"

"That was weird," she observed at it flew away.

"Look around, lady," said Jefferson, spreading his arms wide. "Everything about this scenario is weird. But at least it will get results, unless it doesn't, in which case, Rumplestiltskin is totally the man." Another bag of gold appeared in his hands, and he grinned. "On the bright side, my little girl's going to college!"

A mighty crash of lightning lit up the night, and the doctor's shadow threw its head back, laughing. "Bwa hah hah! It's not alive! It's not alive!"
"Aw, damn it."

Regina tiptoed quietly into the stall. "Snugglebear? It's me, Cuddlebunny!"

In an utterly unprecedented move that absolutely no one could have foreseen, Daniel started strangling her again. "Rrrrr!"

"You're wasting your time!" she rasped. "The more you abuse me, the more I'll adore and respect you!"

Daniel's eyes suddenly flickered with recognition. "Why, I'd know that damaged psyche anywhere! Hi, Regina!"

"The one and only, baby!" She flung herself into his arms. "Come on, let's go make out in the tack room! It'll be just like old times."

"I'd rather die," said Daniel.

"Hey!"

"That's not an insult, I meant it literally. Undeath blows."

Regina hesitated. "I don't know, Daniel. I have a tendency to cause apocalypses when you die."

Daniel flinched, clutching at his—or rather, at Regina's despised dentist's—heart. "Yeah, about that. I'd appreciate it if you'd knock that off. I'm really not worth all the fuss. I don't know if you ever realized it, but I was seeing Maleficent behind your back." He gave her a gentle pat on the back. "You need to move on. You're a great girl, and you deserve a man who's alive."

"Do not!" she wailed despondently.

"Do so." He tapped his aching chest. "Now, if you'll kindly get this heart back to its rightful own… rrrrr…." His skin suddenly and inexplicably turned green.

Tears streaming down her face and somehow leaving her mascara untouched, she raised a hand and melted him. "Oh Daniel!" she bawled. "I've ended your pain and defended my community in the only way I was physically equipped to!" She sank to her knees, sobbing like a child. "I'm a monster! A monster!"

The Girl Power Squad made their way through the woods, with special guest Captain Hook in tow. "All right," said the pirate, "after he was done yelling at me for stealing all his mannerisms, Captain Sparrow mentioned that he was planning on selling the compass to a guy living at the top of that beanstalk." He pointed out the bit of bad CGI they were looking for.

"Emma," Mary Margaret whispered, "if you don't realize that this is a trap, I'm disowning you."

"Silly Eminem, I know it's a trick," her daughter scoffed. "Don't you see what my master plan is? We're going to avoid capture by walking into it anyway and hoping something will come along to save us."

Mary Margaret buried her face in her hands. "That settles it! You're not getting your hands on my kingdom!"
Barging in to Rumplestiltskin's yard, as usual, Regina found her mentor busy with his latest hot female apprentice. "What, another one, Rumple?"

"Yep. Allow me to introduce the lovely Esmeralda," the Dark One trilled merrily. "Her fans are all up in arms because she fell in love with Phoebus, rather than Quasimodo, and she needed a place to lay low for a while."

"Whatever." The queen twirled around grandly, showing off her spiffy new outfit. "As you can see, I'm dressed in head-to-toe black now. Will that be enough to convince you of my commitment to the forces of evil?"

"Nope, sorry."

"How about this, then?" She tore out the other woman's heart and crushed it to dust.

"Justice!" the poor girl cried with her last breath.

"Not in this dimension, dearie," Rumplestiltskin cackled.


Archie cracked the door, looking incredibly tired. "Regina, I can't handle any more of your mood swings today. Can I just prescribe you some heavy-duty tranquilizers and call it a night?"

"Not this time, Dr. Hopper. It's an emergency. I protected my loved ones and restored the balance of nature!"

Archie stared blankly.

"By using magic!"

He slapped her. "You vile hag!"

The doctor reluctantly followed Jefferson through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia. "This land of magic and wonderment disgusts me! I demand to be sent back to my own drab, ignorant dimension, before I miss the 8:15 p.m. witch burning!"

Jefferson chuckled. "Wow, you really are new around here. News flash, Doc. Nobody in this world does anything, up to and including reproduction, without Rumplestiltskin's say-so."

The Dark One popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Way to use and manipulate a desperate woman, Doctor. If you ever decide to quit necromancy and become a seducer of babes, I'm sure you'll go far. Jefferson snickered. "Yeah, she cried like a little girl. Hopefully it won't end up affecting my little girl."

The doctor looked down his nose at them. "I find you both disgusting, and I'm a freaking grave robber. Please pay me and get me out of here before I have a major ethical crisis."

"You'd be surprised how often I hear those words," Rumplestiltskin giggled, producing a thumping box labeled, "That Damn IRS Agent."

The doctor peered inside warily. "I hope you'll understand if I'm a little reluctant to trust a guy whose
"Not at all. Would that all my clients could be so intelligent."

The doctor examined the heart beating inside the box. "Hey, wait a minute! This thing's all clogged with cholesterol!"

"Take it or leave it, dearie."

"Great, now in addition to resurrection, I have to invent Lipitor!" he griped, taking Jefferson's hand and following him into the hat.

Dr. Whale, who was either drugged senseless, inhumanly stoic, or both, skipped merrily down the street, carrying his own severed arm in an ice chest. "Afternoon, Granny!" He took the arm out and waved it at her.

"AAAAAAHHHH!" the old woman screamed, running for her crossbow.

"What's with her?" he wondered aloud, continuing on to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. "Yo, Gold! I need your help."

"Help? Me?" Gold laughed, holding out his hand. "I guess we haven't met. Hi, I'm Mr. Gold, a villain."

Whale smacked him with the frozen arm. "Stop screwing around and heal me!"

"All right, but answer a question for me first." He donned a pair of shades and tossed a scarf around his neck. "What's your motivation?"

"I need to go home and reanimate my brother."

"Oh, I get it! You're Dr. Franken—"

Whale covered his mouth with the frozen arm. "Shh!"

"Blech, formaldehyde!" the pawnbroker sputtered, gagging. "All right, I'll give you back your arm if you promise never to do that again and then say the magic words for me."

Whale gritted his teeth. "Rumplestiltskin is right about everything, always has been, and always will be."

Gold giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Damn straight, dearie!" He smeared some superglue on the limb, snapped his fingers, and the doctor was as good as new. "Always a pleasure celebrating Halloween with you, Victor."

The Doctor, who had suddenly and for no reason gone colorblind again, strutted proudly into his laboratory. "Nothing like a dark and stormy night for reanimating a corpse!"

"Doctor, you were gone an awfully long time," his assistant noted. "What happened? Trouble with the Daleks?"

"No, just some harmless mind ga—" He paused in mid-sentence. "Igor, where's your hump?"

"You noticed!" Igor preened. "I visited a plastic surgeon while you were gone."
"Well, you look great, buddy. " He went over to the body on the table, took the heart out of the box, gripped it with a pair of tongs, and attempted to insert it into the slot labeled broken heart. "BZZZZZZZ!" the machine screamed, the patient's nose glowing red. "Damn, let me try again." He steadied his hand, dropped it in, and the body began to twitch. The doctor grinned from ear to ear. "Yes!" he cried triumphantly. "It's true! I'm the doctor for you!"
The Girl Power Squad, with special guest Captain Hook, gaped up at the giant beanstalk in front of them. "It reminds me of death," Mulan said darkly.

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. "You said the same thing about the stop sign, the birdbath, and that meadow full of bunnies."

Aurora patted her friend gently on the back. "We know you're intimidating, Mulan. You don't have to keep reminding us."

"Hey, if this is a beanstalk, why aren't there any beans growing on it?" Emma wondered.

"I ate them all in order to keep Rumplestiltskin from getting them," Hook bragged.

"And where does Jack fit into all of this?"

"Historical records from that era are spotty, at best. Experts believe that Jack was either a man who fought a terrible war against the giants or a slutty girl who used to run cons with the original Prince James."

"I like the second story better. Makes me feel nostalgic. So, what happened?" Emma's eyes darkened. "Did he knock her up and let her go to jail for him?"

"No, they killed all the giants except one. His name's Tiny, but don't let that lull you into a false sense of security. He's still pretty big, compared to us, and he's also friends with Jacob."

Mary Margaret frowned. "And why are we attacking such a well-connected monster, again?"

"Oh, sorry, did you miss the exposition the first hundred times?" Hook cleared his throat, deepening his voice and losing the accent. "Previously, on Once Upon a Time: There's an enchanted compass that will guide us to your land. Cora has the means to open a portal with the wardrobe ashes, but she can't find your land without the compass. All we have to do is get the compass before she does, then steal the ashes." He coughed loudly, his voice returning to normal. "Any questions?"

"I have one," said Aurora, raising her hand. "Who is Cora, and why am I working against her, exactly?"

"We'll think of a reason later, dear," Mary Margaret promised her.

Emma was doing her best to avoid falling in love again, since that never seemed to end well, and was therefore unable to interact with Hook. Luckily, Mulan was available to fill in as team skeptic. "How do we know you're not playing us, the same way you've played every other human being you ever met?" the warrior demanded.

Hook laughed. "Aw, come on, what do you think I'm gonna do? Betray you to Cora? Why would I want to do that? You're hotter, more numerous, and far more lovelorn than she is. My chances of scoring are much better on your side." Then he remembered himself. "Oh, and getting to Storybrooke to complete my ancient quest for revenge will be a nice bonus, too."

Mary Margaret looked at him over in horror. "I'll untie you if you promise to stay the hell away from my daughter."
Hook pouted. "Fine, deal."

Giving her mother a look of pure gratitude, Emma began speaking to Hook without fear. "So, how do we get up there?"

"Core gave me a counterspell." He held up a pair of solid-gold slap bands. "Said she got them out of one of those claw crane vending machines, and if besting one of those isn't magic, I don't know what is." He slapped one of the bands over his unmutilated wrist. "Ow! So, are you guys going to mud-wrestle for the privilege of spending time alone with me, or is Emma going to settle this by finally admitting she's hot for me?" He leered theatrically at Emma.

Mary Margaret decked him. "What did I just say?"

In Portland, a younger and apparently blinder Emma Swan was making a vain attempt to skulk around an alley with a crowbar unsuspiciously. Whistling casually, she smashed in a window on the most garish and distinctive car she could find. "I'm the greatest cat burglar of all time!" she yelled triumphantly out the window, driving off.

A guy popped out of nowhere, rather like Rumplestiltskin was always doing. "Dude," he exclaimed, crawling out of the backseat. "This fledgling crook's in dire need of a mentor."

"Ah! Please don't hurt me!" Emma screamed. "Er, I mean, put your hands up or I'll kill you like the cold-blooded maniac I am."

He just smiled and shook his head. "You're adorable when you're pretending to be tough, but your threats need work. Try ditching the glasses and getting yourself a chainsaw." He held out his hand. "My name is Neal Fire Cassidy. What's yours?"

"I'm not telling you my name. Names have power."

"Who told you that?" Neal demanded, drawing a gun. "Was he green and flamboyant?! ANSWER ME!"

"You're losing your grasp on reality." Emma relaxed. "I love that in man. Emma Swan."

"Good name."

"Thanks, I stole the first half off a blanket and the second half off an ice cream truck. So, what were you doing alone in the backseat of a car? Women troubles?"

"Why don't I tell you over drinks?"

"I'm too young for alcohol, and whatever else you're planning."

Neal looked her over doubtfully. "Are you?"

"I'm seventeen!"

"Huh, I could have sworn you were thirty-three."

"Yes, I get that a lot." Emma demurred.

A siren blared to life behind them. "Okay, Emma, here's your first lesson in crime. Put the freaking crowbar out of sight while you're talking to the cops!" Neal snatched it irritably. "Man, I've got my work cut out for me, here."
A cop came up to the window and whacked Emma on the shoulder with his nightstick. "Slugbug!" he crowed. "Now, let's get down to business. License and registration?"

"Uh, my dragon ate it?" Emma tried lamely. Neal facepalmed. "Yep, this is definitely going to be a project." He poked his head out the window. "Sorry about my girlfriend's crummy driving officer, but you know how hopeless chicks are." He gave the officer his patented Little Orphan Bae smile. "If I promise to beat her severely when we get home, will you let us off with a warning?"

The officer mulled it over. "Severely, you say?"

"I do it all the time. What did you think this was for?" He held up the crowbar.

The officer relaxed. "Why didn't you say so in the first place." He tore up the ticket, gave them a friendly wave, and hit the road.

In light of the results Neal's sexist lies had gotten, Emma wasn't sure how angry to be. "Was that supposed to be funny? Because I think that would make it even worse, somehow."

"Say what you will about my attitudes towards women, at least I've never committed uxorcide." He dangled a set of car keys in front of her. "I only committed grand theft auto."

"You too?" Emma's eyes widened. "Wow, what are the odds of two petty crooks breaking into the same car at the same time?"

"Probably almost as low as the odds of Rumplestiltskin's estranged son and Snow White's estranged daughter travelling to the same foreign dimension and unwittingly hooking up with each other."

The four beautiful women of the Girl Power Squad were competing ruthlessly for the right to join Hook, while the pirate himself averted his eyes in an attempt to keep his ego from exploding. "All due respect," said Mulan, "but I'm the most awesome."

"Hey, I ain't your grandmother's Snow White!" Snow protested. "I've done awesome stuff too!"

"I took out an entire army single-handedly, dueled a barbarian king with nothing but a decorative fan and won, then blew up the Forbidden City." Mulan looked expectantly at Mary Margaret. "Rebuttal?"

Mary Margaret fidgeted uncomfortably. "I…uh…I threw dust at some trolls?"

Mulan didn't dignify that with a response. "Cuff me, Hook. I'm going in."

"Wait!" Aurora interrupted. "I should be the one going. I don't have a man anymore, and my life is therefore meaningless."

Mulan punched her in the face. "Ow! What was that for?" the princess yelped.

"Sorry, but it was my obligation as a feminist icon."

"All of this banter is pointless," Emma piped up. "I'm the protagonist, and that renders my ignorance, Aurora's death wish, and Mulan and Mary Margaret's awesomeness irrelevant."

The three runners-up sulked.
Emma turned to Mulan. "You seem like the least useless of my companions. Got anything that might help me on that utility belt of yours?"

"Sure, I'm always prepared. I actually got my start impersonating a Boy Scout." The warrior handed her a hook. "Here, they're good for fishing, grappling...everything but killing the Dark One."

"Hey! I do my best, damn it!" Hook shouted indignantly.

As an afterthought, Mulan pressed a Ziploc bag into Emma's hand. "Here, this might prove useful, too. It's a Far Eastern sedative powder made from poppies."

"So...opium?"

Mulan bristled. "I prefer my description."

"I should arrest you for possession, but I'm definitely outside my jurisdiction." She pocketed the narcotics. "By the way, how strong is your sword?"

"A +5 katana with the keen and vorpal properties," Mulan bragged.

Emma frowned. "I haven't played third edition in a while. Is that good?"

"Yep."

"In that case, can you use it to cut down the beanstalk if I'm not back in ten hours?"

"Er, yeah, but why?"

"So Hook can't get the compass to Cora."

"But what if he's not the cause of your tardiness? What if you get...I don't know...ATTACKED BY A FREAKING GIANT?"

"Then we're not very good adventurers, and we'll both deserve to die."

"Ladies," Hook interrupted, "please don't make me say 'tick tock'. Those words always turn me into a sniveling wreck."

"Shut up and cuff me in a completely platonic manner," Emma commanded, giving him her hand.

Hook, who was incapable of brushing his teeth in a platonic manner, let alone handcuffing a beautiful woman, smiled lewdly and placed her hand on his chest while he attached the band. "This will allow you to climb the beanstalk. A spidey sense would also help, if you've got one." He held out his hand. "Oh, and before we get underway, can I have my hook back? I need it for backstabbing people." She glared at him, and he held up his hand in a conciliatory gesture. "Literally, dear. I meant literally."

"Well, I'd hate for you to lose your cool nickname on my account." She tossed him the primitive prosthesis. "But don't think I'm taking my eyes off you for one second."

He smirked. "No woman ever does."

Emma and Hook clung to the upper portion of the massive beanstalk, trying to ignore the increasingly strong scent of pesticide. "Well, it's nice to see Captain Swan finally getting off the ground."
"Dude, that was lame."

"I'm a villain, baby. Lame puns are what I live for."

"Just shut up!"

Hook grinned. "If you're trying to put me off, you're going about it the wrong way. I've always adored bitchy women."

"Can we *please* have this conversation when we're not clinging to an insanely tall object without safety harnesses?" Emma pleaded.

"Bah, that's just an excuse! I know what this is about. You've got some kind of crazy hang-up about trusting a career criminal who switches sides more often than a volleyball."

"Look, it's nothing personal," said Emma. "I've just had bad experiences with bad boys."

"Plus you were abandoned as a child, then again as an adult, and now you're afraid of doing the same thing to your son Henry. And then there was the whole Graham thing, which just screwed you up further. And you've got a fear of pigeons, too."

Emma stared at him. "How did you know all that?"

"I'm awesome."

"If you're so awesome, why is it taking you three hundred years to kill one scrawny guy?"

"...Shut up."

As they strolled casually into their local Kwik-E-Mart, Neal theatrically laid a hand on his girlfriend's bulging stomach. "So, Emma, we haven't talked about names yet. I was thinking maybe Gucci for a boy and Prada for a girl."

"That settles it," said Emma decisively, removing herself from his embrace. "First the Neal Cassady knock-off, now this? You're as bad with names as I am. If we ever do have an actual baby, we're getting someone else to name it for us."

"Deal." He pecked her on the cheek. "Now go swipe me a jar of that delicious Peter Pan Peanut Butter, and remember what I told you about keeping the crowbar out of sight." Neal walked up to the cashier. "Hey, is that a crocodile behind you?"

The cashier didn't budge. "I sincerely doubt it."

"I'll never get used to this place." Sighing heavily, Neal moved on to Plan B. "My hot, underaged wife and I—don't judge me!—are a bit lost. We're supposed to be in Portland, but this appears to be Vancouver, British Columbia. Could you give us some directions and free Apollo Bars?"

"Hell no."

Emma, seeing that her man was even worse at evil than she was, smashed a bottle of Evian on the floor. "Oh no! My water just broke!" she cried honestly.

Neal beamed with pride. "The student has surpassed the teacher, though, in all honesty, that's not hard to do." He took a keychain with a swan engraved on it from a nearby rack. "Hey, buddy, do you mind if I take this? I'm going to have a baby to entertain soon, and I hear they like it when you
jingle your keys at them."

"Hey, wait a min—"

But the underaged girl and her adoring molester were already out the door. "Thanks, bye!" They jumped into their ill-gotten Love Bug and tore into a bag of pilfered Apollo Bars. Emma giggled. "You know what would be hilarious? If, one day, we had a baby who was accused of shoplifting Apollo Bars." The pair laughed themselves silly.

"Ah, Emma, the things you come up with." He handed her the keychain. "Here, I got you a present. Cheap, I know, but at least it's not a bridle bit."

Emma smiled when she saw the swan on the front. "Oh, Neal! You remembered my name!" She smooched him enthusiastically. "This is the best birthday ever!"

Neal watched through a pair of high-powered binoculars as a certain motel room became vacant. "We're go, Emma. Twenty minutes to shower, and remember to stay one jump ahead of the breadline."

They ran inside, adorable pet monkey in tow. "Hey, look," said Emma, pointing. "The family who was staying here left their expensive-looking souvenir behind. Do you think they'll come back for it?"

"No, such a thing wouldn't advance the plot." He nodded at the object. "What is it, anyway?"

"You don't know what a dreamcatcher is?" Emma raised an eyebrow. "How does a man grow up in twentieth-century North America without hearing of dreamcatchers?"

Neal paled and started shaking. "Wh-wh-what are you implying?"

"Neal, you're getting that PTSD look in your eye again." Emma reached over to feel her boyfriend's forehead.

"Sorry, honey," he apologized. "Maybe we should think about settling down someplace so that I can go for inpatient treatment."

"Where? Neverland?"

Neal tensed. "Who told you to say that? Was he smarmy and handless?! ANSWER ME!"

"Okay, I'm starting to see your point about inpatient treatment," Emma conceded, prying herself free of his white-knuckled grasp. "But where shall we go?"

"Anywhere but Storybrooke, Maine. I understand their inpatient psychiatric hospital is used to house political prisoners, and you know how I detest politics." Neal's eyes fell on a map that had also been left behind by the room's former inhabitants. "Wow, these people don't know much about packing a suitcase, but so much the better for us." He handed the map to his girlfriend. "Here, close your eyes and point. Whatever spot you pick will be our new home."

"Okay." She shut her eyes and her finger landed squarely on Portland, Oregon. "Do-over," they said in unison.

She shut her eyes again, pointing to Phoenix, Arizona this time. "Aw nuts!" Neal grumbled. "Try again."
"I'm starting to think that maybe this isn't the most effective way to choose a home," Emma sighed, pointing again. "Death Valley, California. Damn it!"

Neal tossed the map aside, disgusted. "Screw this, let's just go to Tallahassee, and say you pointed to it, if anyone asks."

"I like the way you think, honey." She kissed him. "But are you sure you want to give up our life of crime, before we've even had the chance to be immortalized in a bad Broadway musical?"

"Yeah, I can't sing worth a darn, and we're way too adorable to be evil anyway."

"What are you doing," asked Mary Margaret, watching Mulan draw a line in the sand. "Is this your way of challenging me to a fistfight? Because if it is, I'm going to have to forfeit. I have way too much to live for."

"No, I'm making a sundial so we can keep track of whose turn it is to sleep." She glared at Aurora. "I'm looking at you, Sleeping Beauty."

Mary Margaret rushed to her fellow comatose princess' defense. "That's not fair, Mulan. Despite the name, I don't think I've seen her sleep once in all the time we've known each other." She looked at Aurora. "What's up with that, by the way?"

"Well, I've been suffering nightmares ever since I was freed from my curse." Aurora held up a small blue and silver can. "But luckily Red Bull gives you wings."

Mary Margaret's eyes shone with nostalgia. "Ah, Red Bull. I drank enough of that to drown a siren after my own sleeping curse."

"You suffered from the same incredibly rare, virtually incurable curse as I did?" Aurora marveled. "Wow, what are the odds of that?"

"Probably even lower than the odds of you finding your boyfriend alive in some other dimension." Mary Margaret hazarded. "Anyway, my husband, being too cheap to spring for an actual nightlight, used to help out by lighting a candle to capture my nightmares."

"He sounds sweet, but I'm afraid I'm still obligated to hate him for stealing my Philip's defining moment."

"Eh, nobody's blaming you." Mary Margaret clapped her on the back. "Why don't you try to sleep while I watch over you? You'll be fine, unless you somehow manage to get physically injured in your dreams. Which, of course, would be ridiculous."

At the top of the beanstalk, Emma found herself standing in yet another razed and derelict castle. "This dimension could sure use a clean-up crew."

"Give me your hand," said Hook.

Emma shoved her hands in her pockets. "Why, are you planning to steal them for yourself? Because that would be completely in-character."

"No, hands really aren't my style." Hook waved his titular appendage. "I just wanted to help you tend that gash on your palm."
"Eh, we just climbed a plant the size of the Sears Tower without equipment or safety gear of any kind. If this is the worst injury we sustain in the process, we've got no room to complain."

"I'm sorry," Hook apologized, gripping her wrist firmly, "but I'm afraid I can't let such a perfect excuse to touch you to waste." He opened up his hip flask and poured some booze over the wound.

"Ow! What is that?" she howled.

"Rum. The kind I drink, not the kind I crusade against." He pocketed the flask. "Now, it's time you heard my brilliant plan. I sneak inside, and then flirt with the giant's anthropomorphic harp until she agrees to put him to sleep for us."

"Ugh, men," Emma scoffed. "We can solve this particular conundrum without your powers of seduction, thank you very much."

Hook looked positively crestfallen. "Oh." Then he brightened. "Hey, are you just saying that because you're jealous?"

"No!" She held up Mulan's baggie. "We can use the 'sedatives' Mulan gave me."

"Okay, but can I at least flex my muscles tantalizingly while we do it?" He rolled up his sleeves and rubbed on some coconut oil.

Emma stopped to examine his tattoos. "Who's Milah?"

"A spiteful, selfish, lazy, drunken, vindictive hag, but for some reason, Rumplestiltskin and I both loved her." He shrugged helplessly. "Love is blind, and not terribly intelligent."

"Oh, I get it! Gold killed her and that's why you hate him."

"No, I hate him because he looks cooler in leather than I do. The Milah thing just pushed me over the edge."

"Well, I suppose I can understand. After all, I was in love once," said Emma, while up in Heaven, Graham's spirit wept bitterly.

Emma met Neal at a park with a bag of snacks. "Hey, baby, I got you some jellybeans."

Neal froze. "Who told you to give me those? Was she tiny and blue?! ANSWER ME!"

"You're lucky I love you, you nut." She pinched his cheek tenderly. "But I sure hope these delusions of yours aren't hereditary. So, apart from your usual baggage, what's wrong?"

Neal held up a wanted poster with his face all over it. "How retro," said Emma. "What did you do? Try that pathetic map routine of yours one too many times?"

"No, I stole a bunch of Rolexes, forgot them in a locker someplace, then tried to go into hiding without changing my name."

Emma rolled her eyes. "It's official. You're an even worse criminal than I am."

"Cut me some slack. I'm the child of an evil supervillain and a black-hearted pirate. I've got a lot to live up to, and I don't work well under that kind of pressure!"

"All right, jeez, sorry."
He collected himself. "It's cool. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to go find a map of Canada and point at it."

"You're going to Canada?" Emma glanced around, confused. "You mean we're not already there?" She shrugged. "Well, I'll come with you, then. It's not like it'll be any kind of adjustment."

"You can't come with me! You'll get arrested!"

Emma blinked. "It's a felony to be a thief's girlfriend?"

"All right, that was a really dumb objection," Neal admitted. "Here's a better one: how are we going to get across the border?"

She smacked him upside the head. "It's Canada, you bonehead, not Mexico! We'll get a barrel, drive to Niagra Falls, and presto."

"I don't know…" Neal was still hesitant. "It takes a lot of money to start a new life, and my job skills of spinning and brawling don't transfer well to a post-industrial economy."

A light bulb went off in Emma's head. "Wait. I just had the craziest idea. What if, being thieves, we obtained money by actually selling our stolen property?"

Neal stared at her raptly. "Okay, I've made a decision. You're the new brains of this operation."

"Then it's a deal. I'll go get the watches, and you'll refrain from ruining my life."

Narcotics at the ready, Emma climbed onto a life-size sculpture of the BFG. "Are you ready to fall into my arms and swear your undying love?" Hook called up to her.

"Hell no, but I'm ready to attack the giant."

Hook sighed. "I guess that'll do, for now." He took a king-sized Apollo Bar out of his pocket. "Yo, Tiny, I hear you love these things! Come and get it!"

The giant lumbered outside. "Fee fie foe fum! I smell the blood of a Sparrow clone! I could say hi, but I'm off my meds, so I'll have to murder you instead!"

"Sure, sure, I'm shivering in my timbers," said Hook insincerely.

"Emma SMASH!" roared Emma, hitting him in the face with the opi…uh, Far-Eastern poppy-based sedative.

The giant's face took on a look of pure serenity. "Hehehe…" He looked down at his hands, drooling slightly. "My hands are huge." He giggled inanely. "And so's the rest of me! Wait till I show Libby!"

He swayed precariously on his feet.

"Uh oh. Maybe standing under this guy wasn't the smartest idea I've ever had." Hook turned tail and ran like a flying orphan was chasing.

The giant hit the ground with a mighty crash, an addled smile on his face. "Mm, this is the best attack I've ever suffered," he murmured dreamily, eyelids falling shut.

"Hook, are you dead?" Emma yelled.

"No," came the answer.
"Darn. That sure would have simplified things."

Mulan took a look at her sundial. "The clock is ticking." A faint, male scream rang out above her.

Aurora began thrashing around in her sleep. "Ah! An adorable little boy! Somebody help!"

Mary Margaret shook her awake. "I guess that candle thing of Charming's was just a placebo." She snuffed the candle and tossed it aside. "Cheapskate. So, Aurora, do you want to talk about it?"

"No."

"Well, do it anyway. The audience has a right to know."

Aurora heaved a longsuffering sigh. "All right. I was in this room with singed drapery."

"…Uh, how horrible?"

"Hey, I haven't told you the worst part yet. There was this adorable little boy cowering menacingly in a corner, glaring at me with his innocent brown puppy-dog eyes!"

"Aw Aurora, it's okay. 'It' meaning your dream." She smacked her friend upside the head. "Honestly, if that's your idea of a nightmare, then what do you do when you dream about your teeth falling out?"

"AHHH!" screamed Aurora at the very thought of such a terrifying experience.

"Go back to sleep, you big baby."

Emma followed Hook into a massive room filled with treasure. "Let me guess. Touch nothing but the lamp?"

"No, that was Aladdin. This is…" He glanced from the giant's beanstalk, to Snow White, Jr., to the hook on his wrist. "I don't know what this is," he admitted, swiping some gold coins from a nearby chest.

"Put those down!" she nagged. "They could be under an Aztec curse."

Emma strolled casually toward Neal's loot locker, garbed in a t-shirt reading 'Not Guilty.' "Hm," she mused, searching for the proper locker. "Maybe I should wait and do this when there are no longer cops standing right behind me?" She immediately dismissed the thought. "Oh, stop being so paranoid, Emma!" Taking the case of stolen watches from the locker, a contented smile crept across her face. "Ah. Something about stealing jewelry always makes me feel close to my heritage."

Emma dug into a haystack to search for the compass, but all she found was a needle. "Ow!" she whined. "This is taking forever."

"It would take less time if you did more searching and less complaining," Hook griped.

"Cut me a break, I have a short attention spa—hey, look, a shiny thing!" Emma abandoned her task to go examine a sword. It was clasped in the bony hands of a skeleton wearing a pointy white hood.

"It's Jack," Hook observed.
"Which one?"

"Who cares?" Hook attempted to return to the search, but Emma yanked him into her arms. "Emma, are you succumbing to my charms already? Huh, I'm kind of disappointed."

"No, I did it because of the trap!" She pointed to the tripwire he'd nearly walked into.

"Keep telling yourself that, love."

---

Emma rushed out to the Love Bug, where Neal was waiting with open arms. "Oh, thank the gods!" he cried. Emma gave him a funny look. "I've, er, been reading Percy Jackson and the Olympians," he saved, opening up the jewelry case to distract her.

"Roll-lex," Emma read. "Hey, since there aren't any ice cream trucks or Beat literature around for us to plagiarize, shall we use that for our new name?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Rolex. I love it!" He kissed her, then placed one of the watches on her wrist. "Here, so we won't forget how to spell it." He ducked out of the car; never an easy task for a fully-grown adult. "I'm off to hock these to some dude named Gold. See you in a few, and remember, we're almost home."

"'Home'?" Perplexed, Emma took out her dictionary and flipped to the h's. "Oh, now I get it. Cute."

In an attempt to look innocent, Neal was shuffling down a dark alley, on a foggy night, with a nondescript briefcase. Oy. And, as an apparent cop started following him, he actually had the nerve to look surprised. Neal took off running. "Screw subtlety! I don't know why I even try!"

One obligatory chase scene later, the stranger tackled him to the ground. "Ouch!" Neal yelped. "You gave me a splinter!"

"Baby," scoffed the one and only August W. Booth.

"Please don't arrest me an hour before my retirement from crime!" Neal pleaded. "I couldn't bear the irony!"

"Relax, I'm not a cop. I'm a stalker."

Neal recoiled. "I'm flattered, but spoken for."

"Not yours, stupid. Emma's."

Neal glowered menacingly at him. "Her name isn't Emma anymore; it's Mrs. Neal Rolex, so step off, pal!" He gave the puppet a shove.

"I'm not that kind of stalker. I'm the kind who tries to help, but sucks at it." He swung an arm around Neal's shoulders. "See, it's like this. Emma has a difficult task to accomplish, and the happiness and mental health she enjoys in your company will only get in the way, so I want you to send her to jail."

"Are you high?"

"Yes, but that's beside the point." August produced a copy of Joseph Campbell's Hero with a Thousand Faces. "It's all part of the heroic cycle. She has to fall from grace sooner or later, and now's as good a time as any."
"I've heard enough." Neal turned to leave. "I'm off to Tallahassee to get some inpatient psychotherapy, and I suggest you do the same."

"Wait!" August cried. "Do you believe in magic?"

Neal stopped in his tracks. "Who told you about that? Was she tiny and blue?! ANSWER ME!"

August smirked. "Actually, yes."

Neal's scream could be heard from space.

August led Neal to his motorcycle, which held a tantalizing wooden box. "Now that I have your attention, I'm going to show you what's in this box, and you're going to believe every word I say, despite my horrible track record." He flipped the lid dramatically.

Neal peered inside, then looked back at August. "You know I'm--"

"Sh! You'll spoil the surprise!"

Neal frowned. "I don't get it. Why didn't you just tell me instead of all the damn theatrics?"

"Uh…as an author, I prefer to express myself through writing?"

"Weak, man. Weak. And how did you even know--"

"Are you gonna listen or not?" August snapped impatiently, face heating.

"Yeah, but your explanations had better get less lame, real quick."

At a deserted parking garage, where, as we all know, nothing good ever happens, Emma was attempting to call her boyfriend. "We're sorry," a mechanized voice answered, "but the AT&T customer you are attempting to reach has betrayed your love. You'd better pray you're receiving this message in error."

"Damn right, it's an error," Emma grumbled.

A cop appeared behind her. "Sorry, kid, but I'm going to have to agree with the machine. Hands above your head!"

Emma gaped in horror. "Are you telling me I actually fell for one of Neal's pathetic cons?" She groaned. "I'll never be able to live this down."

Back in the giant's treasure room, Hook attempted to look for the compass, while Emma held a golden chainsaw to his throat. "Damn, girl, you're more paranoid than anyone I've ever met, including Rumplestiltskin, and I didn't think that was possible."

Before she could put together a rebuttal, they heard a voice in the distance. "Fee fie foe fum! I smell the fury of a scorned woman! Be she alive—eh, screw this. I'm coming to kill you!" He charged into the room, his footsteps knocking debris from the walls and ceiling.

A pile of rocks landed on Hook. "Hook, are you okay?" Emma called.

"Never fear, dear. The only way to kill a Disney villain is to knock him off a cliff," a muffled voice replied.
The giant pounced, seizing her in his fist and bringing her close to his face, while she kicked and flailed helplessly. "You'd better not be planning to carry me up the Empire State Building!" she growled.

August stood on the shoes of Vancouver, as Neal chugged up in the Lost-Love Bug. "Ah," the thief sighed, getting out of the car. "Something about beautiful British Columbia always makes me feel right at home."

"Hey Neal" August greeted. "Ever get around to changing your name?"

"Nah, I've got better things to do. How's Emma?"

"Angry, mistrustful, and highly skeptical." August smiled smugly. "This couldn't possibly backfire on me."

Neal was on the verge of tears. "This is horrible! I'm worse at romance than both my parents put together!"

"Relax, Emma will be fine. She got nine…uh, eleven months."

"That should be me! I should be doing that time!" Neal wailed in despair.

"I'm afraid that's a biological impossibility."

"Fine, but if I can't be there for her, can you promise me and Team Wooden Swan that you will be?"

"All right." August solemnly raised his right hand. "I promise that I will not abandon Emma. Anymore."

Neal studied the alleged guardian angel's nose carefully. "Good man." He handed him a stack of money and a very poignant set of keys. "And can you see that she gets these?"

August held up his book again. "I'm sorry, but there's no mention of sudden riches in the heroic cycle."

Neal grabbed the book and threw it into the water. "Screw the heroic cycle!"

"Hey!"

"Send me a postcard when the curse ends, or I'll come back for your copy of Star Wars!"

Emma was still struggling in the beast's clutches like some sort of damsel in distress. "Ugh, I hope my mom never finds out about this. It'd kill her."

"Don't worry, you won't live long enough to tell her," said the giant.

"But I'm not what you think!"

"You mean you weren't trying to rob me?"

Emma bit her lip guiltily. "Okay, maybe I am what you think, but you wouldn't really kill a woman with ten children, would you?"

The giant's eyes narrowed. "Do you really expect me to believe you have ten kids, with a figure like
"Fine, then, we'll do this the hard way," said Emma, biting his finger.

"Ow!" he howled, dropping her. "Emma bit me, and it really hurt, and it's still hurting!"

Emma ran to Jack's corpse, took the sword from his/her skeletal hands, and severed the nearby tripwire.

A cage fell on the giant, pinning him to the ground, and he groaned. "In retrospect, maybe making this thing big enough to hold me was a mistake."

"Agreed," said Emma. "Now fork over the compass!"

"Why should I? You humans are all alike! Racist jerks, every last one of you!"

"Dude, you're the one killing people on sight for the sole crime of being shorter than you. What's with all the human hate?"

"I hear your bones taste good in bread, and, on a more personal note, you guys murdered my family."

Emma glanced over at the pile of rocks where Hook had been standing. "I don't understand. The career liar told me otherwise."

"That's because history is written by the victors!"

"History? I was under the impression that it happened maybe five years before the curse, tops."

The giant scowled. "You're annoying." He slid the compass through the bars to her. "Take the damn thing and get out of my face."

"Thanks, man. You're pretty cool, for an aspiring cannibal." She pocketed the compass. "But I really should get back to my mom before my potentially lethal curfew. Are there any more of you I need to worry about?"

"No, didn't you hear the exposition? I'm an angry loner."

"You too?" Emma was suddenly sympathetic. "Then let me offer you some advice. If you want to stay that way, avoid reproduction at all costs." She noticed something that looked like a bean hanging around his neck. "Is that a magic bean?"

"No, it's a gun. One of Chekov's."

"Oh." She glanced down at the sword in her hand. "Well, then, I guess I'll just dispose of this sword before I go. No sense in luggng some magic blade to my upcoming showdown with Cora." She stuck it in a giant toothpick holder and started to leave.

The moment her back was turned, the giant suddenly burst free of his cage. "BOO!"

"AH!" Emma screamed. "If you were able to do that, then what the hell took you so long?"

"I like to play with my food." He picked up a giant boulder and flung it in her direction.

"AH!"
"Heh heh, psych!" He stepped aside to reveal the door he'd just uncovered for her. "In gratitude for the entertainment you've provided me with, please accept the gift of life."

Emma reached down to retrieve the heart that had just jumped out of her mouth and attempted to pull herself together. "Th-that's very generous of you, homie, but do you think you could grant me an extra gift of life? Out of solidarity between angry loners, if nothing else?"

"I don't know…"

"Please?" she persisted. "It's for yet another angry loner." She nodded over at Hook.

Wielding a dwarven pickaxe engraved with the name "Tricky", Emma dug Hook free of his rocky grave. He emerged with a huge grin on his face. "You know, I hear your dad won your mom over by getting hit in the face with a rock." He snaked an arm surreptitiously around her waist. "Is history about to repeat itself, perchance?"

Emma raised her hand to slap him, but then changed her mind. "Sure." She smiled coyly. "In fact, now that we're together, why don't we skip the makeout scene and go straight to the hardcore sex scene?" She held up a pair of handcuffs.

"I'm in love!" Hook cried, eagerly presenting his wrists.

"Sucker!" She shackled him to the wall.

Hook jerked uncomfortably at his bonds. "Honey, how are you planning to get my clothes off with my arms in this position?" Then reality sunk in. "Hey, wait a minute! You've been playing me like an anthropomorphic harp!"

"Karma is a beautiful thing." Emma smirked.

Hook was now the angriest angry loner in the room. "But all I've ever done is help, admire, and protect you! This is dishonest! It's cruel and vindictive! It's…strangely attractive to me."

"Ugh, leaving!"

Back on the ground, Mulan checked her sundial and noted that Emma's pointless and arbitrary deadline had passed. The warrior reluctantly drew her katana. "Normally I wouldn't leave a man down, but if all Emma's ideas are going to be this bad, maybe we'll be better off without her." She raised the sword and prepared to hack the beanstalk to pieces. "Hi-YA!"

"Whoa, wait!" Mary Margaret rushed to the poor plant's defense. "What are you doing?"

"Effectively killing your daughter, but that won't affect our relationship, right?"

"Are you high?!"

"No, your daughter took my stash, but we all have to make sacrifices, here." She raised the sword a second time. "Now, as I was saying, hiii-ya!"

"But you can't kill Emma!" Aurora protested. "If she dies, then who will teach me how to be awesome?"

"I'll do it," Mulan offered.
"If your version of awesome involves abandoning one's comrades to die, I don't want to learn it!"

Mary Margaret ran at Mulan, tackling her to the ground. "Don't test me! The last woman who tried to kill my daughter…" She frowned. "Actually, I let her off scot-free and then defended her with my life, but don't think I'm going to make that mistake twice!"

Emma suddenly descended on them, sliding down the beanstalk like a firehouse pole. "Whee!"

"Emma! You're alive, and you ditched the bad boy!" Mary Margaret hugged her daughter tightly. "I'm the happiest mom in the world right now!"

"Emma?" Blushing furiously, Mulan staggered to her feet, spitting out a mouthful of dirt. "Good thing you made it back before I really hurt her."

"Where's Hook?" Aurora wanted to know. "I was sort of hoping he'd end up being my rebound guy."

"I left him in the clutches of a large, murderous, and possibly cannibalistic monster, but don't worry. There are no cliffs around for him to fall off, so he should be fine in the end," said Emma confidently.

"That just leaves the matter of your borderline suicide attempt." Mary Margaret glared. "Do it again, young lady, and I'm sending you to a cricket, you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

In a nonexistent minimum-security women's correctional facility in Phoenix, Emma was sitting in her cell looking tortured, when a guard walked in with a very poignant set of keys. "Hey Swan, someone sent you a SLUGBUG!" The guard raised a fist to punch her.

"Don't hit me! I'm pregnant!" Emma pleaded.

"Oh, yeah, I forgot." The guard peeked into the envelope. "There's also a note in here. 'IOU twenty grand, unless I decide to spend it on something else'."

As the guard left, Emma looked thoughtfully down at the pregnancy test in her hand. "IOU? Now there's an idea." She rubbed her abdomen tenderly. "What do you think of the name Iou Swan?" The baby kicked her angrily. "Ow, okay, okay! It was just a suggestion, kid!"

Over at the Princess Pad, temporarily renamed the Prince Pad, Henry woke up screaming. David stumbled groggily down the stairs. "Damn it, I thought abandoning my only baby would spare me the experience of waking up in the middle of the night to comfort a screaming child," he griped. "Henry, what gives?"

"I had a nightmare."

"Well, I'm too cheap to spring for a nightlight, but maybe this will help." He lit a candle that he for some reason owned, despite living in the twenty-first century. "Now, do you want to talk about it?"

"No."

"Well, do it anyway. The audience has a right to know."

Henry shuddered. "It was terrible! I dreamed that I was trapped in a room with singed curtains!"
"...And you really think you're brave enough to fight monsters?"

"Hey, I haven't told you the worst part yet. I also dreamed that I was alone with a beautiful woman!"

David snuffed the candle and stomped off in disgust. "You keep talking like that and I'm giving you back to Regina!"
Under Storybrooke, a bunch of six-foot "dwarves" were prospecting for fairy dust without pay for the sixth consecutive week. Happy teetered sleepily on his feet. "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it's off to OSHA I go!"

"I don't think so, maggot!" a nun barked, cracking a bullwhip across his back.

"Ow!" he whined, tossing his pickaxe aside. "Can I at least have some booze?"

"...Okay."

"Sweet." He draped an arm around Leroy's shoulders. "Come on, homies! Let's go over to Granny's and get some mead before the plot hits and she starts waving that crossbow of hers around."

Doc frowned pensively. "Where did Granny get mead? Or any other consumable, for that matter? We haven't seen a delivery truck in twenty-eight years."

"I dunno. Airlift?" Happy tugged at Leroy's sleeve. "Come on, since when do you have to be convinced to get drunk?"

"Seriously? You want to take a short break for beverages?" Leroy shook his head sadly. "And you call yourself a slave!"

Happy hung his head in shame.

The grumpy dwarf repeatedly slammed his pick into the tunnel wall. "Charming asked us to search for fairy dust in a freaking coal mine! And the only way...I can keep from killing him...for giving me such a stupid order...is to vent my frustrations on these innocent rocks!" he bit out angrily. "And that's...what I'm gonna...do!"

With one last mighty swing, the wall got tired of his abuse and caved in, sending the alleged dwarf sprawling into a hidden chamber. "Aw great, now I've got to find a new coping mechanism," his voiced echoed up resentfully.

David sped up to the scene of the accident in a squad car labeled Sheriff...'s Dad. "Where is he?!"

Happy was confused. "I told you on the phone, he's in the chamber with all the fai—"

"Damn it, man, I didn't ask for your life story!" The quasi-prince shoved past him.

He found Leroy in the cavern where he'd fallen, rolling blissfully in a heap of diamonds. "All right! Being a workaholic is shaping up to be much more profitable than being an alcoholic!" the dwarf sighed blissfully.

"I'll just take those." The Mother Superior shoved him aside. "Now get back to work, meat, or I'll have you beaten!"

"Wait a minute," said Henry, who was present for some reason. "All we need in order to mend Jefferson's magic hat and get our loved ones back is diamonds? Why didn't someone say so? I could have knocked over a Cartier's and had them home weeks ago!"

"I know, champ," David patted him on the back, "but your mom and grandmother would both have
been heartbroken to find out that they'd missed your first jewelry heist."

"Here's to the dwarves!" cheered David, raising a glass of freshly-airlifted mead. "Not quite as short as purported, but every bit as loyal and industrious." He gathered them into a group hug. "You're the best slaves a guy ever had!"

"And the lowest tippers a lycanthrope ever had," muttered Ruby, clearing some soiled drinking horns off a table.

"A mouse," said Billy the mechanic, coming up behind her.

"Yum!" Ruby picked up a fork and bared her fangs. "Nothing better than a field mice appetizer before dinner, except maybe chicken heads."

Billy shuddered. "I was talking about myself. I was hoping we could get together and discuss our pasts over a nice vegetarian meal." He smiled hopefully. "I was a mouse named Gus in our land, and I figured, since you're kind of an animal too, my hooking up with you would be only a little squicky. Plus, I could really use some protection from that jerk Lucifer." He glanced over his shoulder nervously.

"You're Gus?" said Ruby quizzically. "Then why haven't I ever seen you with Cinderella?"

"She hasn't had much time for me lately. She and Jefferson's daughter Grace have been really busy battling the rebel Skitters together. But don't change the subject. Is it a date or not?"

Ruby racked her brain for a way to tell him she was afraid she would cannibalize him without sounding creepy. But luckily Belle, who was present for some reason, came to the rescue. "Is your boyfriend here getting violent?" she asked the wolf girl. "Do you want me to use my pleading eyes on him until he stops?"

"No! Not the eyes!" Billy screamed, running for the exit.

Ruby sighed with relief. "Phew, thanks, Belle." She glanced around the room. "Where's Rumplestiltskin?"

"It turns out I exist independently of him. Go figure, huh?"

Meanwhile, Henry had forgone in his trademark Charmings' Choice™ cinnamon cocoa for a cup of coffee. "Bleh! This stuff tastes worse than Mom's apple cider! Can I have some more, please?"

"Henry," said David worriedly, "I think you may have a sleeping disorder. However, since Archie seems to be largely AWOL this season, and Whale's preoccupied with pining for his lost Elizabeth, it's going to have to go untreated for the foreseeable future." He snatched the boy's cup. "Now go away."

Albert Spencer plopped down in Henry's vacant seat. "If he were my grandson, I'd tell him to quit moping or get beheaded." He sighed longsufferingly. "But I guess we just have different parenting styles.

"You again? Are you still alive?" David frowned. "We spared Regina's life because we owed her for saving Snow's. What possible reason could we have had for not killing you?"

"It's not your fault. I'm just too damn ornery to die. Bwa hah hah!"
The quasi-prince yawned. "Is there a point to this conversation?"

"I just wanted to inform you that you suck."

"And I'm supposed to value your opinion…why?"

Spencer faltered. "You mean you don't have Stockholm Syndrome from all that time I held you hostage?"

"Nope, sorry."

"Then I'll just have to come up with another way to hurt you." Spencer smacked him across the face. "Did that hurt?"

"No."

Flushed with embarrassment, the deposed king fled. "I'll be back!"

In the back of the diner, David found Granny welding the walk-in freezer shut. "Wow, you're a chef, a welder, a sharpshooter, and a shapeshifter with superhuman senses?" He studied her curiously. "Your first name wouldn't happen to be Mary Sue, by any chance?"

"No, it's Fido, but I don't like to spread that around."

"Wouldn't dream of it," he assured her. "So, what's with the blowtorch? Did your crossbow run out of ammo?"

"No, it's the first night of the full moon, and the kennel won't accept were-creatures, so I'm going to stick Ruby in here and hope for the best."

"Stuffing your little girl in a storage receptacle?" David chuckled. "I must be rubbing off on you." He looked at Ruby. "But what about your titular hood? Wouldn't it be a lot less cold and degrading?"

"I'll say, and I feel utterly undefined without it, but I can't find the darned thing anywhere. I even tried asking Gold, but all he gave me were some stupid notes to pass to his girlfriend." She rolled her eyes. "I strongly suspect Regina stole it, seeing as how she's a villainess and it's the only cape in town."

"Ruby, you don't need to worry," said David, slipping into comfort mode. "I know you. You'd never go crazy and eat an innocent person. You got that out of your system years ago."

"If you really believe that, then maybe you'd like to stick around and keep me company?"

He recoiled. "Can't! I…er…have to go buy my grandson some speed! Bye!"

"Baby." Ruby picked up her Ralph Wolf sleeping bag and retired for the night.

Snow White and Red ran through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, with All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men hot on their tail. "You can't run from the Queen, Snow White!"

"Sure we can," said Snow, clubbing the guard with a rock and continuing on her way. "See? Piece of cake."
"Don't you go falling in love with him now," Red cautioned, indicating the fresh gash she'd left on his chin.

"I'll try." The princess stopped in her tracks, spotting a wanted poster that accused her of treason and treachery. "How insulting and redundant!" She tore it down indignantly.

Red dragged her off the road and behind some trees as the pair of guards approached. "Come on out, Snow White, and give me a kiss!" the guy she'd whacked called out. "Everyone knows that being threatened with arrest is one of your biggest turn-ons, so you may as well quit playing hard-to-get!"

A dreamy smile appeared on Snow's face, and she started to crawl toward the road, but luckily Red managed to tackle her before she could reveal herself.

"Hello? Anyone there?" the guard yelled again. "Eh, it's no good. Come on, Ted, let's go check the movie theater. I hear she's got a strange obsession with Thor.

As the pair took off, swords and poisonous fruit baskets at the ready, Red heaved a sigh of relief. "That was close. You know, now that we're BFFs, we're going to have to have a frank talk about your taste in men."

But Snow White wasn't listening. She was staring woefully at the wanted poster. "Man, being an outlaw isn't nearly as cool as Robin Hood made it look. Maybe it's time for a career change."

Red waved her torn red hood in the other girl's face. "Hey, I just destroyed my most treasured possession while saving you, if you care at all."

"Good riddance, that thing was highly detrimental our goal of stealth. Honestly, those guards must have both been colorblind not to see it amidst all this greenery. Plus, we're always getting attacked by angry bulls."

"But it keeps me from turning into a flesh-eating beast and killing you," Red reminded her.

"Oh yeah. That."

"We'll have to split up. You should head farther into the woods and find shelter. Maybe an abandoned cabin."

Snow stared at her friend incredulously. "You really think sending an attractive and frightened young woman into some dark woods, all alone, with a supernatural monster on the loose, to spend the night in an abandoned building is going to increase her chance of safety?" She shook her head sadly.

"Those guards may have been colorblind, but you're definitely genre-blind."

"Cut me a break. I'm new at this tortured monster stuff." She sighed wistfully. "You know what I could really use? The love and support of a good man who knows what it means to be persecuted by an angry mob. Maybe a nice doctor."

"Seems like you're aiming a little high, but I'll keep my eyes open," Snow promised. "Say, now that you mention it, there's a guy in the bushes over there who seems to be stalking you."

Granny walked into the only diner in town, dragging a case of lasagnas tied to a parachute. "Ruby, are you sane yet?" No answer. "Ruby?" She whistled shrilly. "Here, girl!"

Upon reaching the freezer, she found the door shredded to pieces and a large "R" carved in the door. "Ah, hell, not this again." She took out her cellphone. "Dogcatcher? This is Granny, calling with a
Code Red emergency. We'll need a net and the biggest bottle of Midol you can find!

Meanwhile, Henry was strangely dreaming about fire, rather than wishes his heart made. "Is this Hell? It's a lot smaller than I was expecting." A beautiful woman appeared across the room. "You again? Are you dream-stalking me?" he yelled. "Because that's a trick I would really love to learn!"

He awoke to an evil queen looming over his bed, and immediately regretted his decision to wake up. "Mom, what are you doing here? Have you come to kill me again?"

"Will you quit harping on that, already?" She swatted him over the head. "David asked me to come over. He said you'd been dreaming about beautiful women, and thought it might be time for me to give you the Talk."

"Ew!" The boy covered his ears.

His mom reached over to pull his hands away. "You see, when a man and a woman love each other very much, or one of them gets lonely and enslaves the other—"

"Ah!" screamed Henry!

"It's my choice of lifestyle and you have no right to criticize it!"

"It's not that. You hurt my hand."

She inspected the hand and found a large burn covering it. "Henry, have you been fighting dragons without adult supervision?"

Because David’s talent for finding people was specific to princesses, and the dog catcher was busy chasing that rogue Tramp, Granny was working mostly on our own. "Ruby went that way," she informed David, nose twitching. "We must stop her before she falls into the same abyss as Archie!"

Breaking into a run, they found her dozing under some anachronistic trees. "Ruby, wake up!"

Ruby's eyes fluttered open. "What's wrong, Granny? Is that damn huntsman after us again?"

"Even worse! You destroyed the freezer and melted all the ice cream!"

"Oh no! Did I eat any one while I was out?"

Granny shrugged. "I don't know. Probably."

"AH!"

"The dogcatcher recommended obedience school, but when I told him we couldn't afford it, he suggested euthanasia." Granny patted her granddaughter on the head. "Maybe you'd better lie low for a while."

David didn't like where this conversation was going. "Comfort Mode!" he cried heroically. The two women simultaneously swooned, and he hauled them off to his squad car, where a voice could be heard on the radio. "Attention all units, parking violation in progress at the cannery."

David picked up the receiver. "Who the hell is this?"
"The ghost of Graham. Seeing as how you don't have any training or experience as a cop, I thought I'd pitch in until Emma gets back. Now hustle!"

Red jolted awake in the muddy, gravelly dirt she'd so stupidly chosen to sleep in, glancing down at her hood. "I think I'll just assume it worked, even though I'd never know if it hadn't. Much more uplifting."

One of the many stalkers that plagued the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia jumped out of the shadows and snatched her hood. "Keepaway!"

"Oh no! My garment-slash-namesake-slash-PMS-medication!" She chased after him.

He appeared behind her. "Looking for this?"

She glared at him. "Popping out of nowhere, stealing my most prized possession, then taunting me about it? Who do you think you are, Rumplestiltskin?"

"No, I'm a werewolf, like you."

"How do you know what I am?"

He smiled cryptically. "I know how to recognize a child of the moon."

"Really? How?"

"By your, uh...and your...um...and your unusual..." He sighed defeatedly. "All right, fine, I found out by eavesdropping. I just wanted you to think I was cool."

"You're stalking me? Why?" Red looked nervous. "If you're interested in me romantically, I think it's only fair to warn you that I ate my last love interest."

"No biggie, so did I. Speaking of which, there's therapy available for that, if you're interested."

"Thanks, but I should probably go and make sure my friend isn't dead, what with all those horror movie cliché's I forced on her last night."

"Aw, come on!" he prodded. "We've got kibble."

"Really?" Red licked her lips. "Well, when you put it that way, her friendship doesn't mean that much to me. Lead on!"

He led her to a hatch in the ground and knocked loudly. "Yo Desmond! Turn down that damn Mama Cass record and open up!"

Red followed him down, her eyes growing as big as a transvestite wolf's. "What is this place?"

"We call it the Doghouse, in an effort to combat the negative connotations that word often carried. I accidentally dug the place while trying to bury a bone during a sugar high."

"Then it's true? You're all wolves?"

"Well, those girls in the corner are Twilight fans doing research for a fanfic, but the rest of us are, yes." He led her across the massive chamber. "Now, let me introduce you to Anita?"

all along! This is all a practical joke!"

Then an older, less heartwarming version of herself appeared from the shadows. "Actually, my last name's Lucas."

"But that's my name." She studied the woman closely. "And my face. And my baby picture sitting on your desk. What gives?"

Anita lowered her voice. "Granny never told you what happened to your mother."

"She told me enough. She told me hunters killed her."

"No. I am your mother."

"NOOOOO! No! N-" Red trailed off. "Wait a minute, I mean yes!" She hugged her mom blissfully.

By the time they reached the cannery, Granny and Ruby had finally regained consciousness. "That's Billy's truck parked out front," Ruby noted. "He must have snuck in to steal scraps from the dumpster again. No, wait, I smell blood."

David grimaced. "Ruby, let me give you a tip. If you really want people to stop freaking out and treating you like a monster, you might want to stop saying stuff like that."

"Noted. Now let's just try to find Billy before Lucifer does."

Granny peeked under the truck. "Well, I found half of him. That's a good start, right?"

Upon finding his lower half in the dumpster, Ruby let out a scream that shattered every window in the building. "Yikes!" David looked at her gravely. "You're going to have to pay for those, you know."

Over at the Princess Pad, Gold was taking a look at the new Honey-Roasted Henry. "Looks pretty bad, kid," the sorcerer diagnosed, "but between my fiendish brilliance and yours, we should be able to come up with a solution."

"I don't get it," said Henry. "A dream shouldn't be able to affect my physical state. That makes about as much logical sense as a mammal suddenly growing scales or a child raised by wolves acquiring perfect language skills."

Gold just shook his head. "Henry, you're standing here today because of an enchanted closet and a talking blue bug. Attempting to bring logic into the situation is only going to give you a headache."

"So what's your explanation, wise guy?" Regina challenged.

"It's a side effect of the sleeping curse." Regina looked blank. "You know, that side dish you like to serve with apples?"

"Doesn't ring a bell."

"Remind me never to go into teaching again," Gold sighed sadly. "I'm talking about that thing you killed your son with."

She threw an apple at his head. "Will everyone please stop harping on that?!"
Gold ignored her the same way he ignored everyone else, taking out his enchanted chemistry set. "You see, Henry, when people fall under a sleeping curse, the soul travels to a netherworld between life and death, and across the street from insanity. However, even if the curse is broken, which it always is, the victims can still find their way back to that world when it becomes plot-relevant."

"Well," said Regina, "this miniaturized rip-off of Christian Hell is giving my boy third-degree burns, and since I recently lost my job as an evil overlord, there's no way I can afford to keep paying for skin grafts. If you can't fix this, we're screwed."

"Hm, let's see what the good doctor has in his magic bag..." Gold rifled through his potion bottles. "Rogaine?" He chuckled nervously. "How did that get in here? It's certainly not mine! Uh... Amortentia?" He blushed. "Sorry, that one's for Belle. Ah, here we are." He dripped some liquid into a pendant. "Here, this will allow you to control the other realm until David needs an excuse to get cursed."

"My son will be safe and Charming will be cursed?" Regina eyed her former mentor skeptically. "That seems a little too good to be true. What's your angle, Gold?"

Gold smiled innocently. "Why, I simply don't want to see dear Henry harmed...yet. Tee hee!"

"Ah! He's giggling! Run for your life!" Regina screamed, shielding her son with her own body.

Down at the docks, David was back in comfort mode. "Don't worry, Ruby. It might not have been you who did this. Maybe Spencer is framing you in order to call my impartiality into question, enabling him to erode my power base, seize control of the town, and finally get his revenge for whatever the hell I did to make him hate me so much. It would certainly explain why he made that pointless appearance last night, after all this time."

Ruby sobbed, shaking her head. "David, use your logic!"

The quasi-prince laughed. "Ruby, I'm standing in a parallel universe hugging a werewolf because she's afraid she may have eaten a mouse. Attempting to bring logic into the situation is only going to give us a headache."

But Ruby wasn't listening. "Oh, if only Graham were around to cut my stomach open with an axe and retrieve my victim unscathed!" she lamented.

"Now, now, Red, don't you get canonical on me," David chided gently. "A few weeks ago, Mary Margaret was falsely accused of murder, and I didn't believe in her. What does that tell you?"

"That you're a crummy judge of character and I shouldn't put much stock in your opinion of me?"

"No—well, yes, but—"

"That you're a lousy friend and I shouldn't be turning to you for support?"

"Stop dwelling on David Nolan's flaws! I'm trying really hard to forget he existed!"

"Sheesh, you brought him up!"

"Look, Ruby, my point is, I know who you really are. A sometimes noble, sometimes violent person with a long history of murder and insanity. Just like Regina and Gold. I haven't bothered to arrest them for any of their various atrocities, so what makes you think you're going to be any different?"
"David! You're the only cop in town and I'm the prime suspect in a murder! As a taxpaying citizen, I demand the arrest that his my due." He just stared at her blankly. "Ugh, do I have to do everything around here?" Ruby grabbed his cuffs and shoved her wrists into them. "I have the right to remain silent. If I refuse that right, anything I say can be used against me in a court of law, provided that the authorities ever get off their butts and prosecute me..."

Back in the Doghouse, Red was staring up at her mom in awe. "A mom who isn't dead? I never dreamed such a thing could exist in our world!" She took out her camera. "Can I get a picture of this so people won't think I'm making it up?"

"Sure, pumpkin." The alpha werewolf flashed a smile for the camera.

"Thanks." She tucked the Polaroid into her wallet for safekeeping. "So, why did Granny tell me you were dead? Was she lying, or did she just naturally assume?"

"Lying, I'm afraid." Anita's eyes darkened. "The old witch stole you away from me when you were a baby, just because she didn't approve of my dietary habits." She covertly wiped a smudge of blood from the corner of her mouth.

"And where does my father fit into all this?" Red wanted to know. "Was he a werewolf, too? How did you happen to meet?"

"You know the story of Beauty and the Beast? It was kind of like that, only replace the word 'beauty' with another 'beast'."

"Cool. So where is he now?"

"He was tragically killed chasing a Frisbee over a cliff several years ago." Anita sniffled sadly. "But at least we have each other now." She pulled her daughter into a hug. "We're going to have so much fun! I'll teach you how to braid your hair, and ride a bike, and even stop getting possessed!"

"Sweet! When can we start?"

"As soon as you lose the hood. No offense, but it's seriously compromising our goal of stealth."

Red hesitated. "I don't know, I'm sort of attached to the old thing. It's a garment and a name tag rolled into one."

Anita snapped her fingers. "Oh, that's right, I haven't told you yet. You see, now that you're part of the pack, you'll be getting a new wolf name, rendering the hood obsolete as a name tag."

"A new name? What kind of name?"

Her mom looked her over thoughtfully. "How about Moon Moon?"

Red shuddered. "I'll make you a deal. I'll give up the hood if you promise never to call me that again."

Down at Mayberry Jail, Ruby was locking herself into a cell while David sat at his desk doodling snowflakes all over her fingerprint card. "Hey David, you want your keys back?" She dangled them through the bars.

"Nah, that's cool, you can keep them."
"David, I'm supposed to be your prisoner!"

David took the keys with a heavy sigh. "Fine, but I really don't see the point of this. Regina's probably got twelve more of them stashed around the cell as a failsafe measure."

Spencer walked in holding a muzzle and leash. "Nolan, take this creature out to the corncrib and shoot her, or I'll send my creepy Siamese cats in to do the job for you!" he threatened.

David looked bored. "You really think you're scary enough to frighten a dragon-slaying conqueror into submission, huh?" He brushed past his ex-father. "Well, good for you, aiming high and all, but here in reality, I'm afraid I have better things to do than humor you."

"You're biased! How dare you ignore my accusations against Ruby, just because I'm a megalomaniacal psychopath?" the old man yelled indignantly. "I call discrimination on that!"

Ruby looked at the old man with pity. "Mr. Spencer, please stop pretending to be cunning. You're embarrassing yourself."

He shot her a pathetic imitation of Regina's Glare of Evil. "That does it!" He whistled. "Si! Am! Waste her!"

"No!" David locked the front door against the horrible creatures and glowered back at his ex-father. "Look, Spencer, your quarrel is with me. Ruby hasn't done anything to you. Neither have I, for that matter, but I'm past hoping that you'll ever realize that."

"Don't get smug with me, kid! This town is bigger than you think!"

"It'd have to be," David agreed, "to hold so many dimensions full of people."

Spencer rambled on, ignoring him. "And somewhere in it, there are bound to be at least a few people who are stupid enough to join forces with me. Watch your back!"

As night fell over the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Wolf!Red followed her pack through the woods, and apart from the voice in her head, remained completely sane. "So, yeah, a wolf is going to invade your body and turn you into a monster, but you don't have to get all uptight about it, okay?" it said.

She awoke in the Doghouse, surrounded by her canine compadres. "What do you remember?" Anita demanded.

Red thought hard. "Well, I transformed and stayed completely in control. Oh, and I heard some voices in my head. But that's normal for our kind, right?"

Anita's face fell. "Uh oh. I was afraid your dad's family history of schizophrenia might come back to haunt us." She gave her daughter a reassuring squeeze. "Well, don't you worry, Red. We'll get through this together, as a family."

True to his word, Spencer had miraculously managed to dredge up one or two dozen people among the population of three universes that were dumb enough to follow him, and gathered them into an angry mob outside Mayberry Jail. "We've lived in fear for almost twelve hours, and I, for one, can't take any more! I say we kill the beast!"
But then Sir Gaston marched up to him, flanked by a team of lawyers. "Excuse me, Your Former Majesty, but you're stealing some of my best lines, and I've obtained a cease-and-desist order." He presented the old man with a stack of forms.

"I see." Spencer thumbed through them. "Well, these seem to be legitimate, so I guess I'll just quit ranting now and kill her."

"Yay!" cheered those few members of his following with enough brainpower for speech, storming the place's poorly-defended gates. But alas, all they found was an empty cell with an 'R' scratched mockingly on the wall. "Aw, nuts!"

Granny and David had devised a brilliant plan to hide Ruby in a place someone as stupid as Spencer would never go: the library. "Thanks for letting us hide her here, Belle," said David as he attached some chains to a bookcase, "but why, exactly, are you in possession of these manacles?"

Belle's face flamed. "It's my lifestyle and you have no right to judge me!

Granny's ears perked up. "My superhuman senses tell me that the crowd is exactly six blocks from here, and exactly seventy-two milliliters of blood just entered your cheeks."

Belle was confused. "You're a werewolf, too? Then why aren't we shackling you to the wall?"

Granny turned on her, cocking her crossbow. "Just try it, kid." Belle backed away nervously.

David stroked his chin thoughtfully. "You know, Granny, the only way we're going to convince this mob to stand down is if we convince them Ruby had nothing to do with Billy's death. Being sort of a cop, maybe I should try that 'investigation' thing Emma used to talk about."

"Sounds like a plan. I'll come with you so that Belle and Ruby can have some time alone to bond."

They headed for the door. "Call us if the mob finds her, Belle, and whatever you do, don't try to protect her by telling them that they're the real monsters. It'll just make them mad."

"GOTCHA."

Red was dozing in a basket with her name on it when someone stumbled into the Doghouse. "It's a hunter!" Quinn screamed. "Kill it quickly, before it has a chance to confirm or deny the accusation!"

Snow stumbled through the front door they had stupidly forgotten to install a lock on, frowning intently at her road map. "This doesn't look like the Lake Nostos National Monument," she muttered. "Maybe I'd better ask for directions."

Quinn suddenly pounced on her, and she laughed. "Well, hello! I'm flattered by your enthusiasm, stranger, but I already have a boyfriend."

"Wait a minute, Snow?" Red piped up.

"Red, you're alive?" said Snow. "Gee, thanks for letting me know, instead of leaving me to wander alone through the wilderness full of cops and monsters looking for you."

"Oh yeah, sorry about that."

Snow indicated Quinn, who was still gnawing on her ankle. "Hey, do you think you could call him off?"
Red tugged him up by the scruff of the neck. "Quinn, can you please stop eating the one person who doesn't avoid me for fear of getting eaten?"

"But she's a human, Red!" Quinn snarled. "Four legs good, two legs baaad!"

Red looked to her mother for help. "Come on, Mom. Does this really look like a person capable of cruelty toward animals?" She pointed at Snow, who had a bluebird twittering on each shoulder and a flock of adorable baby bunnies trailing after her.

"I guess I see your point," Anita conceded. "All right, Quinn, put down the human. We'll have those three little pigs we captured earlier for dinner."

"Yay!" cried the wolves, donning rib bibs.

"Don't worry Snow. You don't have to be afraid of them," Red assured her friend.

"Of course not," said Snow sarcastically, applying ice to one of the many bruises Quinn had left her with.

"How did you find me, anyway?"

"I will always find you!" Snow proclaimed grandly. "I'll have you know I learned stalking from a true master of the art. Speaking of which, we really need to get back to the surface so that he can find me when he's through playing hard to get."

"No can do, homie." Red indicated her mother. "Mom, here, promised me she'd take me for ice cream once I finished my shapeshifting homework.

Snow looked at Anita, jaw dropping. "Oh my gods, a mother who's not dead?!"

"I know, right?"

"Well, in that case, I can't blame you," said Snow wistfully. "I'd give anything to be with my non-homicidal mom again." They hugged.

It was just starting to get sappy when Regina's guards barged in, as usual, to jazz things up. "Freeze, fleabags!"

"Bullseye!"

One of his squad-mates gave him a strange look. "What the hell did you do that for?"

"Well, he looked a little more attractive than me." His comrades stared at him in disbelief. "Hey, you never care when the Queen does it!" he defended.

While All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men stood there in uncomfortable silence, trying to think up a possible defense for their career choices, Anita and her pack attacked.

Red ran to Quinn's side, where the visiting Twilight fangirls were fighting for the privilege of comforting the hot werewolf. Baring her teeth and snarling to send them on their way, Red gathered him into her arms. "Please don't die, Quinn! We haven't even had the chance to get shipped yet!"
At the library, Belle was all geared up for her first sleepover. "This is so exciting!" she squealed, setting out a plate of smores and rawhide chews. "What shall we play first? Makeover, or Truth or Dare?"

"How about hide and seek?" Ruby suggested slyly. "You go and hide, while I stay here and count to a billion."

"Are you trying to get rid of me?" Belle started cracking up. "Honey, if Rumplestiltskin couldn't get rid of me, what chance do you have?"

Ruby sighed. "Look, Belle, I appreciate you trying to be my friend, but since I seem to kill a lot of my friends, maybe you should reconsider."

Belle gave her a reassuring hug. "Aw, Ruby, I've lived with Rumple long enough to know self-loathing when I see it. Stop beating yourself up, okay? At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I know there's good in you."

The werewolf considered her words. "You really trust me?"

"Sure."

"Enough to let me back you into that corner over there?"

"Um…well, I…okay," Belle agreed reluctantly.

"Sucker." Ruby shackled her to the wall.

"Damn it, why does everyone I love keep locking me up?" Belle grumbled.

Ruby headed for the door. "Well, this has been fun, but if you'll excuse me, I'm off to go commit suicide by mob. Have a nice life, and whatever you do, don't pursue a career as a motivational speaker."

The door swung shut behind her. "Whatever. I tried," said Belle with a shrug, reaching for a nearby copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

David and Granny made their way down the only street in town, the latter sniffing Billy's jacket to get the scent. "Pity we didn't think to try this when Kathryn went missing," said David. "It sure would have saved a lot of trouble."

The trail led them to a car parked by the roadside. "A black luxury vehicle with tinted windows!" the quasi-prince exclaimed. "Granny, your services are no longer needed. We've clearly found our villain." Sure enough, Ruby's hood and a bloody hatchet the killer hadn't had enough sense to dispose of were found in the trunk.

"She was framed?" Granny frowned. "But who would want to harm Ruby? The only huntsman in town is dead, and the only woodcutter in town hasn't been seen for months."

David took a look at the car's registration. "It was Spencer! Quick, we've got to go find Ruby so I can tell her 'I told so so!'"

Anita bent down to close Quinn's lifeless eyes. "May you always run free under the moon's badly-animated light."
"Sorry about your latest dead boyfriend, Red," said Snow sadly. "Maybe the third time will be the charm."

"This is all your fault!" Anita snarled, turning on the princess. "How dare you come into my home and attempt to say 'hi' to my daughter?! Death is the only suitable penalty for such a crime!" She grabbed a rope, trussed her up, and stuck a meat thermometer in her mouth. "Preheat the oven to 350, Rex. We're having a side of princess with our spare ribs!"

"This sure is a sticky spot I'm in," Snow noted, fidgeting uncomfortably. "Oh, if only I had some sort of magic whistle that I could use to call on a friendly wolf expert for help!"

"Mom, stop!" Red cried. "Please don't make me eat another loved one! My poor psyche is already pretty close to the breaking point."

"Sorry, Moon Moon, but if you want to be a benevolent werewolf, this probably isn't the 'verse for you," said Anita curtly, transforming into a snarling beast.

"I told you repeatedly to stop calling me that!" Red screamed, shifting into her wolf form and tackling her mother. Anita fell backward, impaling her chest on an iron spike. "Guys, I've asked you time and again not to leave these damn spikes lying around," she coughed. "Someone could get hurt."

"And...yep, that did it. Psyche's broken," Red whimpered, running to her mother's side. "I'm so sorry, Mom! If it makes you feel better, I only kill people who I really love."

"Ugh, I should have gotten my tubes tied when I had the chance," Anita groaned with her last breath.

Making its way through the street(s?) of Storybrooke, the mob heard a howl outside the library. "It's Ruby!" Spencer announced. "Or Pongo. Or maybe that wolf of Graham's." He took out a gun. "Either way, it's a fuzzy animal, and I'm evil, so it must die." He cornered Ruby's canine alter-ego in a nearby alley. "Hey, it is her! What are the odds?" He cocked his pistol. "Die, literal bitch!"

A bolt from Granny's crossbow sent his gun flying. "Watch your language, buster!"

David rushed onto the scene. "Comfort mode!" he cried. The crowd murmured warily, fighting the sudden urge to put down their weapons and hug each other. "I said comfort mode!" the quasi-prince repeated stubbornly. "Get off Ruby's back, guys! She didn't kill Billy! Spencer did it because he wanted to make me look bad and he knew I was too cute and innocent to frame directly." He smiled angelically, a warm beam of light shining on him from above.

"Can you prove it?"

"Well, for one thing, Spencer's standing right over there, and he hasn't made even a cursory attempt to shut me up or deny it."

"Hm, good point." The crowd parted to let him pass.

Hood in hand, he slowly approached Ruby. "Ruby? I guess this isn't a good time to say I told you so?" The wolf snarled. "Right, didn't think so. Look, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, I see the good in you." He inched a little closer. "Come on, Ruby. It's me, Honeymuffin."

The wolf stopped growling and licked him. "Hey, none of that. You know I'm a happily married
"man," he scolded gently, draping the hood over her and transforming her back into the bipedal beauty we all know and love.

"You saved me," Ruby breathed incredulously.

"Yeah, I'm a handsome prince, so I was kind of obligated," he demurred. The mob behind him roared to life once more. "Hey, don't make me turn the Charming Family Charm back on!" he threatened, running over to investigate.

He found Granny sprawled on the ground. "Well," the old woman grumbled, "in case you had any doubts about Spencer's villainhood, he just beat up a sweet old lady." She handed him her crossbow. "Go get him, tiger, and shoot him once for me!"

They found their nemesis standing in the shadows on a dark beach, before a raging fire, trying to come up with a good villain song to make the scene feel complete. "I've got friends on the other… no, that won't work, I don't have friends anywhere. No… one… shoots like—no, that's no good either. I just missed a stationary target from a distance of ten feet. I am your dentist…crap!"

"What the hell are you ranting about now?" said David wearily.

"Do I need a reason?"

"You killed an innocent man, a crime which I've suddenly started caring about!" the quasi-prince accused.

"Who cares? He was just a mouse," sneered the former king.

"I'm telling Mickey you said that!" Ruby shouted angrily.

"Look, Spencer," David growled, "it's been a long day, and I need to get home to my grandson before he spontaneously combusts again. If you've got a point, can you get to it?"

Spencer held up Jefferson's hat, smirking smugly. "Get ready to be as lonely and pathetic as I am, loser!" he crowed, tossing it onto the fire.

"No!" cried David, sinking to the ground in despair.

Ruby nudged him gently. "David, get a grip! It's a little singed, but it's been established that minor damage doesn't reduce the effectiveness of magical garments." She indicated the tear in her cloak. "Why don't we go get a stick and fish the hat out of there, or some water from the ocean five feet away to douse it with, or just smother it with some of the sand you're sitting on?"

David considered her words. "Hm, nah, I think this precious time would be better spent beating on the old man." He lit into his ex-dad like a Tasmanian devil, brandishing a gun.

"David, stop!" Ruby protested. "You've got to think of your family. You know how Snow hates to see murderous tyrants get their comeuppance."

His shoulders sagged in defeat, and he put the gun away. "You're right. I don't know what I was thinking."

Spencer stood up shakily, face pale, pants soaked. "Uh…does this mean you're not going to arrest me for that murder I just committed?"

"Me? Make an arrest?" David stared at him in shock. "I hardly think jokes are appropriate at a time
Red and Snow had stopped to perform a small funeral service for Anita before they moved on. "We're gathered here today to honor Anita, purported wife and estranged mother," Snow began solemnly. "Let's try to think of all the good times we had with her before she passed. I'll never forget the time she tried to murder me and eat my corpse. And..." Snow winced. "You know, homie, I really don't think I'm the right person to be delivering the eulogy. Can you take over?"

Red stepped up to the plate. "I owe my mom so much. She taught me so many things, like how to betray your loved ones, and how to be an angry racist, and how to disrespect the woman who raised me, and..." She sighed in defeat. "You know, Snow, I'm starting to come to the conclusion that maybe living mothers aren't all they're cracked up to be."

"I'll say." Snow took the wanted poster out of her pocket and glared at it. "We both got in the wrong line when they were handing out families. Maybe we should put ourselves up for adoption."

"Nah, let's just adopt each other and be sisters."

"Snow White and her sister Red. Hm, that does have a nice ring to it."

"Actually, my full name is Rose Red." Red grabbed her new sister's hand. "Come on, sis. I know an enchanted bear we can stay with until we get on our feet."

Back at the Princess Pad, David and Ruby inspected a sleeping Henry for any signs of ignition. "Poor kid," the quasi-prince lamented. "He may never see his biological mother again."

Ruby shrugged. "Could be worse. He could have to live with horror of having killed her."

David shuddered. "Okay, Ruby, it's official. You win angst forever."

"Thanks for noticing." She gave him a pat on the back. "And try to cheer up. You'll always find them, and I don't think saying so even qualifies as a spoiler." She turned to leave. "Oh! One last thing—can you go rescue Belle from those chains I put her in, before Gold finds out about it and turns me into a snail?"

"Will I go to the rescue? Are you new around here or something?"

"Right, right, dumb question."

Ruby threw off her cloak. "Well, I'm off to howl at the moon. Something about it always makes me feel right at home. In fact, if I didn't know any better, I'd swear its landmarks were identical to our own moon's."

Mary Margaret sat in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, gazing at her companions calculatingly. "The only possible way this Girl Power Squad could get any cooler would be to work Red in somehow," she mused.

Emma approached her cautiously. "What's with the smile? Are you about to break into song?"

"No, just pining."

"Well, stop it and come here. Mulan has some ideas for defeating Cora, which all seem to involve large quantities of explosives, and I'm hoping you can talk her out of trying them."
"On my way."

Meanwhile, on the ground nearby, Sleeping Beauty was finally living up to her name. She found herself in the Hell expy again, and groaned. "Why can't I dream about walking with Philip while his eyes gleam, for a change?"

Then that terrifyingly adorable little boy from earlier appeared across the room, clutching a necklace. "I command you flames to disappear!" The flames subsided. "Good work, now give me a swimming pool filled with cinnamon cocoa." One appeared. "And a puppy!" A little Dalmatian appeared in the boy's arms. "Now this is what I call dreaming!"

Aurora approached him tentatively. "Hey, you! Where can I get one of those necklaces?"

Aurora woke with a start. "Snow, I've had another nightmare. Come here and bring my blankie with you!"

Mary Margaret grudgingly retrieved the blanket and went over to her. "How the hell did I get roped into being the mother figure around here?"

Aurora threw herself into her fellow comatose princess' lap. "Oh, it was horrible! That sweet little boy was back! He smiled at me and told me not to be afraid!"

"Uh…right. Did this savage monster of yours have a name?" Emma asked.

"Yeah, he said it was Henry Mills-Swan-Blanchard-Nolan. There may have been more—I woke up before he could finish."
Hook slid down the last few feet of the giant's beanstalk. "If I were a different kind of person, I'd be developing a crippling fear of heights right about now."

Cora, who was so evil she could make even a lacy parasol look creepy, awaited him at the bottom. "Oh, Captain, my Captain, the prize we sought had damn well better be won," she seethed, a lightning bolt aimed straight at his heart.

"Er, not exactly, but can I at least get some points for effort?" A third degree electrical burn was his answer. "Ow! It's not my fault! Emma betrayed me! I think I've had a bad influence on her."

The Evilest Queen stared at him in astonishment. "Wow, I didn't think there could be a villain with a higher rate of failure than my daughter, yet here you are. Give me one reason not to fire your sexy butt!"

"Well, because there is at least one thing I'm really good at, if you know what I mean," the pirate answered with a smoldering leer.

"Are you coming on to me?" Cora made a face. "Dude, even I know that's gross!"

"Sorry," he apologized. "Stealing Rumplestiltskin's women is an old habit of mine. Sometimes I do it without thinking."

"You know Rumple?" Cora frowned. "How big is this dimension? Twenty square feet? Well, no matter, you're still fired. I despise useless men. And useful men. And women. And anthropomorphic playing cards. And children. Except maybe for my daughter. On occasion." She presented him with a treasure chest. "Here's your severance pay, now hit the road, gorgeous!" The sorceress disappeared in a puff of smoke, having not yet learned that spiting Captain Hook and then leaving him alive was a very bad idea.

She teleported back to the doomed rebel base, where she had been keeping a box full of hearts, cleverly disguised as a subwoofer. Reaching inside, she took out her plastic master heart and breathed on it.

The corpses in the yard rose to their feet. "You could really use a mint, milady," the zombies droned in unison.

"Shut up or I'll kill you even harder!" she snarled. "Now, go forth and destroy my enemies, and whatever you do, steer clear of Brad Pitt."

But she needn't have bothered. The Enchanted Forest's tight-knit community of deposed princesses was already in a state of panic. Emma flashed a school picture of Henry that she'd swiped during one of her many heists on Regina's office, at Aurora. "Is this the boy you saw?"

Aurora studied the photo uncertainly. "Well, he was noticeably older than the boy in this picture, but the uncanny resemblance to the Dark One is spot-on."

"But that's impossible! How could you dream of my on-again, off-again son?"

"Um, Emma?" Mary Margaret ventured. "We're in the process of battling our magical grandma and
her three-hundred-year-old pirate chum for a bottle of enchanted closet ash. I'm pretty sure anything's possible."

"I choose not to notice that."

"I've had the same dream as Aurora. Are you going to choose not to notice that, too?"

Emma sighed. "I would if I could, but even I have my limits."

"But Snow," Aurora interrupted, "when I told you about the dream, you told me I'd probably just had one too many ice cream sandwiches before bed."

"I was lying. I wanted your share for myself."

"Lying?" Aurora frowned. "Are we heroines allowed to do that?"

"Hey, I was raised by Regina and spent the better part of a year dating David Nolan. It's a wonder that I even remember the meaning of the word honesty."

"Hm, fair enough," Aurora conceded.

"It's the sleeping curse," Mary Margaret realized. "Everyone who goes through it ends up in that little room. Let's hope Regina was serious about her desire to reform, or it could get really crowded in there."

"Poor Henry!" Emma wailed. "This is all my fault! If only I hadn't acted so damn sane about the curse, he wouldn't be going through this!"

Everyone ignored her. "I was just trying to protect you, Aurora," said Mary Margaret gently. "Seeing as how we share a biography, I feel somewhat responsible for you."


"Cover your mouth, sweetie," Mary Margaret scolded, handing her daughter a tissue.

Emma swatted it aside. "Eminem! This is where you're supposed to say, 'Don't blame yourself, Emma; it isn't your fault.'"

"I'd like to, Emma, but it seems my fan base doesn't want me lying anymore." She pointed at Aurora. Emma burst into tears.

Mary Margaret patted her gently on the back. "Okay, okay, so I'm in dire need of some fireproof pants, and your head's buried so deeply in the sand you should have struck oil by now. It's not the end of the world. We can get Jiminy to fix those things later; right now, let's try to focus on the positive."

"I'm still perfect?" Aurora suggested innocently.

"No—"

"We've still got our looks?" Mulan admired herself in a mirror.

"No! Now that we can communicate with Storybrooke, we can go to Rumplestiltskin for help. That never backfires, right?"
"Whoa, hold the phone!" Aurora protested. "Venturing into an accursed pit full of fire to talk to a
dude with the word 'Dark' in his name? Doesn't that strike you as a little bit dangerous?"

"Don't worry, I'll be perfectly safe. But thanks for caring," said Emma cheerfully.

"Hey, come on! Doesn't anyone care what I think?"

"No," said Mary Margaret, whacking her unconscious with a frying pan.

Aurora appeared in the netherworld with a splitting headache. "I'm starting to think that this just isn't
the right clique for me," she grumbled.

Henry conveniently appeared nearby. "Who the miniaturized hell are you and what are you doing in
miniaturized Hell?"

"Name's Aurora. I'm here because I'm incredibly brave and not terribly sensible. Also because your
grandma knocked me out with a frying pan." She rubbed her head gingerly.

"You're with Mary Margaret and Emma? Are they okay?"

"Physically yes, but they've acquired some minor character flaws, and they really want to get home
to their therapist and get them fixed."

"And I suppose my dear mother wants me to tell them exactly what they need to do, and why, and
how to accomplish it, as usual?"

"Close, they want Rumplestiltskin to do it."

Henry nodded, unsurprised. "Yeah, that was going to be my second guess."

Henry sprang awake in bed, too excited to complain about the frilly pink blanket some fool had
wrapped him in. "They're alive! They're alive!"

David yawned. "That's nice, kid. You can tell me all about it when the sun's up."

Henry jabbed his grandpa with a hobby horse. "David!"

"Ow!" The quasi prince staggered to his feet. "Fine, fine, who's alive?" he muttered groggily.

"My mom!"

Regina stirred nearby. "Of course I'm alive, sweetie, why wouldn't I…" Her face fell. "Oh, you're
talking about that woman who hocked you again, aren't you?" She sighed. "You're welcome for
sleeping against this brick wall to be near you in your time of need, by the way, and for finding an
expert to treat your nightmares while this clown was busy bonding with Ruby." She jerked a thumb
at David.

The Charmings ignored her, as usual. "I smell another family reunion in our futures, kid!" David
exulted.

"I'm afraid it's not quite as easy as that, Gramps. We're going to have to work for our happy ending.
And by we, I mean Mr. Gold."

"Naturally."
"Gold? Bah!" Regina spat hatefully. "I wouldn't ask that psycho for help again if he was holding a hose and both my eyebrows were on fire!"

"Hey, did you know your mom's still alive?" asked Henry curiously.

"AAAAAH! Gold, HELP ME!" Regina screamed, bolting for the door.

"...I think that was a 'no'," David answered him.

Gold had taken Belle on a date to Granny's, because where else was there to go? The pair sat in a corner booth trying to catch up. "So, still adorkable?" said Gold conversationally.

"Yup. Still evil?"

"Yup."

"Well, we can work on that later." She held out her hand. "In the meantime, give me some change for the jukebox. I want to hear that delightful 'Be Our Guest' song one more time."

Granny appeared with their food. "Hey, Belle, I don't mean to rush your relationship along or anything, but do you think you could just make up and take him back to your place? That suit of his is making all my other customers feel underdressed."

"Sorry, homie, not this time."

Gold examined his hamburger with a frown. "Hey, I ordered escargot."

"I cancelled it," said Belle.

Gold pouted. "Remind me why I want you back, again?"

Belle took his teacup and threw it on the floor. The Dark One giggled boyishly. "Oh yeah, now I remember." He hauled her across the table and smooched her passionately.

Granny examined the cup. "You'll have to pay for that, you know."

Regina ran in, conjured a fire hose, and blasted the pair with it. "Hey Belle, you're looking less tragic than usual today. Enjoy it while it lasts. As for you, Gold, put away your cuddly persona and break out the evil one; we've got killing to do."

Gold looked pleadingly at his girlfriend. "Can I murder her now?"

"No." Belle turned to Regina. "You're welcome."

Meanwhile, Granny had pulled an alarm and turned on an air-raid siren. "Civil Defense Emergency! All right, folks, this is what all those hours of practice were for! Duck and Cover!" The other patrons dutifully donned helmets and crouched under their tables.

Regina blinked. "What's with them?"

Gold shrugged. "Who cares? If you know what's good for you, you'll leave before I chew through this damn leash Belle has me on and slaughter you like a hog."

Belle stood up. "That's it, I'm out of here. Maybe that nice Jefferson guy is still single."
"Aw, come on, Belle!" Gold wheedled. "Stick around and I'll give you another library."

"Okay!" Belle sat back down.

Seeing that she was getting nowhere, Regina killed their cutesy theme music and insinuated herself between them. "Cora's on her way to Storybrooke."

Gold paled. "Belle, go away and I'll give you another library."

Belle had swiped some popcorn off one of the abandoned tables and was watching the scene with interest. "No way! This is just getting interesting. Who's Cora?"

Regina answered for him. "My mom, your boyfriend's ex-lo—mmph!" She was cut off by Gold stuffing his hamburger into her mouth.

"Here, Regina, you were looking a bit hungry." Wearing a phony smile, he got up, gave Belle a goodbye peck, and ran like hell. "Sorry, babe, but you heard the lady! We've got murdering to do!"

The Girl Power Squad didn't really have anywhere they needed to be yet, but they were hiking around anyway in an attempt to keep their bodies trim. "Are we there yet?" Emma whined.

"Are you kidding? We don't even know where 'there' is yet," Aurora pointed out.

"Well, wherever it is, can you sleepwalk to it? Henry could be waiting for you in mini-Hell as we speak, and I'm really not comfortable leaving him there alone. What if that pervert Frollo shows up?"

"You're worried about Henry?" Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. "Emma, you're talking about the boy who hoodwinked Regina, hacked his adoption records, all but kidnapped you, reunited me with my true love, unraveled the curse to end all curses, and, oh yeah, CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD. You really think he needs the protection of a small-town rookie cop?"

"Yes, damn it!"

Mary Margaret sat down in the middle of the road. "Fine, we'll camp here. It's as good a place as any, I guess."

Aurora's poofy silk hiking attire caught on a branch for the umpteenth time. "Oof!" she grunted, pulling herself free. "Historically accurate clothing patterns blow!"

"Is something wrong?" said Mulan.

"Well, my true love just died a couple of days ago, I have a potentially life-threatening sleeping disorder, and I'm living in a post-apocalyptic warzone. Does any of that count?"

"About that potentially life-threatening sleeping disorder," Mulan interrupted. "Have you noticed that it's potentially life-threatening?"

Aurora shrugged. "Yeah, but so is everything else about our environment. So I figure, what the hell?"

The warrior swatted her over the head with her katana. "Stop risking your life or I'll kill you! I can't bear the thought of losing you...uh, because you're my last tie to my heterosexual love interest Philip."

Aurora looked at her quizzically. "So what's your plan? To spend of the rest of our lives alone
together in this post-apocalyptic hellhole, ducking monsters side-by-side for the rest of our lives?"

"Mm, hot," said Mulan dreamily. Then she blushed. "Uh, I mean, this plan is too risky."

"Listen, lady, I'm the only chick in this dimension who's not a complete badass, and I'm sick of feeling left out!" Aurora advanced on her, eyes glinting dangerously. "So I'm going in to find that boy, and when I get back, you're giving me ninja lessons, and I don't want to hear another word about it! Understood?!" the princess barked.

Mulan pouted. "I think I liked you better as a damsel in distress."

Henry settled down for a nap on the bed Gold had in his shop for some reason. "Here, I brought you your favorite blankie," said Regina, covering him tenderly.

"Mom, I'm going into a chamber full of fire. You really think warmth is going to comfort me?"

"Sorry."

"It's cool. So, this grandma-slash-great-great-grandma of mine, she's pretty scary, huh?"

"Yeah, but don't worry," Gold consoled him. "I have the biggest fan base, so if it comes down to a fight between us, she'll probably be the one who dies."

Regina was insulted. "Nuh-uh! My fan base is bigger than your fan base!"

"Is not!"

"Is too!"

"Is not!" She threw an apple at his head.

"Is too!" He hit her with his cane.

While they were busy duking it out, David took a minute to comfort his grandson. "Sorry about them. If there was anyone else to go to for help, I'd do it, but unfortunately, genius and sanity seem to be mutually exclusive around here.

"And how." Henry rolled to the side to dodge a stray lightning bolt.

"Are you sure you're up to this?"

Henry heaved a longsuffering sigh. "Gramps, I suffered ten years of crippling psychological abuse, committed suicide, and came back from the dead. I think I can handle the trauma of watching drapery burn for a few minutes."

"Right, dumb question. Just try not to die, okay?"

Gold shoved the quasi-prince aside. "Relax, the boy won't be dying until I damn well say so." He perched at the side of the unexplained bed. "Now then, I'm going to tell you a bedtime story. Once upon a time, there was an incredibly powerful and very attractive sorcerer who shall remain nameless because his name is unpronounceable. One day two ingrates, who had forgotten that they owed him their safety and happiness, decided to trap him in a hole for kicks."

"That was you. They used Cinderella to trap you with a quill from the legendary Aves Deusexmachinus."
"Don't interrupt!" Gold conjured a frying pan and knocked him unconscious with it. "Now, where was I? Oh yes, it wasn't the quill, it was the ink. Came from a squid by the name of Ursula. Don't ask me how the Blue Fairy ended up with it—frankly, I don't want to know. I got mine by swapping her a pudding cup for it. They can find it in my old cell down in the mines. The ink, not the pudding, that is."

David frowned. "Wait a minute, how did you manage to smuggle that into your cell?"

Gold smirked. "I dared the guard to strip-search me and he ran away screaming."

As Aurora lay sleeping, Mulan watched over her anxiously. "I won't let you die, sweet princess." Her companions stared at her, and she covered her tracks by pointing heavenward. "...er, because Philip's up there, and he's mine!"

Meanwhile, Emma was pacing so hard she'd worn a five-foot-deep trench in the forest floor. Shaking her head, Mary Margaret reached down and hefted her out of it. "Emma, relax!"

"How can I?" she cried in despair. "Through my own carelessness, I have inadvertently caused my only child to be trapped in a scary new dimension, and I can't even be there to help him! You have no idea what I'm going through, here!" She sighed. "I could really go for a Zoloft cupcake right about now."

Mary Margaret, mentally adding 'empathy issues' to the list of problems to be discussed with Dr. Hopper on their return, put an arm around her daughter's shoulders. "Relax. Henry's not going to die. If he did, what would you and Regina fight over?"

Emma relaxed slightly. "There is that, I suppose."

They heard a twig cracking in the distance. "Hey, is that a bunny?" Mary Margaret wondered.

"No, all the cute and fuzzy animals went over to Storybrooke, unable to bear the thought of being parted from you." Mulan's hand flew to the handle of her sword. "With our luck, it's probably a horde of something."

Aurora awoke in a swirling mass of flames for the third time that day. "Ugh, this is really starting to get old."

Henry appeared across the room. "Aurora? We've got to stop meeting like this, homie."

"Agreed!" she hollered back to him. "Did you ask the Dark One for help?"

"No, he was in the shower, so we went to the Blue Fairy instead."

"We're doomed!" Aurora cried in despair.

Henry laughed. "Naw, just playing, we got him."

"Don't scare me like that!" she yelled over the roaring flames. "What do we have to do?"

"You have to go to Rumplestiltskin's cell and pray the curse somehow caused it to unlock!"

"Huh? Henry, I can't hear you!" A wall of flames shot up between them. "Hey, I thought you said your necklace could control those!"
"It was free! You get what you pay fo-AAAAAAGH!"

"Aurora!" a deep, male voice called down to her.

"Who the hell is that?" Henry screamed.

"It must be Hook! He's the only living male in our dimension!" She floated up out of the room. "No, wait, it's Mulan. I must be late for my ninja lessons. Gotta jet!"

Aurora awoke with a yawn. "Hey, what's the big idea? I was finally making a friend who doesn't boss me around and hit me."

"Shut up and cower, Aurora!"

"Yes, ma'am." Aurora grudgingly obeyed while Mulan drew her sword.

A pack of zombies emerged from the forest and ambled over to them. "Excuse me, ladies? My friends and I are on our way to Yonkers, and I think we've taken a wrong turn somewhere. Could you—"

"Hi-yA!" Mulan beheaded three of them in one mighty blow.

Elsewhere in camp, Mary Margaret was fighting off zombies with bow and blade, while Emma shed a tear for her lost chainsaw. "Emma, pay attention!" her mother screamed. But it was too late. A zombie tackled her to the ground and grabbed the compass.

With a heavy heart, Emma picked up a sword and tried to make do. "Emma SMASH!" she yelled halfheartedly, running the creature through and snatching the compass back.

The zombie yanked the blade out of it rotting guts. "Are you trying to kill me? That's so redundant," it scoffed haughtily.

"Mulan, help!" Mary Margaret glanced around, realizing that the warrior had fled. "She's gone! Sweet! Now that a precedent has been set, we can flee without looking like total cowards." She grabbed her daughter's hand and bolted.

Mulan raced through the woods, Aurora at her heels. "But Mulan, I don't wanna run from danger! You promised you'd make a man out of me!" the princess protested.

"That was just an empty recruitment slogan! Run! Run like a scared bunny!" the warrior screamed.

A zombie grabbed her by the ankle. "Hey, nice shoes. Give 'em up and I'll let you keep your brain," it bargained.

"No way! These were a birthday gift from Shang!" Mulan kicked the its head off and scrambled to her feet. "Can you believe the nerve of that thing, Aurora?" She glanced around. "Aurora?" She cursed loudly. "Damn it, Aurora! You know I was just kidding about liking you better as a damsel in distress, right?"

She made her way back to Mary Margaret and Emma, who were trying to fashion a makeshift chainsaw out of some wood and leaves. "Bad news, homies. This latest evil horde took my girl."

"No, not Aurora!" Emma cried in dismay. "She was just starting to get interesting!"
Henry jolted awake in the unexplained bed. "Well, that was a bust."

"What happened?" Gold wanted to know. "Did you get a chance to talk to her, or did she selfishly flee, as all women eventually do?"

"The second one," said Henry glumly. Gold gave him an empathetic pat on the shoulder.

Regina raised her hand. "Does anyone else care that my son is covered in third-degree burns? No, just me?" She sighed. "Okay, then."

Aurora was in the pit back at Ye Olde Refugee Camp, torn from the arms of yet another brave protector and imprisoned by yet another evil witch. "I'm getting the strangest feeling of deja-vu," she murmured thoughtfully.

Cora walked in, wearing a smile that could have curdled milk. "Yo, I brought you some stew. It's unicorn's blood flavor. I hope that's okay."

"Go screw an imp, psycho."

"Would that I could." The creepy smile remained in place. "You've taken a level in badass, I see. How adorable." The witch gave her cheek a motherly pinch.

Aurora smacked her hand away. "If you're planning on trading me for the compass, you're wasting your time. My friends would never give it up for me. I'm not even a regular!"

"I'm afraid they don't have to choice. They have to do the noble thing, or they'll all get magical heart-leprosy."

"Ew."

"Eh, it's not so bad. Sure, the Dark Side warps your heart, drives away your loved ones, and leaves you empty and miserable, but the costumes are to die for." She conjured up a mirror and admired herself in it. "You should really consider joining up."

"What part of 'go screw an imp, psycho' are you not getting?"

"What are you tagging along with them for, anyway?" Cora sniggered. "Are you planning on following them to Storybrooke? You want to live in a world that actually has people in it? How absurd! Your proper place is here, crying over Philip's corpse until you drown in a sea of your own tears."

Aurora looked unconvinced. "No, actually, that sounds like more of a Greek myth's ending than a fairy tale ending."

Cora switched tactics. "What if I told you Philip wasn't really dead, but in another dimension?"

"I'd ask you how he was surviving there without his body."

"There's a very good explanation for that." But before she could give it, Aurora flung the bowl of stew at her. "Hey, knock it off! There's poison in that!"

"You think I'm dumb enough to buy into your lies? What do I look like, Snow?" Aurora shot her a pretty good imitation of Regina's Glare of Evil. "You clearly have a hearing problem, so I'm going to say it loudly this time. GO SCREW AN IMP, PSYCHO!"
Cora conjured a frying pan and knocked her unconscious with it. "I'm starting to like this kid." She stroked the parrot on her shoulder. "It's a shame we're going to kill her."

"Rawk! Gonna kill her! Rawk! Gonna kill her!"

"Good boy, now pass it on."

The bird descended from the treetops and landed on Mary Margaret's shoulder. "Hi, homie!" she greeted brightly. "You're not as blue as my normal pets, but after so many days of bird withdrawal, I'm desperate enough to accept any—what's that?" The bird whispered into her ear. "You already have an owner? Named Cora? Ouch, my condolences."

Emma and Mulan were looking on dubiously. "Where exactly did you learn to speak bird?" asked the warrior.

"I took some lessons from Dr. Doolittle when I was a kid." She listened carefully. "That's rough news. Well, thanks for the info, Iago." She handed him a five dollar tip, and he cawed indignantly. "All right, fine, here's ten." Clutching the bills in his talons, he flew away. Mary Margaret turned to her companions grimly. "Cora says we have until sundown to bring her the compass or she'll kill Aurora."

"She's going to kill Aurora if we don't bring her the compass." Emma raised her eyebrows. "As opposed to us bringing her the compass and giving her the chance to kill all four of us?" She snorted. "Oh yeah. We're definitely stupid enough to fall for that."

Mulan grabbed for the compass. "Fork it over, Swan! I don't want Aurora to die. I need her for banter."

Emma clutched it protectively. "Yeah, well, I don't want us, my son, my father, and the entire population of Storybrooke to die. I win."

Mary Margaret insinuated herself between them. "Relax, Mulan, we can save Aurora ourselves. We're Charmings, and you're no slouch yourself." She raised her sword heroically. "This calls for an epic quest!"

"You want us to accomplish something without Rumplestiltskin's help?" Mulan gaped at her. "What planet are you from?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I'm not crazy. I was just thinking that, if you could whip up another batch of your opium—"

"Far-Eastern poppy-based sedative powder," Mulan corrected stubbornly.

"Whatever. If I had some, I could go under and talk to Henry myself."

The warrior scowled. "And why didn't you mention this a few hours ago, when Aurora was roasting herself alive for your benefit?"

"You want us to accomplish something without Rumplestiltskin's help?" Mulan gaped at her. "What planet are you from?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I'm not crazy. I was just thinking that, if you could whip up another batch of your opium—"

"Far-Eastern poppy-based sedative powder," Mulan corrected stubbornly.

"Whatever. If I had some, I could go under and talk to Henry myself."

The warrior scowled. "And why didn't you mention this a few hours ago, when Aurora was roasting herself alive for your benefit?"

"You want us to accomplish something without Rumplestiltskin's help?" Mulan gaped at her. "What planet are you from?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I'm not crazy. I was just thinking that, if you could whip up another batch of your opium—"

"Far-Eastern poppy-based sedative powder," Mulan corrected stubbornly.

"Whatever. If I had some, I could go under and talk to Henry myself."

The warrior scowled. "And why didn't you mention this a few hours ago, when Aurora was roasting herself alive for your benefit?"

"You want us to accomplish something without Rumplestiltskin's help?" Mulan gaped at her. "What planet are you from?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I'm not crazy. I was just thinking that, if you could whip up another batch of your opium—"
Regina sat holding a cool cloth to Henry's burned arm, while Gold looked on in disgust. "Have you gone mad? Are you a witch or not?" Shoving her aside, he magicked the burn away. "Nope, you're definitely not mine," he muttered under his breath.

"Yeah? Well, if you're so smart, then why didn't your stupid pendant keep Henry safe like you said it would?" Regina challenged.

"Think back to our conversation when I gave it to him. What were my exact words?"

"This will allow you to control the other realm until David needs an excuse to get cursed',' she remembered. "Crap."

David wandered back in from the bathroom. "What was that?"

"We were just saying that Henry's going to need some time to recover before he goes back in," Gold lied.

"Are you crazy?" the quasi-prince shrieked. "I can't send my grandchild back in there to be barbecued alive! I'm still trying to live down that baby-in-the-closet fiasco!"

"So what's your solution?" Gold sneered. "Pump him full of caffeine and forbid him to sleep again for the rest of his life?"

"Okay, good point, but what good is sending him back in going to do?" Regina challenged. "You heard him. Aurora's gone; there's no one there to hear our brilliant plan." Gold shot her a look.

"Okay, fine, there's no one there to hear your brilliant plan," she conceded.

"Yes there is!" David's face lit up. "Snow will be there!"

"How do you know?" asked Regina.

"Because I have psychic powers where Snow is concerned. Remember when you cursed her, how I automatically knew the moment it happened?"

"True." Regina shrugged. "I guess everyone sort of forgot about that."

"Then it's settled!" David was positively beaming. "Cora gets stunned, my girls get home, and I get a private makeout session with my Eminem. Everybody wins!"

"Uh, you do realize that you're about to undergo one of the most horrible curses known to man, or whatever the hell I am, don't you?" Gold ventured.

Regina nodded grudgingly. "I hate to agree with Gold, but yeah, that's kind of a valid concern."

"I'm not scared. I faced you, didn't I?"

"Yeah, and look how well that went for you."

"Shut up!"

"But you might never wake up!" Regina protested. "And as much as I would love to see that, Henry would yell at me."

"No worries. When I see Snow, she'll kiss me, and I'll wake up."

"But you won't have physical lips, how are you going to—"
David cut him off. "I'd rather die than go another minute without Snowing fluff! I have spent far too much time looking for my wife! Seriously, it's like, the only thing I've done since I met her, and I'm ready to get a new freaking hobby! Now, shut up and curse me, damn it!"

Hook strolled into the pit and shook Aurora awake. "Hey, baby, rise and shine! Sorry I didn't knock, but, ya know." He held up his hook. "No knuckles."

Aurora screamed, shrinking back in fear. "Ah! Are you here to ravish me?"

"What? No!"

Aurora tried her best to look relieved. "Then what do you want?"

He broke the shackles on her wrists. "I'm letting you go."

"Why?"

"Because I'm Chaotic Neutral, and besides, I can't abide Cora's incessant hookblocking."

"Do you think I'm a fool?"

"Well, you did go out hiking in a ball gown and tiara." He nodded at her attire. She didn't look amused. "I'm serious about this! That woman double-crossed me, and it seems I can dish betrayal out but can't take it."

"Uh, right." Aurora rose uncertainly. "Well, thanks, then. Is there anything I can do to repay you?"

"Yeah, actually. Give this to Emma for me." He swept her into his arms and kissed her breathless. When he finally released her, she sank into a boneless heap at his feet. "Aw, nuts, why is this always happening to me?" he grumbled, shaking her and slapping her cheeks. "Wake up! You've got to get out of here!"

The Girl Power Squad was on the move again, Mulan poring over a map as they marched. "Let's see, we're on the Troll Road, heading west from the Sea of Monsters, so the Woods of the Dead should be right over there, behind Blood and Guts Ridge." She pointed.

"Who names these places? Did your royal cartographer have some sort of mental illness?" Emma whispered to her mother.

Mary Margaret had her eyes squeezed shut and was taking deep breaths through her nose. "Shh, Emma, I'm trying to visualize, here."

Emma pulled her to a halt. "Wait a minute, what's with all the relaxation techniques? Is there something scary about this accursed netherworld full of blinding flame?"

"Yes, it's an accursed netherworld full of blinding flame. And boring, to boot," she added. "There's no cellphone reception and the only TV in the place melted years ago."

"No!" Emma screamed. "What a nightmare! Oh, and now Henry's stuck in there, all because I refused to notice how omniscient he was!"

Mary Margaret took a page out of her husband's book and slipped into comfort mode. "Don't blame yourself. No logical adult would have believed Henry's stories."
"No, but most logical adults probably would have reconsidered when they were corroborated by two
grown men who had never met him or each other."

"True," Mary Margaret conceded. "You suck. But don't worry, it's not your fault. It runs in our
family. After all, I'm the one who started this whole mess by narking on Regina's boyfriend. But
there's no point in playing the blame game. The good folk of the blogosphere already have that
covered. We've just got to keep our eyes on the prize and stay positive."

"Why?"

"Because that's normally your dad's job, and since he's not here, someone has to pick up the slack."

"Okay," Emma agreed reluctantly. "And Eminem?"

"Yeah?"

"I disagree with you on one point. The blame game is highly underrated. When we get home, I'll be
getting a new chainsaw and going after the rest of Regina's yard."

"All right, fair enough, but at least promise me you'll wear goggles."

As Regina stood in the back of the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, fiddling with Gold's enchanted
chemistry set, Henry suddenly remembered that they were still technically related. "Hey, Mom. I
notice you're wearing gray instead of black today. It's a good start." Smiling proudly, he gave her a
big hug.

"Thanks, sweetie, it mean a lot to me to hear you say that. I've finally managed to cut myself down to
two spells a week." She shoved a stick of gum in her mouth and chewed it fiercely. "Except for, you
know, that relapse a while back where I used my powers to destroy a rampaging zombie who was
threatening your safety and everyone else's."

"That was truly unforgiveable," Henry agreed, "but we'll just have to move past it. So, do you think
David will be okay?"

"Who cares?" Then she remembered. "Oh, that's right, you do. I dunno. Why don't you heed the
words of our town motto?" She pointed out the window at a billboard reading, When in doubt, ask
Gold.

"That would be a waste of time, Mom. It doesn't take an evil genius to see that this plan is doomed to
failure."

"What makes you say that, sweetie?"

"Where do I begin?" He began ticking reasons off on his fingers. "For one thing, you're involved, for
another, I'm not involved, for another, Rumplestiltskin was against it, plus that creepy music is
playing in the background, and everyone's been building up how horrible it would be to get trapped
in that netherworld…"

Regina gave him a funny look. "Since when are you such a pessimist?"

"Since now," he snapped.

"Well, stop it. It's weirding me out." she scolded. "I never thought I'd say this, but I miss the
Charming Family Charm."
Mulan and her homies finally arrived at their destination, where one last poppy was growing. "It looks narcolicious," said Emma in wonder.

Mary Margaret shuddered. "I don't know. I've had bad experiences ingesting magical coma drugs."

"Too late to back out now," said Mulan, chopping the little flower to pieces and breaking out her portable drug lab.

Back at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Henry was too upset to deliver the exposition as he usually did, so Gold had stepped up to the plate. "Regina's weird apple fetish notwithstanding, the best way to deliver a sleeping curse is by pricking the victim's finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel, and then turning into a dragon to keep the necrophiliac princes at bay." He handed said spindle to Regina. "Here, you do it. When this idiotic plan kills him, as it inevitably will, I don't want his fans blaming it on me."

"How thoughtful." Regina dunked the needle into the potion she'd prepared, then placed it back on the spinning wheel, then waved David forward. "I sure hope your tetanus shots are up to date."

"No, but it's too late to back out now."

Henry gave him a hug for luck. "Try not to die, Gramps. I'm starting to run low on guardians, here."

David slipped into comfort mode. "Henry, why did you eat that cursed turnover?"

"Because I was kind of hungry and a complete badass."

"And how did you know Emma would save you?"

"Because I inherited my badass gene from her."

"Precisely. And where do you think she got it from?" He raised his hand, smiling smugly. "Yo." He gave his grandson a pat on the back. "So stop worrying, already. You should know better by now."

"Fair enough," said Henry, slipping his magic necklace over David's head. "But take this with you, just in case you have another relapse of your lame cursed persona. It'll keep you safe."

"I doubt that-it didn't seem to do you much good. But I appreciate the gesture all the same."

Mulan's over timer finally pinged, and she gave the opi-, uh, Far-Eastern, poppy-based narcotic powder—an experimental sniff. "Mm, just like Mom used to make." She noticed the princesses staring at her. "Don't judge me!

"Your opiate addiction is nobody's business but yours," Mary Margaret agreed. "Let's stick to the topic at hand. How long is this stuff going to last?"

"No longer than an hour. Maybe two if I mix it with some Ambien."

"That probably won't be necessary. I'm sure Henry will be there. I mean, it's not like he's going to be busy doing his schoolwork!" She and Emma laughed hysterically at the very notion.

Wiping tears of mirth from her eyes, Emma started to hug her mother for luck. Then remembered that she was supposed to be the stoic one, and turned it into a handshake instead. "Give Henry my love, and a belated apology for the near-death experience, if time permits."
"Sure thing." She gave Mulan a nod. "Okay, I'm ready." Then she turned back to Emma. "Sweetie, could you shut your eyes? Call me old-fashioned, but I don't think it's appropriate for me to be snorting opium in front of my kid."

Mr. Gold sat pretending at the spinning wheel, pretending he knew how to use it, while David stared at the spindle with trepidation. "I guess this isn't a good time to mention I'm afraid of needles?"

"Just think of it as a metal toothpick, dearie."

David tried to visualize it for a moment, then shook his head. "Nope, no good, I'm still nervous."

"Dude, you counted coup on a freaking dragon, and you're scared of a nap?"

"It's not so much the nap. It's the waking up in mini-Hell that makes me uneasy."

"You won't be waking up in mini-Hell. You'll be waking up in the black, lonely, un navigable void next door to Hell. Does that make you feel better?"

"No."

"Tough cookies, you still have to do it."

David took a deep breath and stretched out his finger, while chanting quietly to steady his nerves. "I am the original badass, I am the original badass, I am the original…zzzZZZzzz." He slumped back on the unexplained bed, drooling profusely.

David awoke in a darkened void, indistinct whispers rustling all around him. "Oh no, it's the Others!" he screamed. "Belle! Spencer! Regina! Help!" Then he noticed a variety of mirrors gleaming in the torchlight. "Oh, thank goodness, a familiar face." He tapped on one of them. "Hey, Sidney, I'm kind of lost. Have you seen Snow?" He knocked a little louder. "Hello? Sidney? Erik? Anybody?"

Meanwhile, Snow had arrived in the burning room, and found it every bit as horrifying as she remembered it. "I am the original badass, I am the original badass, I am the original badass…" she chanted under her breath.

David suddenly realized that Henry's necklace was glowing blue. "More homing jewelry? How convenient." The pendant began sizzling in his hand. "Gah! How inconvenient!" The necklace clattered to the floor. He reached down to pick it up, his fingers brushing the floor and coming away scorched. "Hooray, I've found mini-Hell! I won't be needing this flame-controller anymore!" David tossed the necklace aside, smashed a hole in the floor, dove inside, and then remembered. "Oh, right, the raging inferno. Damn it!" He tried to jump back out and retrieve it, but it was no use.

"Henry, is that you?" Snow yelled across the sea of fire. "Wow, I never realized how much you look like your grandpa. And did you have a massive growth spurt while I was gone?"

"No, Snow, it's me!"

"Charming?"

"Yep." David stood there waiting for a long moment. "Come on, honey. I can't say my line until you
"You found me," Mary Margaret parroted dutifully.

"Did you ever doubt I would? I'm the original badass!"

"I thought I was the original badass?"

"Let's just call it a tie."

"Deal. Where's Henry?"

David was insulted. "I'd never let my grandson come to a place like this! What kind of father figure do you think I am?"

"The kind who stuffed his baby in a box."

Her quasi-prince shot her a death glare. "Hey, don't you start. It was your bright idea."

"Sorry."

"Let's not argue. We've still got twenty-eight years of making out to catch up on." He tried to pop a breath mint, but it melted in the heat of the chamber. "Aw, nuts!"

"You are incredibly hot, no pun intended, but maybe we should spend some time discussing Gold's plan first."

"Huh?"

"You know, to defeat Cora and get me and the kid out of this post-apocalyptic hellhole?"

"Oh, that. Gold says you need to stun her with some magic squid ink. There's some back at that cell we so ungratefully locked him in all those years ago. Get it and defeat her, like you do everyone else." He caressed the scar on his chin lovingly.

"Wait a minute. How did you get here? You went over to Regina's for dinner again, didn't you?" She groaned. "Damn it, Charming, did you suffer a head injury while I was away?"

"No, no, no, I'm not dumb enough to fall for her apple routine. I'm not you. I simply cursed myself so the Snowing shippers would have something to talk about again."

"The question stands! You loveable idiot!" she howled. "Now you're stuck here, and you didn't even have the foresight to bring sunscreen with you!"

"Relax, babe. You're forgetting one of the cardinal rules of fairy tales. Physical affection solves all problems!" He lunged at her, puckering his lips.

"I love this universe!" she cried ecstatically, throwing herself into his arms. They both fell forward and landed flat on their faces. "Ow. Were you always this transparent?"

David's face fell. "Oh, I get it. My lips are still technically back at Gold's place." The quasi-prince sighed. "I should have known the writers would find some way to muck up our reunion. They always seem to."

Mary Margaret burst into tears. "We have spent far too much time finding and losing each other! Seriously, it's like, the only thing we've done since we met, and I'm ready to get a new freaking
"Er, comfort mode?" David tried meekly.

His wife was still ranting. "It's a wonder we even managed to reproduce without our bed spontaneously splitting in two!"

"Snow…"

"Hell, you've never even had a chance to tell me your actual name!"

"Come on, Snow! You've got to stay positive!"

"About what?!"

It took him a good long while to think of a comeback for that. "You'll make it back to Storybrooke and save me eventually. You're the original badass."

"And you're still great in comfort mode, baby," she sobbed, fading to nothing and leaving David alone in mini-Hell.

The quasi prince surveyed his new home with a heavy heart. "Well, it's better than living with Kathryn, but not by much."

Henry stood over David's prone body, examining the ruined pendant on his chest. "Come on, Gramps! If you don't wake up, I'll have to go back and live with Mom, and she's already killed me once!"

"Hey!" Regina protested. "I said I was sorry!"

"No you didn't!"

The former queen composed herself. "Relax, I'm sure David's fine," she fibbed. "We all know he's too cute to die."

Mary Margaret sprang awake. "No! Emma, quick, get me some more opiates! I desperately need more opiates!"

"Are you addicted already?" Emma shook her head ruefully. "I knew this was a bad idea."

"Emma, please, this is serious! He's trapped in there!"

"Henry?"

"No, David!"

Emma relaxed. "Oh. That's all right, then."

"Emma!"

"What do you expect? I've seen the guy maybe twice in my life, and he was always too busy philandering to talk." Mary Margaret slapped her. "Relax, Eminem! You'll save him when we get back, as usual."
"What makes you so sure?"

"I didn't want to do this, but you leave me no choice." Emma tossed her hair and held up her sword. "Comfort mode!"

Mary Margaret positively melted. "Aw, you're daddy's little girl, all right!"

"It's starting to look that way," her daughter admitted. "So, did he give you the info, or were you two too busy exchanging sappy one-liners?"

"Gold says that the key to stopping her is back at that cell we so ungratefully locked him in all those years ago."

"The one in the mines?" Emma's eyes sparkled with avarice. "Well then, let's go get it, and maybe grab a diamond or two off the walls while we're there. Oh, don't give me that look, I'm broke! Mulan seems to have stolen my wallet." She felt around in her pockets. "And the compass, too. That little sneak! I can't believe I fell for this! What about my superpower?"

Mary Margaret heaved a longsuffering sigh. "Emma, you're a magical princess who can break curses and raise the dead. Do you really still need the imaginary human lie detector to feel special?"

"Yes, damn it!"

At that very moment, Mulan was running through the woods. "The Charmings aren't going to like this," she panted, "but hopefully they'll be too high to seek revenge."

Cora strolled into the pit. "Hey, Aurora, I feel terrible about that poisoned stew, and I thought I'd make amends by bringing you a gift." She dragged a spinning wheel into the cell. "I've heard you're a collector, and this little beauty has the sharpest spindle you ever saw. Go ahead, give it a—" She took a closer look at the cell's sole inmate. "Aw, no. Hook, why are you still cluttering up my dimension?"

"Because you idiot sorcerers keep neglecting to kill me," the pirate replied cheerfully.

"Why did you release Aurora? Did she charm you through song?"

"No."

"Offer to get you Emma's diary?"

"No."

"Point out how much it would annoy me?"

He smirked. "No, but the thought had occurred to me." Infuriated, Cora caught him in a Force choke, pinned him to the wall, and conjured stone shackles for his arms. He just laughed. "Ooh, kinky."

"Wipe that ridiculous grin off your face and cower, damn it!" She tore off his titular hook and dug it into his perpetually bare chest.

Hook started laughing even harder. "You think bitchy women scare me? Please! I lived with Milah."

"Hoo-ook!" She stamped her foot petulantly. "You're making me look bad!"
"Wouldn't want that." He cowered politely. "Please, dread mistress, spare my worthless life and I shall grant thee a boon," he delivered in a monotone.

She dropped him. "That's more like it."

Mulan's little journey down the slippery slope was interrupted by an arrow from Mary Margaret's bow. "Fork over the compass and that wicked cape of yours at once!"

"What are you gonna do if I don't?" the warrior sassed. "Set a bluebird on me?"

"No, I'll stab you in the jugular and watch with glee as you choke to death on your own blood!" Mary Margaret jump-tackled her, digging an arrow into her neck.

Mulan gaped at her in disbelief. "Are you sure you're really Snow White? If so, I've got to say, you've been grossly misrepresented in film and literature."

"I know, right?" said Emma.

"Bloodthirsty or not, you're still not getting the compass. I need it to save my damsel from her latest bout of distress."

"And you really think Cora's just going to give her to you on a silver platter when all of this is done?" Mary Margaret slugged her with her free hand. "I thought you were supposed to be a tactical genius!"

Then Aurora suddenly appeared, a gaping hole in her bodice, but otherwise fine. "Snow White, please stop killing Mulan. I need her for banter."

Emma bent over, groping around blindly on the ground for the eyeballs that had popped out of her head. "Dude, what the hell?"

"I escaped from Cora." The other women stared at her skeptically. "All right, a big, strong man rescued me from Cora…but I did manage to track down your whereabouts without any prior knowledge of your destination. I deserve some awesome points for that, at least, right?"

"A big, strong man?" Emma perked right up. "We could use one of those for our upcoming quest. Is he still available?"

"Yeah. His name is Hook."

Emma blanched. "Er, on second thought, no boys allowed."

"You should really reconsider. Hook is brave and cunning and way better-looking than that jerk Rumplestiltskin…"

"…a snappy dresser, great in the sack, and did I mention way better-looking than that jerk Rumplestiltskin?" Cora finished, Aurora's heart held in the palm of her hand.

"Hey, you forgot 'studmuffin'," Hook whispered over her shoulder.

"Oh, and I forgot 'studmuffin'," Aurora finished.
"Do you really expect Emma to buy this?" asked Cora.

"Do you really expect Emma buy this?" Aurora parroted.

"Huh?" said Emma.

"Er, I was just wondering if you wanted to buy some band candy? No? That's cool, we're still buddies," Cora saved, finally remembering to turn off the heart.

"To answer your question, yes, I do," Hook replied. "Emma's got kind of a thing for con men. So, what do you say? Are we partners, or are you going to screw me over?"

"Yes."

"So, did you find a way to stop the lovely Cora?" Aurora continued.

"Uh…yes and no," said Emma. "We have to go to Rumplestiltskin's cell and pray that he's not screwing with our minds again."

"The odds of that seem pretty slim," Aurora agreed, "but I guess it's the only chance we've got."

As Emma and Aurora started on their way, Mary Margaret was left alone with Mulan. "Er, I hope there are no hard feelings about me trying to drown you in your own blood just now."

The warrior's eyes were fixed squarely on the ground. "Yeah, and I guess I should apologize for throwing your whole family under the bus, too."

Mary Margaret groaned. "This is going to be the most awkward quest since that one I accidentally went on with Regina."
A completely cloaked, yet somehow still sexy stranger, skipped merrily up the stairs of the Queen's tower prison. But alas, Royal Henchman #991723 stood in his way. "Hey, hold it, pal! A stranger half-hidden under an ominous black cloak? You're clearly up to something."

"What, this old thing?" He plucked at the folds of his cloak. "There's a very simple explanation. I'm...a member of the Night's Watch, and it's part of my uniform."

"You expect me to believe that you made an oath of chastity with a body like that?" Royal Henchman #991723 scoffed. "Seriously, who the hell are you?"

"A character with a name," Hook replied.

The royal henchman gulped. "I'm clearly out of my league, here!" He shoved the keys into Hook's hand and promptly jumped out the nearest window.

"Smart man." Hook strolled into a cell, where Belle sat in the cleanest, most stylish set of prison rags ever. "Hey, baby. Nice night for a bloodletting."

Belle looked bored. "I assume you've come to kidnap me, like everyone else?"

"No, I'm here to help you, for now. I have dreadful news. Rumplestiltskin's gone on a rampage for the umpteenth time and is trying to kill your father. I need to find his cursed dagger so I can stop him."

Belle looked unworried. "That's not necessary, I'm sure Rumple had a good reason. Honestly, Dad's kind of a jerk."

Hook groaned. "Oh, you have got to be kidding me..."

"Sorry, dude, but you're barking up the wrong tree," said Belle boldly. "I'm the queen of the Dearies, and I always will be!"

"Oh," Hook brandished his titular appendage. "Then I guess I'll have to kill you. No offense—I just do that sort of thing."

"Or," Belle suggested, "you could ransom me back to my adoring Rumple in exchange for that dagger you keep going on about."

"Hey, I don't need any chicks telling me how to do my job!" He knocked her unconscious and raised his hook to kill her.

Fortunately, Regina appeared and magically arm-wrestled him away from her, snatching his hook and locking it into her enchanted tackle box. "Hey, hands off the damsel, pal! I, having been blessed with a brain, am planning to use her against Rumplestiltskin."

"Well, you'd better do it fast. I'm killing him tomorrow."

Regina gave him a pat on the head. "I seriously doubt that, but you're dear for trying."

"Give me back my hook!" Hook whined. "Without it, I'm just Captain Jones, and people invariably mix me up with that weirdo Davy!"
"Jones?" Regina's eyes flickered with recognition. "The same Jones who swore vengeance on Rumplestiltskin, then immediately decided to take a break and go on vacation for three hundred years?"

"The one and only." Hook genuflected.

"Well, in that case, maybe I can help you. I've been out to get 'Stiltskin ever since he gave me that F in Evil all those years ago." She pouted. "Jerk ruined my entire GPA!"

"Harsh."

"You're telling me!" She draped an arm around his shoulders. "I like you. Come on, let's go grab a drink and give the Hooked Queen shippers something to talk about."

"All right," the pirate agreed warily, "but no appletinis!"

She led him down to the Royal Wet Bar, the construction of which had been her first official act as Queen, and poured them some McCutcheon's. "Here, it was a gift from King George."

"Thanks." He took a sip. "Not poisoned, I see. Well, since there are only two reasons you ever refrain from killing men, you must either want to jump my bones or make me kill someone."

"The second one," Regina confirmed.

"Are you sure?" Hook gave her a provocative look and started undoing his buttons. "Because I have good references." He opened up the window and gestured at a crowd of screaming fangirls below.

"Thanks, but I already have a love slave," she declined politely. "What I really need is someone to off my mom."

"That's the sickest, most twisted thing I've ever heard." He grinned. "I love it!" He held out his hand expectantly. "My usual subcontractor's fee is two grand, but for you, I'll offer a twenty-five percent discount."

"I can give you something better than money. I can put you under a horrific curse, designed by your archenemy himself!"

Annoyed, Hook did up his buttons and started to leave. "That's it, I'm out of here!"

"Wait, let me finish! The curse is going to turn your archenemy into a pathetic, helpless multi-millionaire with hired goons and magical powers of coercion."

"How the hell is that any different from now?"

"Er, he'll walk with a slight limp, making him marginally easier to catch as he flees to his bulletproof limousine?"

The pirate sighed heavily. "I guess it's better than nothing. Sign me up."

At the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Regina stood vigil over a sleeping David, nobly resisting the urge to draw a funny mustache on his face. Gold, lacking her strength, walked in with a Sharpie and an evil grin. "I see our friend David is comatose, as usual."

"Yeah. Pity Snow's not here. She'd fall for him all over again if she could see him like this." She
checked her watch impatiently. "Speaking of which, she'd better get home and wake him before he chokes to death on his own drool." A beat. "Though, given her behavior during his first coma, that would probably just make her love him more."

"Much as it breaks your heart," Gold scoffed, "I think you'd better give up on ever seeing dear Eminem again. By now, your mom's probably killed her, reanimated her corpse, and programmed it to hula for her amusement."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's Thursday." He doodled some vampire fangs on David's chin to complement the mustache. "Maybe they'll be able to hold out until Friday and get their skulls repurposed into beer mugs instead, but either way, we need to prepare ourselves for Cora's inevitable arrival." He shuddered. "I'm really, really not looking forward to what's going to happen to us if she arrives on a Sunday."

"Ah, yes, I remember Sunday dinner at Mom's place all too well." Regina paled. "Okay, I'm listening. Whatcha got?"

"Perhaps a demonstration?" He produced an egg. "This is your mother." He conjured a frying pan. "And this is the portal she's using." He smashed the egg with the pan. "Any questions?"

"Yeah, actually. Why are you still hitting the egg?"

But Gold couldn't hear her anymore. "No one dumps Rumplestiltskin and lives, baby! NO ONE!" he screamed savagely, whacking on the egg like it was some kind of florist.

Regina grabbed his arm. "Gold! For once in your life, can you quit smashing stuff and listen to reason?"

"Pfft. Look who's talking," the pawnbroker snorted.

She slapped him. "Your plan has one major flaw. If, by some miracle, Snow and Emma manage to avoid becoming giant hula toys long enough to get through the portal, we could end up smashing them instead."

"Do you actually care?"

"Hell no! They want to take away my son, just because I abused and killed him—wait." She reached into her pocket and took out a book called Righteousness for Dummies; a gift from her son. "That is, yes, of course I care. There is nothing more important to me than the sanctity of human life."

"What's this, selflessness?" Gold smacked the book out of her hand. "I thought I taught you better than that, girl!"

"But I can't lie to Henry!"

"Since when?!"

"Since now!"

"Aw, come on! Don't go all cuddly on me!" He shook her furiously. "You'll lose all your power, and worse yet, your sex appeal!"
"But—"

"Don't make me dress up in a devil costume and perch on your shoulder!"

The Girl Power Squad arrived at Rumplestiltskin's old cell. "Ah, Rumplestiltskin's cell. I haven't been here since he foretold your destiny." Mary Margaret shook her head sadly. "In retrospect, I probably should have made more frequent use of a captive genius who can see the future, but I was pregnant, and the walk down here was murder on my back."

"Wait," said Emma. "Go back to the 'foretelling my destiny' part. That's really a thing?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So people whose destiny is prophesied always end up tragically dead!" Panicking, the savior began to tick various examples off on her fingers. "Oedipus Rex, Paris of Troy, Aeneas…"

"That's no reason to…"

"Anakin Skywalker, Rhaego Targaryen, Luke Castellan…"

"Emma, relax, it doesn't mean…"

"King Arthur, the Pevensie kids, and the entire cast of Lost!"

Mary Margaret was getting a little nervous. "Okay, I'm starting to see your point." She drew her sword. "Everyone watch my daughter's back—she's clearly in grave danger!"

Forming a tight circle around Emma, the Girl Power Squad proceeded into the cell, but Mulan hung back. "Hey, I just had a thought. Maybe one of us, probably the one with the magic sword, should stay outside the cell as a precaution, in case this unbreakable door should accidently fall shut behind us?"

"NO!" screamed Aurora. Everyone looked at her strangely. "Uh, no, Mulan, I'm claustrophobic, and I need you to hold my hand in the cell to keep me calm."

Mulan took the proffered hand grudgingly. "Jeez, and you wonder why everyone thinks we're in love?"

A thorough search of the cell revealed nothing but a bunch of graffiti reading, Rumplestiltskin was here, and now it's your turn. Evil giggle! "No ink," Emma reported. "Do you think he got one of his friends to smuggle it out for him?"

"No," Mary Margaret replied. "Gold doesn't have any friends, and even if he did, I cut the little psycho off from all forms of human contact."

Emma raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure you're the good guy?"

"Hey, that jerk reunited me with the man I love on two separate occasions, saved my husband from a lifetime of misery in the Infinite Forest, and helped keep my daughter from certain death," Mary Margaret defended. "He deserved every moment of psychological torture I ever inflicted on him!"

"Then I guess you won't be happy to hear that he seems to have been in love with your daughter?" Aurora held up a scroll she'd retrieved from the wall safe Rumplestiltskin's jailors had so thoughtfully installed for his use.
Emma examined the scroll and found her name written approximately a zillion times…in ink, but she was too busy wigging out to realize what that might mean. "Rumplestiltskin's in love with me? Yikes, just when I thought I couldn't get any more doomed!"

Henry sat at David's bedside, reading to him from the Big Book of Deja-Vu, since, after all, it had already worked once. "And then Snow White and her necrophiliac quasi-prince rode off into the sunset together, proving that even coma victims and the weirdos who love them can find happiness. This wasn't the end of their story, but it was pretty much the only time in their entire relationship that they would be happy and together, so let's just leave off here, before it gets depressing again," he read cheerfully. "The end!"

Regina, who had been listening from the sidelines, suddenly burst into tears. Henry looked up. "What's wrong, Mom?"

"Nothing," she sobbed unconvincingly. "These are just…tears of joy at the prospect of seeing those two adorable lovebirds together again." Bawling into a handkerchief, she motioned for him to stay in his seat. "You stay here and keep an eye on David. Mr. Gold and I have to go and…er, attend a Magiholics Anonymous meeting."

Her son beamed his patented Little Orphan Henry smile. "I'm glad you finally found a program that works for you. Just keep taking it one day at a time, and remember that I'm proud of you."

Regina just cried even harder. "Sorry, sorry, just some mood swings. Maybe I'll go grab one of those Zoloft cupcakes Emma's always going on about before the meeting."

Regina and Gold made their way through the tunnel full of magic diamonds that no one had been smart enough to post a guard at. "Evil triumphs again!" Gold crowed smugly. "Shows what you know, Bae!"

The former Queen turned her mighty Glare of Evil on him. "Stop with the gratuitous gloating. That's my gimmick. Just because I'm not using it at the moment doesn't mean I never will."

"Sorry. Let's get down to business." Gold took a magic wand out of his coat. "I swiped this little beauty off a fairy's corpse in order to show people how hardcore I am, but it has the added bonus of being able to suck the magic out of fairy dust. Observe." He waved the wand. "Bippity-boppity BOOM!"

Regina made Hook's hook glow purple, thus confirming it as a tool of evil. "Here, this is now enchanted to harvest a human heart. I trust that you'll be a good enough sport not to use it on me and forego the perilous quest?"

Hook was offended. "Hey, I may have murdered people, kicked beggars, and sold out my own beloved stepson, but even I draw the line at turning on my boss of fifteen minutes."

"Excellent," said the Queen. "So, let's go over this one more time for those just tuning in. You're going to find my mother and rip out her heart, while screaming, 'No one interferes in Regina's love life and lives, lady! NO ONE!'"

The pirate considered these words. "It sounds like there's a story, here. You wanna fill me in?"

"If you weren't smart enough to listen to the recap, you don't deserve to know."
"Well, you mentioned romantic troubles. Can I offer my services for some rebound sex?" Eyes lidded, he started undoing buttons again.

She slapped him. "Knock it off, or I'll arrest you for sexual harassment!"

He pouted. "Spoilsport. Well, I guess there's no point in my sticking around here any longer, then."

"Agreed," said Regina, dragging a dead body from her closet. "Remember Bernie? The guard who confronted you earlier? He died in his fall from that window, but on the bright side, I'm sure it was a hell of a lot more pleasant than whatever you had planned for him."

"I'll say," Hook agreed brightly. "But why is he here and not in a mass grave with everyone else who's ever failed you?"

"Well, I banished my mom to a far-off land many years ago. This land's PR people call it Wonderland, but don't let that fool you. A more accurate name would be Schizophreniopolis." Regina shuddered. "I've got a very powerful and stylish device that can take you there, but it has to transport the same number of people back as it transports in." The Evil Queen suddenly grew nervous. "Incidentally, if you run into a guy named Jefferson while you're there, pay him no mind. He's, uh, an old boyfriend of mine, and he took our breakup a little too hard. He's always ranting about how I betrayed his trust and abandoned him for someone else." She forced a chuckle. "Heh heh. What a drama queen."

Hook mulled this information over as she took out Jefferson's hat and set it to spinning. "So, you're sending one man to search an entire dimension?" He hesitated. "I'm awesome, but not quite that awesome."

"Don't worry, she'll find you. She will always find you. Bwa hah hah!" An arrow slammed into the wall behind Regina, with a note attached to it. Confused, she unrolled it and read it aloud. "'Dear Mom, stop stealing my lines or I'm aiming the next one at your head. Hugs and kisses, Snow.'" Regina tossed it aside and rolled her eyes. "Little know it all." She glanced over at Hook. "Oh, are you still here?" The queen kicked him through the portal and tossed the corpse in after him. "Bon, and hopefully not mortel voyage, gentlemen!"

An assortment of eerily silent masked figures dragged Hook before another assortment of eerie masked figures, but he didn't let that rattle him. "Hey, are any of you guys the Phantom of the Opera? Can you teach me that delightful 'Point of No Return' song? I want to use it on babes." More silence. "What about Cora? Is anyone here Cora?"

Their queen raised her hand and tossed away her oversized fan. "Yo."

Hook glanced quizzically from her face to the fan. "If you're so open about your true identity, what exactly was the point of hiding behind that thing all this time?"

"They don't have plastic surgeons in this land, and I'm ashamed to let people see how I've let myself go." The Queen of Hearts sniffled sadly. "I was Rose McGowan once! Now look at me!" she blubbered miserably, waving her subjects away. "Everybody out! I don't want you to see me like this."

The pirate held out a Kleenex on the tip of his hook. "Aw, don't beat yourself up. You look great for your age."

She slapped him. "Don't patronize me."
"That's it! Even *faking* trying to be nice to you is exhausting!" He tossed the Kleenex aside, without regard for the "No Littering" sign nearby, and plunged his hook into her chest. "Let's see…" he felt around curiously. "Angst, inhuman rage, pain, inhuman rage, disdain for others, inhuman rage… nope, no sign of a heart in here." His face fell. "Crap."

"Bwa hah hah! Sucker!" She shoved her hand into his perpetually-bare chest. "You think I'm dumb enough to keep my heart in my body like everyone else?"

His eyebrows knitted. "Well, yes. That would be the easiest place to protect it. As it stands, you risk some enemy sneaking behind your back and…"

She slapped him again. "Silence!"

Hook rubbed his jaw, which was getting pretty bruised. "I'm starting to see where Regina gets it from."

The Queen of Hearts frowned. "You know my daughter?"

"Yeah. She sent me here to tear out your heart and stick your corpse in a decorative case."

"Why?"

"Because it's Monday," he replied. "Oh, and she also mentioned something about you interfering in her love life."

The Queen of Hearts gritted her teeth. "If I'd known how much trouble that damn stable boy was going to cause, I would have taken the time to make his death look like an accident." She facepalmed. "What the hell was I thinking?!" Shaking her head ruefully, she decided to calm herself down by playing a nice game of Hacky-Sack with Hook's heart. "Tell me the whole story."

"The whole…ow!...story? But that's—ow!- nine hours—ow!- long!" the pirate whined.

Back in Rumplestiltskin's cell, Aurora looked up from her search, a little dazed. "Hey, does anyone else hear voices, or am I going nuts?"

"You're going nuts," Mary Margaret replied calmly. "That tends to happen in here." She noticed Emma still staring down at the Dark One's doodles in horror. "Hey, Emma, relax. It was a completely platonic obsession. He knew you were the key to breaking the curse. You're not going to fall prey to the old 'nobody dumps Rumplestiltskin and lives' trope."

Aurora checked her watch. "I'm bored. Is it naptime yet?"

"No, we've got to keep looking," Mary Margaret insisted. "David said the ink was in here, and he would never, ever, ever lie to me…again."

Mulan fished a jar out of the jail cell's complimentary safe. "Oh my gods! It looks like your man actually told you the truth, for a change!"

Emma reached for her wallet. "Looks like I owe you fifty bucks, homie." She passed Mulan a wad of bills.

"But this jar is empty!" Mary Margaret cried in dismay. "Where could the ink have gone? Do you think he used it to write those freaky doodles that were the only other item in this cell?"

"NO! *Don't you even let that train of thought get started!*" Aurora barked loudly. They all stared at
her. "I, uh, don't want to see my dear friends waste their time."

"Well, does anybody else have an idea?" asked Mulan.

"Maybe Rumplestiltskin got thirsty and drank it," Mary Margaret mused. "Now that I think about it, we never did bother bringing him food or water."

Aurora suddenly pulled a chainsaw out of thin air and slashed through the ropes holding the door open. "Cora SMASH!" she screamed.

Her friends stared at her. "Don't you mean 'Aurora smash'?" Mulan suggested tentatively.

"Nope, I definitely meant it the way she said it," Cora gloated, walking into the cavern with her trusted eye-candy Hook at her side.

Horrified, Emma commandeered Aurora's chainsaw and attacked the bars of the cell, but the Queen of Hearts just laughed. "You think you can escape from this cell? It was built to hold Rumplestiltskin, and I know from experience just how hard he is to chain up!" She laughed wickedly. Mary Margaret reached up and protectively covered her daughter's ears.

Emma turned on Aurora. "You joined up with Cora? This is unbelievable, though still more believable than Hook having a sudden attack of benevolence and helping you escape her."

"Actually, I took her heart," said Hook smugly. "The first one I've ever stolen in a literal sense."

"If I absolutely have to have a partner in crime, Hook, I'm glad it's you." Cora clapped him on the back. "So long, suckers!" As she left, she gave the heart a vicious squeeze.

Aurora cried out in pain. "Ow! I know you guys are probably not in a mood to do me favors right now, but do any of you have a defibrillator on you?"

Mulan took a defibrillator off her utility belt and began CPR on her friend, while Emma unleashed the Charming Family Charm on Hook. "Hook, come on! I have a son who desperately needs his backup mother!"

"You want me to help you?" The pirate's eyebrows shot up. "The last time I tried to help you, you tried to turn me into giant bait!" He gave her a look of utter disgust. "Honestly, if you're what passes for a hero these days, I'm glad to be a villain!" Smirking, he dangled a pendant in front of the bars. "See this? I was going to give this to you as an engagement present, but now, you can rot here!"

"Chekhov's Bean?" Emma frowned. "How the hell did you manage to wrestle this away from the giant?"

"The most epic swordfight in the history of the Enchanted Forest," Hook boasted. "You might have had the honor of witnessing it, IF YOU HADN'T LEFT ME FOR DEAD!"

"Uh...oops?" she ventured.

"Too little, too late, baby!" He pocketed the bean and ran off.

Ruby ran down into the mines, holding a cellphone. "Leroy, what's the emergency, and why on Earth did you call me about it?"

"Well, you spent two days working as the sheriff's receptionist several months ago, and sadly, that makes you the closest thing Storybrooke has to a law enforcement officer now." He waved his
flashlight at the tunnel's barren walls in dismay. "Someone stole our unguarded, unsupervised
diamond stash. Who would have thought, right?"

Henry, having officially inducted his grandfather into the Charming Family Book Club, was reading
the Big Book of Deja-Vu at his bedside again. "...And yes, she was theoretically beyond hope,
beyond saving, but fortunately, we Charmings are not bound by the laws of nature, so you saved her
anyway."

Someone barged in, and Henry looked up expectantly. "Hi, Mom, back alread—wait, Ruby?" The
town's latest de-facto sheriff and her newly-deputized dwarves filed in. "What are you guys doing
here?"

"We're looking for Regina and Gold."

"You missed them. They went to a MagAnon meeting together." He smiled proudly. "Isn't it great? I
think Mom's been a good influence on him."

"MagAnon? Henry, there's no such thing!" said Leroy. "They ditched you to go steal our fairy dust
so they can blow up Emma and Mary Margaret!"

"We were kind of asking for it, what with our complete lack of any kind of security," Happy
admitted, "but even so, it's still a pretty heinous crime."

"Mom lied to me?" Henry sighed. "I used to be better at spotting her lies. I must've grown soft since
the curse broke. Well, that ends right now!" He stood up, put a record of "Battle Hymn of the
Republic" on Gold's gramophone, and gazed heroically into the distance. "I'm the last conscious
Charming in Storybrooke, and as such, it falls to me to defend this town against Mom's evil scheme
du jour." He hoisted a flag and waved it gallantly. "Come, my loyal subjects! The battle for
Storybrooke begins now!"

The dwarves shuffled nervously toward the door. "Uh, sounds tempting, but, er, I have a date!"
Leroy ran for his life.

"I forgot to drink my coffee this morning, so I won't be any good in a fight!" Sleepy bolted after his
brother.

"I have to go study for the MSAT!" said Doc.

"I have to go take my antidepressants!" said Happy.

"I'm 4-F on account of my crippling developmental disability!" said Dopey, holding up his draft card
to prove it before running away. Bashful was too nervous to come up with an excuse; he just threw
himself out the nearest window and ran.

Deflated, Henry dropped his flag. "Well, that was a bust."

Ruby saluted. "Don't worry, I'm still with you, captain!"

"That's the spirit!" He jumped on her back. "To the well!"

Back in Rumplestiltskin's cell, Emma was still whacking on the bars with her stolen chainsaw.
"Emma smash," she gasped hoarsely. "Emma...smash..." She crumpled to the floor from
exhaustion, still slashing feebly at the door with one hand.
"Emma, do you really think you can break down a door enchanted to hold Rumplestiltskin?"

"No," the savior coughed, "but hitting stuff makes me feel better."

Her mother dragged her limp, twitching body away from the bars and managed to pry the chainsaw out of her grip with some help from Aurora and Mulan. "This is all my fault!" Aurora cried miserably. "If only I'd had the foresight to be born of True Love, none of this would have happened!"

"No, it's mine," sighed Mulan. "I should have prevented those zombies from taking you, though, granted, you didn't exactly do your part on that front, either."

"Actually, I'm pretty sure this is Hook's fault," said Mary Margaret, but no one was in the mood to listen to reason.

"You're all wrong. This is obviously my fault," said Emma decisively. "I just can't seem to accomplish anything without Gold's help."

Her mother laughed. "Oh really? You know, there's a support group for that. It's called the entire population of this universe."

"Being in good company doesn't make it any easier."

Mary Margaret slipped into comfort mode. "Relax, Emma. We don't need Gold to get out of here. I don't know if Henry ever told you, but us Charmings aren't bound by the laws of nature."

Hook and Cora, who suffered from a deplorable lack of practicality, had gone for a hike in leather pants and a ball gown, respectively. "Where are we going, and why don't you just teleport us there?" the pirate wanted to know.

"We're going to Lake Nostos, and we can't teleport in because it's Unplottable."

"Lake Nostos? The place run by that hot, scantily-clad, sex-crazed chick?" He perked right up. "Count me in!"

Cora smacked him upside the head. "Heel, boy. We're just here for the magic water."

Hook surveyed the dry basin before them dubiously. "Looks like the water's gone," he observed disinterestedly. "I guess we'll just have to think of something—wait! The hot, sex-crazed chick is also gone! NOOOOOOO!" He sank to his knees, weeping in despair.

"Well, I can solve one of those problems." Cora took a little bottle of Evian out of her purse and poured it into the dry bed. "There. Problem solved."

Hook looked down at the little puddle quizzically. "Are you sure that counts?"

She slapped him. "Don't question your betters, churl!"

In Schizophreniopolis...er, Wonderland, Cora had grown tired of Hacky Sack and was now shooting hoops with Hook's battered heart. "Ow! Hey, come on, I've told you everything I kn—no, don't try for a three-pointer!" he screamed.

"Why shouldn't I? You tried to kill me."
"Hey, it was Regina's idea, not mine. I've never even met you before. I've never even met her before!" He broke down in tears. "All I wanted to do was kill Rumplestiltskin! I don't know how I ended up caught between the rock that is you and the hard place that is Regina!"

Cora, who had been making people cry all morning and was getting bored with it, decided to take pity on the pirate, slam-dunking his heart back into his chest. "Here, take it; just stop whining, already!" She looked him over thoughtfully. "How long did you say you've been trying to kill the Dark One?"

"Couple centuries."

She frowned. "Your track record at killing evil sorcerers isn't very impressive, but at least you've proven that you're dumb enough to pick a fight with one. Maybe it'll be enough."

"For what?"

"You're going to help me kill my daughter."

"Why should I?"

"Well, aside from the obvious..." She picked up a croquet mallet and aimed it pointedly at his chest, "I can help you get revenge on Rumplestiltskin." A beat. "Just give me ten minutes in the makeout closet with him before you kill him, okay?"

Back at the Queen's Evil Lair, Cora was laying stiff and lifeless in a glass case, while Regina looked on impassively. Without warning, a brick came crashing through the window, followed by the one and only Prince Charming. "Step aside, everyone! It's Charming's time to shine!" He puckered his lips eagerly. "Never fear, fair lady! I'll bring you back to life!"

"Wrong corpse, Charming," said Regina.

"Whoops, how embarrassing!" He ducked back out the window with a little wave. "Sorry for disturbing you!"

"Crazy kid." Regina turned to Hook. "As for you, Hook, you've been very helpful. Word on the street is, you're only helpful when you're about to betray someone, so I think you'd better leave now." She shoved him out the door and bolted it behind him.

Evil Queen #2 sadly placed a rose on top of Evil Queen #1. "Sorry about that whole killing you thing, Mom, but it's your own damn fault for demanding my love and admiration, and then teaching me to kill the things I love. You're a smart woman. Did you honestly not realize that two plus two was going to end up equaling four someday? Well, either way, it was good advice. I can't afford to have any weaknesses, except, of course, for the kids I'm always adopting."

As she left, Hook popped out of the shadows. "Gah! How the hell did you get back in here?" Cora yelped, her hand fluttering over the mass of inhuman rage where her heart had once been.

"I got Charming to give me a boost through the window. The kid's all right." He nodded at the door. "So, is there a reason you didn't kill her, or are you just being whimsical again?"

"A little from Column A, a little from Column B. But I can fill you in later. Right now, we need to go find somewhere to hide from Smokey."
As the curse billowed toward them, Cora waved her magical anti-Curse-to-End-All-Curses stick, creating a shield around them. "I sure am glad I happened to have this on me," she said, eyeing the stick appreciatively.

Hook gave her a weird look. "You know, in most families, affection is displayed by giving one's child a hug and telling her you love her. Not faking your death and cheerfully watching her destroy the planet."

Cora laughed. "I know my Reggie, and trust me, there's no talking to her when she's on one of her gloating jags. I'll try things your way after the curse. It's going to end in exactly twenty-eight years, at the hands of Snow White and Prince Charming's daughter."

The pirate gave her a double-take. "How the hell do you know that?"

"I dunno, I'm psychic, I guess."

Regina followed Gold through the woods to the old well, where Archie was tossing coins and praying that he would finally get a line this episode. Gold shooed him off with a couple of whacks from his cane. "Beat it, you! We already called dibs!"

Regina hung back skeptically. "Are you sure Mom's going to be the one who comes through, here? You know what they say about Charmings and the laws of nature…"

"Sorry, but even you cannot fathom the sheer depth of my pessimism," Gold replied. "It's definitely going to be Cora."

Looking down at the Dark One's parchment full of doodles, Mary Margaret suddenly grinned. "Hey, Emma? Are you still a pessimist?"

"Last time I checked."

"Well, you can stop now." She blew on the parchment and the many Emmas on the page floated into mid-air, blasting through the bars and leaving a hole in the door.

"Gold wrote the scroll in squid ink?" Emma swore loudly. "The cryptic old bastard might have mentioned that earlier!"

"We'll beat him up when we get home," Mary Margaret promised. "Right now, though, we have bigger fiends to fry." She drew her sword and tossed Emma her chainsaw.

"Wait," said Aurora. "I can't go with you, I'm still a zombie, remember? You have to tie me up."

"Okay," Emma agreed brightly, whipping out a lasso and tying her to the door.

Aurora's face fell. "You could have at least made a perfunctory attempt to disagree with me."

"Allow me," said Mulan. "Hey, Snow, can I borrow that comfort mode thing of yours?"

"I don't see why not. I myself swiped it from Charming."

"Thanks." She turned to Aurora, tossed her hair and struck a heroic pose with her sword. "I will always find your heart!"

"Thanks." She smiled tentatively at the Charming women. "I'll be praying for your victory, since,
after all, I'm probably going to starve to death here if you lose."

"How very noble of you."

Cora took the bottle of wardrobe ash from her pocket. "Here, Hook, can you dump these into the water for me? My arthritis is acting up and I don't think I can get the lid off."

"Jeez, do I have to do everything around here?" He tossed the ashes into the puddle, creating a massive whirlpool. "Wow, the Evian actually worked? Go figure that one."

Gold pulled his soggy arm out of the well, holding the last of the pennies he'd collected from the bottom. "Okay, I think I got all of them. Let's get down to business."

"Okay." Regina linked his arm with hers, he raised his wand, and the pair of them began to dance around the well, singing. "A-killing we will go! A-killing we will go! Heigh-ho, the merry-o, a-killing we will go!"

That being said, Gold waved the wand, and Regina's old pal Smokey came out to greet them. "You again? Can't I get five minutes to myself for a change?" it rumbled. "My brother put you up to this, didn't he?"

"We just need one quick favor," she assured him. "Can you smash this well in for us? Please? It's to get rid of my mother."

"Cora?" The cloud trembled a bit. "That crazy witch scares even me, and I'm a demonic abomination of physics. You've got yourself a deal!" It zapped the well with some lightning and billowed off.

Gold smirked victoriously at the churning force of electricity in the well. "Score! The odds of someone surviving this are about as high as the odds of surviving an incurable poison."

Regina gulped nervously.

"All right, we're off." The Evil Queen 1.0 held the compass out for Hook. "Don't let go of this thing, or you might get lost and end up in Universe #29537-M." She shuddered. "And trust me, you don't want that."

But before they could take the plunge, an arrow knocked the compass from their hands. "All right! Takes a lickin' and it keeps on tickin'!" Mary Margaret crowed from the other side of the portal, slapping Emma and Mulan a high-five.

"You again?" Cora groaned. "How many times do you people have to be killed before you finally die?"

"We're Charmings," Emma replied, as if that were all the explanation that was necessary.

"Don't gloat, Emma. That inevitably leads to a downfall," Mary Margaret scolded. "Make yourself useful and go get the compass."

"I don't think so!" Cora whistled for Hook. "Fetch, boy!"

"You asked for this, punk!" Emma revved up her new chainsaw and charged Hook like a raging rhinoceros. "Emma SMASH!"
Hook parried saw with sword and laughed. "Mm, I do so love it when you get feisty!"

Cora shot a fireball, apparently the only spell she knew, at Mulan, who swatted it back at her with her sword. "Reflex save! Boo-yah!"

Cora, having completely run out of ideas, counterattacked by throwing Aurora's heart at her. Unfortunately, she threw like a bedridden girl, and the heart wound up teetering on the edge of the portal.

Hook, realizing that he was in danger of losing his mystique if he didn't perform a random good deed soon, seized it and tossed it to Mulan. "I may be a rogue, a thief, a killer, a serial traitor, a kidnapper, an adulterer, a devil, a black sheep, a really bad egg—"

Mulan pointed at her watch.

"—but I don't like to see a woman lose her heart, especially if her name is Milah." He shed a single manly tear.

Mulan looked to Mary Margaret, who shrugged helplessly. "You'd better take it and run, before he gets back in character."

"All right," said Mulan, handing Snow her sword, "but take this. It deflects Cora's spells, and is also good for whacking stuff."

"That was cool of you, Hook," Emma admitted grudgingly, "although overall, your heroism score is still looking pretty sad."

The pirate pointed over her shoulder. "Is that Rene Lenier?"

Emma spun around excitedly. "Where?!"

"Sucker!" He flipped her onto her back and pinned her down, smiling lewdly. "Insert sexual innuendo here—there's no way I can pick just one in a situation like this." His eyes roved over her squirming body. "I hope you'll at least consider surrendering. Our chances of hooking up will be greatly diminished if I kill you."

"I'm prepared to take that chance," said Emma, holding up the compass with one hand and punching his lights out with the other.

Henry arrived at the well with his loyal army of one. "Mom! You said you wouldn't lie to me anymore!"

"I lied," said Regina.

"You're going to kill them?" Ruby cried, outraged.

"Yes, and if you don't get off our backs, the word 'them' is going to include you." Gold snapped, blasting her across the clearing.

"I'm telling Belle!" she yelled at him with her last shreds of consciousness.

"And I'm telling Dan—no, wait, he's dead," Henry remembered. "Rats!"

"That's right, and you're probably going to end up joining him if my mother comes through that portal," Regina pointed out. "You think I was bad? She'll have you in therapy for real!"
Henry shook his head disapprovingly. "I clearly didn't get my unsurpassable wisdom from you. Mom, have you even been paying attention these last few decades? Has good ever lost against evil? Has any Charming ever failed at anything? And has anyone, anywhere, ever actually benefited from allying with Captain Hook?"

"You underestimate the depth of our pessimism, kid," Gold answered for her. "Trust me, this is one estranged relative that even you don't want to meet."

Henry ignored him. "Mom, come on! Don't tell me you've already forgotten what it's like to tangle with Snow and Emma?"

Cora slammed Emma and Mary Margaret to the ground. "Sorry, girls, but I'm afraid you won't be attending this particular family reunion," the witch cackled, finally succumbing to her genetic predisposition to gloating.

"But why do you want to go to Storybrooke in the first place?" Mary Margaret asked. "They don't even have ball gowns there."

"They don't?" Cora's smile faded. "Well, it'll be worth the sacrifice, if it means I can give my daughter the one thing she's always wanted."

"What? Daniel?"

"No."

"Your love?"

"Ew, no!"

"A lifetime supply of Apple Jacks?"

"Of course not—those don't even taste like apple. I meant your heart!" She reached for Snow's chest. Emma had regained consciousness and could have easily smacked the witch's hand away, but having inherited her father's sense of the dramatic, she decided to jump between them and sacrifice herself instead. Cora laughed as her hand sank into the savior's chest. "You foolish girl—woman!" she amended, noticing that Mary Margaret had just picked up a rock. "Don't you realize love is a weakness?"

"That's not how Rumplestiltskin, the Blue Fairy, and more importantly, the mighty Henry tell it," Emma retorted. "And by the way, KABOOM!"

A gentle white light burst forth from her and attacked Cora. "Ew, it's all cuddly! Get it away!" she screamed, fading from existence, or at least the scene.

Emma blinked. "That was weird."

"Our lives usually are." Mary Margaret grabbed her daughter's hand and dragged her into the raging green portal. "I give you Exhibit B!"

Back at the well, Regina was restraining Henry with her arms, because she knew mere locks or chains wouldn't be able to hold him. "Stop trying to murder my loved ones!" the boy screamed. "I can only forgive you for that so many times!"
His mother was unmoved. "And why should I take a horrible risk like that?"

"Because I said so, damn it!"

Regina mulled it over. "You make a compelling argument."

Gold peered over her shoulder, now wearing a pair of red horns and clutching a pitchfork. "Don't listen to him, Regina! You know you love being evil! The gloating, the selfishness, the amazing wardrobe!"

Henry tugged at her other sleeve, a halo glowing atop his head. "Come on, Mom! Do the right thing! The Evil Regals will love it, and besides, you should know better than to bet against me by now."

That clinched it. "Sorry, Gold. He's got me there." She dispelled the magic swirling around the well, but there was no sign of the Charming women. "Oops, looks like I already killed them. Sorry, honey. My bad."

"Don't worry," said Henry. "They're probably just moving slowly in order to heighten our sense of tension."

Right on cue, Emma popped out of the well. "Yo."

"Mom!" Henry cried ecstatically, running over with his arms outstretched. Regina put out her own arms to catch him, but he ran right past them and into Emma's. "Oh. You meant Swan again." The Evil Queen tried not to sulk.

"Oh, good, I'm not too late for the group hug!" Mary Margaret threw her arms around her daughter and grandson, then spotted Regina and groaned. "You again? I assume you've come to gloat?"

"Actually, she saved you," Henry informed them. "From herself, but still, it's a step in the right direction."

Ruby finally regained consciousness. "We won? Yay!" She jumped up and ran over to join the embrace.

"Well, I hate to manipulate and run, but I'm afraid I'm allergic to happy endings. Later, losers!" Gold wandered off to wherever he went when he wasn't manipulating people.

Mary Margaret dropped Ruby like a hot potato. "Wait a minute, what am I wasting my cuddles on you people for? My man is still in a coma!"

"And you don't want to miss a moment of it?" Ruby guessed.

"Bingo!" Mary Margaret grabbed her friend and ran off.

Emma turned to Regina. "I am now going to talk trash about your mama. I hope you understand and will not slaughter me for it."

"I won't, provided you let me join in." They shook on it.

The Charming Family, with special guest Ruby, burst into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. "Where's my man?"

The dwarves were crowded around David's borrowed bed. "You're too late, homie. He's a goner."
"Then why are you all sitting here watching him like you expect him to start doing something? Don't you have anywhere better to be?" She shoved past them. "Mm, you're still cute when you're comatose." She sighed dreamily. "Smooches!"

David sat up in bed. "About freaking time! I've been bored out of my mind! Do you have any idea how many games of Hot Lava Monster I played in there? It's not much fun with just one person."

"Hey, I did my best!"

---

Emma stormed into the front room of the shop to confront Gold. "Hey, Emma," he greeted. "Sorry about that whole trying to kill you thing, but I couldn't risk running into Cora. She might have attacked me, or worse yet, tried to seduce me again." His eyes took on a haunted look.

"Eh, nobody's blaming ya. I probably would have bet against me, too, in your shoes. After all, it's obvious that I can't accomplish anything without your help."

"You and the entire population of the Enchanted Forest. And some other universes, too." He noticed the look on her face and grew concerned. "Hey, come on, it never bothered you before. What's wrong?"

"I saw that freaky parchment in your cell. You've been manipulating me into breaking your curse since before I was born." She scowled at him. "I know better than to even bother asking you why, but can you at least tell me how?"

"Well, True Love is the only magic stronger than the curse, and your parents were the only couple in the entire universe who loved each other, so their kid had to be the one to break it."

Emma raised her eyebrows. "Wow, our homeland is even more dysfunctional than I thought. So, you didn't give me my powers?"

"Of course not. Since when do I give anybody anything, unless they're named Belle or Bae?"

---

"You're holding my heart, Mulan." Aurora observed.

"Again, you wonder why everyone thinks we're in love?" The warrior shoved the heart back into her chest.


"In retrospect, maybe I should have consulted an anatomy text first." Mulan felt around again. "Aorta! Score!"

"You did it!" Aurora beamed. "Well, I know you were only working so hard to save me so that I wouldn't beat you to the afterlife, where Philip was, so I didn't tell you this before. But now that I'm in the clear, Philip's still alive in another dimension."

"Damn!" the warrior cursed. Aurora gave her a weird look. "...good to hear it. Can we save him?" Mulan tacked on hastily.

"I don't know, but we may as well give it a try. Now that the Cora, Hook and the Charmings are gone, it's not like we have anything better to do."
"We failed," said Cora glumly.

Hook spat out a mouthful of dirt. "It happens. Especially to me." He held up the bean he'd swiped from the giant. "That's why I always have a Plan B."

"But that bean is destroyed and useless."

"So were the ashes, Sherlock."

"Oh right, the magic lake we're standing in. I forgot."

Back at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Henry embraced Regina lovingly. "At first I thought your newfound goodness was just a form of rebellion against your mother, but you really have changed, haven't you?"

"Actually, it's a little of both." His mom hugged him back. "Does this mean you'll come home now?"

"Hell no! David lets me stay up until eleven, eat candy for breakfast, and watch *The Walking Dead.*"

Emma glanced up at the clock. "Hey, it's on now!" The Charmings and Company grabbed hands and headed for the door, trampling Regina under their feet in their haste.

As she regained her feet, Gold appeared at her side, wearing those horns of his again. "I told you you should've stuck with evil."

Meanwhile, just off the coast, a ship that had probably once been in a bottle appeared on the horizon. Cora sat idly plucking petals off the rose Regina had given her all those years ago. "She hates me, she hates me not. She hates me, she hates me not. She hates me." The old woman pulled off the last petal. "Well, we'll have to work on that."

Hook sat aside the spyglass he'd been looking through, glancing around curiously. "Wait, what's that horrible racket?"

Cora shrugged. "It sounds kind of like a large gang of rogue tubists is stowing away on your ship."

"Well, we'll do a security sweep of the hold as soon as we're done posing for the promo."
An eighteenth-century brig that had somehow wandered into a medieval setting docked in Storybrooke's harbor. Captain Hook descended triumphantly down the ramp, Cora on his arm. "Well, my dear Cora, we've managed to go several hours without betraying each other. Why don't we quit while we're ahead and break up now?"

Cora's response was to transform into a puff of purple smoke, then back again. "Hook, do you notice anything special about me?"

"Sure, uh…I love the new haircut?"

She hit him with her parasol. "I'm using magic, you blithering twit."

Hook was getting fed up. "You always use magic. What do you want, a happy-face sticker?"

"I know it's hard, but I need you to use both of your tiny little brain cells for a minute. Who else do we know who always uses magic?"

"Oh, Rumplestiltskin."

"Exactly. Magic is here, which is a nice coincidence, since otherwise my plan to take over the town would be pretty much impossible. But on the down side, if you go after Rumplestiltskin now, he's going to end up using his famous escargot recipe on you."

A walking Gorton's logo came over to greet them. "Heya. What's with the eighteenth-century brig? It doesn't fit in with this setting or the one back home. Is it some kind of prop for Talk Like a Pirate Day?" Cora waved her hand and turned the ship invisible. The guy was impressed. "Whoa, just like David Copperfield!" He took out his cellphone. "Say, can you do that one more time? I want to take a video to post on Youtube."

Cora scowled at him. "Don't you get it? You're supposed to be scared of us!"

The man laughed. "There are plenty of demented sorcerers in this town to be scared of already. I'm afraid you'll have to take a number, so—"

Incensed, Cora transformed him into a fish and Hook kicked him into the water. "Say hey to Monstro for me!" the original evil queen sniggered.

Hook looked up at the empty water where his anachronistic ship had once floated. "What did you do with my ship? Did you magic it back into its original bottle? Damn it, it took me ages to get it out of that thing!"

"Don't worry, I just activated the cloaking device. A little gadget I swiped from some Romulans," she explained. "Now come on, it's time for some regal recon."

Mary Margaret and her husband were cuddling naked in her bed. "What are you thinking?"

"That True Love's Nookie is even more fun than True Love's Kiss," her quasi-prince responded, rolling her onto her back for another demonstration.

Emma walked in, Henry in tow. "Hey, why are you still asleep?" the boy asked curiously. "Did you
guys get cursed again?"

Mary Margaret blushed. "Henry, I'd love to explain, but I'm afraid I'm not certified to teach sex ed."

Emma steered her son toward the kitchen and came back with a fork, which she held out to them. "Poke my eyes out. I'm begging you. I can't risk seeing a traumatic sight like that again."

"Hey, we're married and just out of a twenty-eight year dry spell! What the hell did you think was going to happen when you left us alone in a freaking bed?" her father defended.

"Well, you could at least have the decency to get it on in a room with walls!" Emma pointed out, grabbing a bottle of bleach and running to the kitchen to help her son scrub out his sullied eyes.

"She's got us there," Mary Margaret admitted.

---

The Evil Queen: The Next Generation sat on horseback in the woods, casually reaching down with a stethoscope to inspect her mount's chest. "Just a routine check-up, boy," she assured him.

Evil Henchman #382910 galloped up beside her. "Remember the old saying, 'don't kill the messenger? I want you to consider it carefully as you listen to my next words. King George has fallen."

Regina laughed. "Of course he's fallen. The guy's a complete moron. Did you really expect me to be surprised?"

"But that means Snow White and Prince Charming will be coming after you next! And without his troops, we'll be horribly outnumbered!"

"Why? What happened to Evil Henchmen #1-#382909?"

"You killed them for putting too much sugar in your coffee!"

"Oh yeah." She shrugged. "Well, throw anyone who's managed to survive my leadership at the enemy. Hopefully it'll buy me enough time to find Snow, or at least murder a few last innocent bystanders."

"You're going after her yourself? That seems a little risky. Why don't you just send your Huntsman?"

"Because he sucks at murder." Nobody could argue with that, so she spurred her horse into action and took off. "Later, boys!"

She found her stepdaughter sprawled helplessly on the ground, the back of her hand pressed swooningly to her forehead. "Help! Help! I've fallen on the ground, and I'm way too delicate to stand back up on my own," Snow lied.

Regina dismounted. "Don't you ever get sick of being such a damsel in distress?"

"Yeah, but what're you gonna do?" the princess sighed. "Canon is canon. Which reminds me, as a villain, you are aware you're predestined to lose this epic battle, right?" As the Evil Queen stood there, trying to think of an answer to that question that wouldn't make her look like an idiot, Snow White took pity on her. "I offer you parley."

Grumpy burst into the clearing, sword held high. "What have I told you about that word?"

"Fine, fine, sorry." She gave him a little shove to send him on his way. "Anyway, Regina, I'm
"willing to negotiate with you again, provided you promise not to kill me this time."

"No can do," said Regina, reaching for her stepdaughter's heart.

Luckily, the Blue Fairy was there, and much more effective than usual. "Glow of pwnage!" the little creature cried, zapping Regina with a magical blue light.

Frozen and helpless, Regina swore under her breath. "I fell for an obvious trap that wasn't even set by Rumplestiltskin? How humiliating! Man, I'm glad my mom isn't alive to see this.

"I tried to convince you to surrender. I even emailed you a copy of the Evil Overlord List in the hope that you would heed its wisdom, but you just wouldn't listen." Snow shook her head sadly, turning to the Blue Fairy. "And as for you, you might have mentioned that you could do that before we went to the trouble of defeating her on the battlefield!"

"Surprise!" Emma cried, leading her parents into the only food source in town. The place was brightly decorated and packed with heroes of all shapes, sizes and species.

"Welcome Home, Mary Margaret and Emma," Mary Margaret read off a nearby banner, then glanced worriedly at her daughter. "You threw a surprise party for yourself?"

"Living as an orphan, you get used to these kind of things," the savior replied nonchalantly. "Trust me, this is a definite step up from the one I held on my birthday."

Ruby came over and threw her arms around Mary Margaret. "Welcome back, BFF!"

"Save it," Mary Margaret snapped, shoving her away irritably. "I already know you've been cheating on me with that Belle chick."

Dr. Hopper was next to approach her for a hug. "Hey, Eminem. I've just stopped by to remind you all that I still exist."

"Thanks, Archie. That's very thoughtful."

Emma handed Granny a platter of tacos. "Here, apparently I learned how to cook, at some point."

"Thanks, hon. They look tasty as Beggin' Strips." The old woman hauled a keg out from behind the counter. "Now, who wants McCutcheon's?"

Henry raised his hand. "I do!"

"Nice try." David handed him a cinnamon cocoa and then raised his own glass. "My Snow and I have a saying, that we will always find each other. However, I'm getting sick of having to do it so often, so I'd like you all to join me in lynching Regina before she gets the chance to tear us apart again." The rest of the crowd looked at him in uncomfortable silence. "Aw nuts, she's behind me, isn't she?"

"This is very awkward," said Regina, standing in the doorway.

Leroy grabbed a knife. "Don't worry, David. I'm still with you!"

Emma threw herself in front of the former queen. "No! You can't kill her now—she's just starting to get interesting."

Mary Margaret took her daughter gently by the arm and led her aside. "Pumpkin, remember that talk
we had in Cora's dungeon, about the dangers of befriending evil queens?"

"…No."

"I suspected as much." Mary Margaret sighed wearily.

"Look, Regina helped us get home…eventually. But like Henry says, it's a step in the right direction."

"Emma, she tried to kill us! Yesterday, and pretty much every day before that!"

"Henry believes in her."

"Henry believes in talking purple unicorns!"

Meanwhile, as Regina began dishing up the lasagna she'd brought with her, Henry sat down next to her. "Hey Mom. Have you come to abuse me?"

"Not tonight, sweetie."

He hugged her. "In that case, it's good to see you."

Regina handed Leroy a slice of lasagna. "Here, choke on this."

Leroy took a cautious bite. "Normally, I would be more careful about accepting food from a poisoner, but I know you. You'd never break with your cherished apple motif."

As the night wore on, Regina found that nobody wanted to hang out with her, just because she'd destroyed their planet and condemned them to three miserable decades of insanity. "Damn heroes and their in-crowd," she griped, getting up to leave.

Emma caught up with her just outside the door. "At the risk of getting the Swan Queen shippers' hopes up, can I invite you to stay?"

Regina shook her head. "Thanks just the same, but I'm trying not to kill people anymore, and being surrounded by so many of my archenemies at once is simply too great a temptation right now. Thanks for the invite, though."

"Don't thank me, thank Henry. He's the one who worked the Charming Family Charm on me until I caved and agreed to let you come."

"Speaking of Henry, if I promise not to kill him again, can I get some visitation rights?"

Emma hesitated. "I don't know. I think if he wanted to go to your house, he'd have snuck out a window and done it himself."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil for the first time in weeks, and the fandom rejoiced. "Say Emma, you're still sheriff, aren't you? I'd like to report a crime. Some crazy lady with a chainsaw has kidnapped my lawful son and refuses to let me see him, even when I beg."

Emma revved up her chainsaw. "Do you really want to start this again?"

The former queen sighed defeatedly. "I guess not. Sorry, my bad."

"'Sorry'?" Emma blinked incredulously. "I wasn't aware you knew that word. I guess Archie was
right. You really *have* changed."

"Hopper said that?"

"Yeah, sometime within the few hours since my return to this dimension, I found time to meet with him for a comprehensive review of your psychiatric file." The savior laughed hysterically. "The part about your recurring nightmare of showing up to sorcery class naked was hilarious, by the way."

Blushing furiously, the Evil Queen ran home to cheer herself up by smashing a few mirrors.

On a rooftop overhead, Hook gave a low whistle. "That's your daughter? Hubba hubba, I've been hitting on the wrong evil queen!"

Cora snatched away the spyglass he'd been observing Regina through. "Stay away from my daughter or I'll rip your heart out and feed it to you!" she barked.

Archie, having not yet realized that nothing good ever happens on the Storybrooke docks, was walking his dog along them. "Hi, Regina!" he greeted brightly as the former queen walked by. "You're looking murderous today. Want some Valium for that?" He took out his prescription pad.

Regina swatted it into the water. "Don't try to butter me up with free drugs! Why did you betray doctor-patient confidentiality?"

Archie shrugged helplessly. "Judging by your behavior with Henry and me, I assumed that you didn't believe in doctor-patient confidentiality."

"I do when it involves me, you entomological idiot!"

Ruby ran to the good doctor's rescue. "What's going on here, Archie? Do you want me to eat this bully for you?" She bared her teeth hopefully.

Regina fired another Glare of Evil at the werewolf. "Just try it, sister."

Ruby bolted. "You're on your own, Hopper!"

With her out of the way, Regina conjured a lightning bolt and aimed it at Archie. "Time to zap me a bug!" Then she remembered herself. "Oh, wait, I can't. I'm a hero-trainee now." She pouted. "Damn redemption arc."

Snow White and Prince Charming had gathered their Cartoon All-Stars for a board meeting. Standing under a magnifying glass, Jiminy Cricket suddenly burst into flame. "Gah!" he shrieked. Could someone please get this thing out of the sun?" Charming scooted the little bug into a patch of shadow. "Thanks, bro. Now, as I was saying, I don't think the Queen will ever repent. And even if she did, there's still the matter of the hundreds of grisly murders she's committed. I mean, we can't very well just let her off with a fine."

"What about community service?" Snow proposed, absentmindedly stroking one of her many bluebirds.

"Snow, she massacred children!"

Snow shrugged. "We all make mistakes in life. Why, when I was a little girl, I once shared a secret with my grandma. After committing a heinous crime like that, what right do I have to pass
"Um, you're the monarch, Snow," her quasi-prince reminded her. "Passing judgment on criminals is what we pay you for." He looked at his friends. "Anybody else have any ideas?"

"I could smash her with my axe," Grumpy proposed.

"Grumpy, that's your solution to everything," Granny scoffed. "How about sending her through a rabbit hole?"

"No, even she doesn't deserve what Jefferson would do to her if they were ever reunited," said Ruby.

"Here's a thought," Charming piped up. "Why don't we just kill her? You know, like we've been doing to her underlings without a second thought for the past few years?"

Jiminy considered this. "Okay, that settles it. From now on, Charming's in charge of strategy."

As their friends filed out of the war room, Snow looked troubled. "Aw, honeymuffin, do we really have to kill her? That would put a conclusive end to this epic battle between good and evil that we've been waging since the day we met. And I've heard that romantic relationships formed under pressure usually fall apart once that pressure is gone.

"Yeah, but do you know what else can put strain on a relationship? One or both parties getting killed."

Snow sighed. "Point taken."

Some evil queen walked past the only diner in town on her way to Dr. Hopper's office. "Hello…uh, you," she said to Ruby. "I'm looking for…uh, you know, that guy I hate?" Ruby pointed at Hopper's door wordlessly. "Thanks, and please note the murderous look on my face."

"Noted," said the wolf girl as she disappeared into the building. "Hm, maybe I should go in there and make sure they don't get into another catfight?" Then, remembering the Glare of Evil she'd faced that morning she shuddered. "On second thought, maybe I'd better just go watch some more TV, since the announcer specifically told me to stay tuned."

The queen knocked on Archie's door. "Hello? I know it's late but you appear to have no personal life whatsoever, so I figured it was safe to assume you'd be here."

"You assume correctly." The good doctor opened the door. "Regina? Have you come to abuse me?"

"No."

"In that case, it's good to see you." He waved her in. Pongo growled menacingly at the interloper, but Archie, unfamiliar with the Evil-Detecting Dog trope, shushed him. "Sorry, Regina. He's probably still leery of you on account of that time you tried to make a coat out of his kids."

The queen smirked. "That's my girl."

Hopper frowned. "I beg your pardon?" She grabbed him by the throat and enveloped him in a cloud of purple smoke. "Erk!" he choked. "Regina, how many time do I have to tell you? No smoking in my office—my insurance policy forbids it!" He coughed. "Also, you appear to be trying to murder me. What did I tell you about that earlier?" The queen squeezed harder. "Guh…you sure you don't
"want that Valium?" he slurred as his consciousness faded.

The queen eyed his lifeless body appraisingly. "Free Valium? Hm, maybe this guy can be of some use after all." Fading back into her not-quite-original form, Cora laughed evily. "But that will have to wait for another day. Right now, it's time for a victory strut!"

Emma and Henry had to eat breakfast at the only diner in town that morning, since David and Mary Margaret were using the breakfast table at home for their own dirty purposes. "So what was it like in the Enchanted Forest?" Henry, who had apparently not been paying as much attention to the Big Book of Deja-Vu as one would think, asked.

"A lot like British Columbia," Emma replied. "Now come on, it's time for school."

"Relax, we've still got time. My teacher's probably still at home 'resting' with her boy-toy."

His mother shuddered. "I thought we agreed never to speak of that again?" She shepherded him out the door. "Let's go, before you miss the woefully non-magic school bus."

Just outside the door, Pongo bounded up to them, barking frantically. "What are you doing out here all alone, boy?" Henry wondered. "Did Perdita kick you out of the doghouse again?"

Ruby ran out to investigate. "My supernatural canine senses tell me that this wild-eyed, frantically-barking, clearly-agitated dog is upset."

Henry shot her a sympathetic look. "Ruby, you must have gotten in the wrong line when whatever pantheon we worship was handing out superpowers." He pointed at Emma. "That's even lamer than my mom's, and that's saying something."

"Shut up and go to school, kid," Emma snapped, running after Pongo.

She and Ruby followed the dog in to Archie's office, where they found the good doctor himself sprawled face-down on the floor. "Archie's dead?" Ruby gasped. "Oh no! Who are people going find to ship me with now?"

"Yoo hoo." Dr. Whale waved coyly from the doorway.

Emma slammed the door in his face. "I don't get it. Who on earth would want to assassinate Archie? That's like sticking a kitten in a blender—as pointless as it is sick and wrong." She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Do you think the Orkin Man could have come after him again?"

"Nah," said Ruby. "There are only two people in the town who are evil enough to have done this, and since Rumplestiltskin is too whipped to have killed anyone at the moment, it must have been Regina."

In the courtyard of Neuschwanstein Castle, a gaggle of disaffected peasants happily tore into a Regina-shaped piñata, while the Evil Queen herself watched from her window.

A guard came knocking at the door of her cell. "You have a visitor."

"Ooh, is it my Huntsman?" Regina eagerly dove into bed, grabbing a pair of shackles off a nearby wall.

"Uh, no, princess, it's me," said Henry the First, more than a little disturbed.
"Daddy?" She tossed the shackles aside, looking a bit disappointed. "Well, you're not my first choice, but I guess anyone's better than Sid."

"Oh Regina, this is all my fault!" he wept.

She pondered his words. "True."

"I failed you as a father!"

"And how."

"I stood by and let a literally heartless witch abuse you, warp your mind, and murder your loved ones, without making even a cursory attempt to slit the evil wench's throat in her sleep!"

"Yep, that was pretty dumb."

"And when you turned to evil as a result of my cowardly behavior, I became an even worse enabler to you than I was with your mother!" he sobbed.

"Yeah, you pretty much suck," Regina conceded. "But don't worry, I love you anyway." She blew him a kiss through the bars. "I'm glad we got this chance to clear the air before I bite the big one."

"You don't have to die."

"I don't know, I'm pretty sure being shot twelve times at point-blank range is going to make it kind of unavoidable."

"Regina, for some unfathomable reason, Snow doesn't want to kill you. She'll spare you if you just tell her you regret the pain you've caused."

"But I don't."

Big Henry looked like he might strangle her if he could reach her. "Fake it, then!"

She stuck out her tongue. "Make me!"

Big Henry stormed off. "Damn Mills women. I should have just joined the priesthood when I had the chance."

Regina sat in front of a two-way mirror, sneering at David and Emma. "Ruling this town as a family? What do you think you are, monarchs?"

Emma was unmoved. "You're wasting your banter, Regina. We know you're the one who killed Archie."

"Hopper's dead? Heh heh, serves the little blabbermouth right." When she saw the looks on their faces, Regina consulted *Righteousness for Dummies* again. "I mean, that poor man! Please accept my sincerest condolences."

"Save it, Ruby saw you going into his office last night," David accused. "And we know you were up to no good, because you specifically told her you were feeling murderous."

"You really think the word of a nutcase who *ate* her freaking boyfriend is going to hold up in court?" Regina scoffed. "Come on, do you really think I'd be so stupid as to specifically tell someone I was feeling murderous?"
"Of course, you do it all the time. Does my wedding day ring any bells?"

A couple of mooks dragged Regina through the courtyard at Neuschwanstein Castle. A crowd had gathered, waving signs that read "White-Charming '12!", "Make Love, Not Zombies," and "The Bewitchment Stops Here!" Rumplestiltskin skulked through the unruly mob, looking smug, as usual. The virulently anti-magic mob didn't bother to harass him, however, as he was wearing a cloak designed by the same geniuses of camouflage who had produced Clark Kent's glasses.

The guards chained her to a post in front of the Royal Firing Squad, who were sulking because no one had thought to provide them with the firearms that demonstrably existed in their universe. As they strung their bows, cursing their cheapskate employers under their breath, Jiminy Cricket flew over to chat with Regina. "Hey Regina. I've never met you and don't particularly want to, but Snow wanted me to offer you mercy, since she's too concerned with her approval rating to do it herself. So how 'bout it? Wanna apologize?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. Sorry you're all such losers! Bwa hah hah!" Regina laughed hysterically at her own joke.

"You actually thought that remark was clever?" Charming raised his eyebrows quizzically. "Wow, you're even crazier than we thought, and that's saying something." He waved at his semi-loyal firing squad. "Whack her, boys!"

Snow White suddenly sprang to her feet. "Don't whack her, boys!"

"You're sending us some very mixed signals, here, Your Majesties," the captain of the firing squad complained.

"Screw this, I'm going to work for King Midas," several of his underlings grumbled, abandoning their posts.

Sighing wearily, Charming turned to the small handful of guards who hadn't quit in disgust. "Take her back to her cell." Snow whispered something in his ear. "And give her a nice teddy bear to keep her company in there." More whispers. "And a complimentary bottle of our finest apple cider."

As she was dragged off, Regina flashed a deranged look at the crowd, just in case any of them (Snow) had failed to notice that she was a psychopath.

"If you won't let me kill her, can we at least lock her up?" David wheedled. "If word gets back to the dragons that I let her off scot-free AGAIN, they're going to think I'm losing my edge."

"You can't. Regina's innocent of this particular atrocity," Emma insisted. "My superpower told me so."

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. "Oh, you mean like it told you that Lancelot was Cora? And that Sidney was a mole? And that Graham was screwing Regina? And that Gold was planning to burn down city hall? And that Henry's dad was going to frame you for grand larceny?"

"I choose not to notice any of that!" the savior replied stubbornly. "Look, if you don't believe me, just take a look at her sweet, innocent face."

Mary Margaret and her husband exchanged worried glances. "Oh gods, the Swan Queen shippers were right!"
Emma shot them a withering look. "Guys, I'm serious!" She pointed at the two-way mirror separating them from Regina.

On the other side, one of Mary Margaret's bluebird friends had wandered into the interrogation room. "Away, beast, or I'll buy a cat just for the sick pleasure of feeding you to i—wait." Regina leafed through her book again for a moment, then plastered a smile on her face and held out her hand for the bird. "I'm wishing…for someone…to spring me…today!" she warbled.

Mary Margaret pulled a face. "Yikes, that was incredibly off-key."

"It's the thought that counts. Come on, let her out!" Emma persisted.

"Why should we?"

"Because I'm the sheriff and you're a schoolteacher!"

"Oh yeah. Damn it."

At Neuschwanstein Castle, Charming and Snow were fighting the urge to start clubbing each other with rocks again. "Why did you stop the execution?" The quasi-prince scowled at his wife. "You're totally undermining my royal authority, here! And my royal authority is already shaky enough, what with the fake identity and all."

Snow White was less than repentant. "Sorry, but you were about to order the lawful execution of a depraved mass-murderer who was screaming death threats at us. I had to stop you—you were totally out of control."

He shook her until her teeth rattled. "If you let her live, she's going to kill you! She said so herself!"

"Cut her some slack. She was having a bad day."

"Was she just having a bad day when she massacred all those villagers? And poisoned you? And tried to execute me against her own word? And repeatedly raped her Huntsman? And took out a hit on your father? And marooned poor Jefferson in Wonderland while somehow managing to convince herself that it was his fault? And—"

"Okay, okay, so she's made a few mistakes."

"A few?"

"But she has a heroic side too. Why, when I was a kid, she literally rode up on a white horse to save my life."

"Seriously? The horse was white?"

Snow shrugged. "Eh, it might have had one or two brown spots. My point is, if we show her mercy, maybe she can reform."

"Or maybe she can go on a murderous rampage and destroy the entire planet."

"It's a risk I'm willing to take in order to avoid the terrible wrath of the Evil Regals."

Sick of her husband's logical but incessant nagging, Snow decided to take a walk in the courtyard to clear her head. Rumplestiltskin, who had been snapping photos of Regina's suffering for his
scrapbook, sat down his camera and went over to say hi. "Hey Snow. Nice night for a beheading."

She glanced around, confused. "Who said that?"

"Oh, right, the cape. I forgot." The Dark One pulled off his hood, thus becoming visible again. "So
tell me, Snow, have you ever heard of a little thing called reverse psychology?"

Snow frowned. "No, I don't think so."

"Beautiful." Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "In that spirit,
Regina is irredeemably evil and you should totally not free her to cast any curses."

A light bulb went off in Snow's head. "Hey, I just had a thought. Maybe Regina isn't irredeemably
evil and I should set her free to cast some curses."

The Dark One sighed in mock defeat. "Well, if you insist, I guess I could provide you with a test of
character for her."

Snow eyed him suspiciously. "Why would you want to do that?"

"I could give you an explanation, but it would probably give you a migraine," he warned her.

Back at Archie's perpetually-unlocked office, David was digging Regina's file out of a drawer. "Hey,
there's nothing in here but a Post-It. 'Please note,'" he read, "'this file belonging to Regina is empty.
Bwa hah hah hah hah hah—'"

He turned the note over. "...hah hah hah hah hah hah hah."

Emma eyed the folder nervously. "Is that a bait hook stuck to her file?" She gulped. "Oh, I've been
here before!"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Isn't it obvious? This is a frame-job, and not a particularly subtle one."

"I don't know," said Mary Margaret skeptically. "Even if it is, I don't see how we're supposed to
figure out who did it. You can't throw a rock in this two without hitting someone with a grudge
against Regina. Watch." She tossed a rock out the window.

"Ow!" a voice outside whined. "Knock it off—I'm trying to plot my revenge on Regina, here!"

"See?" said Mary Margaret smugly.

Her daughter still wasn't convinced. "Open your eyes, Eminem. This, like everything else that's ever
happened, is clearly the work of Mr. Gold."

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold peeked into the picnic basket his girlfriend had brought
him. "Is that escargot?" At her nod, he swept her into his arms. "Wow, just when I thought I couldn't
love you more!" He leaned in to kiss her, but they were interrupted by the ringing of his inanimate
bell.

He looked up to find the Charmings invading his shop yet again and scowled at them. "Hey, there's a
tie on the doorknob, in case you didn't notice."

"Quiet, you dirty bug-stomper!" Emma barked. "We know you killed him!"
"Someone's dead?" Belle piped up curiously.

Emma gave her a sideways glance. "Who the hell are you? Eh, like I care." She turned back to Gold. "Hopper's dead, and while you have no logical motive for causing him harm, that's never stopped you before."

"Have you considered Regina as a suspect?" Belle suggested. "She has a pretty solid record of hurting people just for the evulz—she locked me in a nuthouse for twenty-eight years simply because I love Rumplestiltskin."

The savior shrugged. "I don't know, that seems like a reasonable treatment plan to me. Personally, I would have tried to smack some sense into your head with a hammer while I was at it."

"Look, I'm sorry to disappoint you," Gold interjected, "but I actually wasn't responsible for this particular atrocity.

"Why should we believe you?" David challenged.

"Well, you could always use Emma's superpower." Everyone but Emma burst out laughing. "Heh, seriously, though, I happen to know a magic trick, invented by my esteemed colleague Dr. Doolittle, that can see into the mind of the cricket's dog."

Pongo wagged his tail and allowed Gold to cuddle him, forever disproving the theory that animals can sense evil. "Aw, how precious!" Belle cooed. "Rumple, I've never seen you look this adorable without me being involved."

"Wait a minute. Dogs can be used to impress babes?" He looked down at the Dalmatian with new appreciation. "Hey Emma, can I keep this thing when you're done with it?"

"Sorry, but I'm afraid Henry's got dibs."

"Well, it was worth a shot." He took a dreamcatcher out of a cupboard, and Emma inexplicably broke down sobbing. "Hey, none of that, now," he chided, passing her a Kleenex. "You need to stay focused—it's time for your first magic lesson."

Emma quirked an eyebrow. "And, uh, when did I agree to let you teach me magic? No offense, but I've seen what happened with your last two apprentices."

"Relax, Emma, everyone knows you're incorruptible," the old man reassured her. "I think it's genetic." He gestured at her parents.

Belle was eyeing him suspiciously. "What exactly did happen with your last two apprentices?"

"Er…I'll tell you later, baby, over some wine. Lots and lots and lots of wine." He placed the dreamcatcher in Emma's hands. "Now, Miss Swan, if you'll just stop crying out for Neal, whoever that may be, we can get started."

"Emma!" her mother balked. "Don't tell me you're dumb enough to start taking advice from Rumplestiltskin again?"

"Sorry, but I seem to be." She looked thoughtful. "It must be genetic, like the incorruptibility thing." She stared at the dreamcatcher as hard as she could, and even tried batting her eyelashes at it, but nothing happened.
"You're not magicking hard enough," Gold scolded. "Come on, now; turn it up a notch."

Emma shut her eyes, and an image of some talking pink horses appeared in the webbing. "Hey look, we're picking up *My Little Pony* on this thing. I haven't seen this show in years!"

"Wrong channel," Gold informed her. "Give it another try."

The ponies were replaced by an image of some castaways playing golf in the middle of the jungle. Emma squinted. "Hey Belle, is that you in there?"

"Getting closer, dearie," said Gold. "One more time."

Emma blinked again, and Pongo appeared inside the hoop, pulling his late master's belt and shoelaces off with his teeth and using them to construct an elaborate pulley system in order to get the door open. "Huh, so that's how he managed it," she mused. Rewinding her inner TiVo a little further, she finally happened across a shot of Regina barging in, as usual. The evil queen proceeded to strangle Archie and yell "You're dead, and I am totally Regina!" while staring straight at the dog.

The savior's shoulders slumped sadly. "Well, I guess it's time to break out the old chainsaw."

---

David ran after his daughter. "Emma, quit rampaging or you're grounded!"

Emma revved her chainsaw menacingly. "Just try it, Pops."

He backed away nervously, and Mary Margaret stepped up to the plate. "Emma, we're just trying to look out for you. People tend to explode when they go up against Regina."

"So what's your solution? Give her a hug and politely ask her not to kill again?"

"No. We'll sprinkle her with pixie dust and put her in time out."

Emma sighed. "I wasn't far off."


"Yeah, the plan is awesome, but not terribly original, so she'll probably see it coming from a mile away," Mary Margaret pointed out.

"You leave that to me," said Emma, waving her chainsaw wildly. "As you can see, I'm the queen of subtlety."

---

Snow White made her way up to Regina's cell and addressed the single measly guard that they had posted, due to all the turnover after the failed execution. "Beat it, homie—my mom and I are going to have girl talk and we don't need any dudes cramping our style."

"But the prince specifically ordered me not to abandon my post, since apparently, I'm not dutiful enough to do it without being told."

Snow rolled her eyes. "You don't have to follow his orders. Charming's not even a real prince—I just call him that because Snow White and her Prince Charming sounds more romantic than Snow White and her nameless sheep farmer."
"Noted." The guard finally took the hint and bowed out, leaving them alone.

Snow slipped a dagger up her sleeve. "You can ignore the knife. I just keep it around in case my nails need trimming."

Regina looked bored. "I suppose you've come to gloat? That's what I would do."

"No, I've come to reminisce." She smiled wistfully. "Remember all the great times we've had together, like when you poisoned m…no, wait, that's no good. How about the time you fantasized about strangling…hm, no." She thought a moment. "Well, there was the time you had my father slaughtered in his sl…damn it!"

Seven hours later…

"…or the time you enslaved my dear friend the Huntsman?" Snow trailed off, looking thoughtful. "Hm, now that you're defeated, I should really look into getting him freed." She felt around in her pockets. "Darn, I don't have my to-do list with me. Oh well, I'm sure I'll remember." She returned to her original task. "I've got it! What about the time you pulled me off that horse and saved my life? That was pretty awesome."

Regina yawned. "I'm afraid all the awesome in my heart died with my man."

"Don't say that. It's anti-feminist, and I don't think it's true, either." She took the keys that the incompetent guard had stupidly left behind and opened the cell. "I'm letting you go out of gratitude for saving my life, and also to get back at Charming for leaving the toilet seat up."

"Really?" Regina stared at her in disbelief. "But what about all those people I killed?"

Snow waved a hand dismissively. "Eh, they probably deserved it, and anyway, I'm sure you're sorry."

"No, I'm not."

"Well, at least you've learned your lesson and won't do it again, right?"

"Wrong." Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil.

Snow hesitated briefly. "Well, no matter. You'll probably mellow out eventually, given some time to reflect."

"Doubtful!" the Evil Queen shouted, snatching Snow's allegedly-hidden dagger. "Did you really expect me to believe that this was meant for clipping nails? The only thing lower than a gossip is a liar!" She lunged at her stepdaughter, but the dagger passed right through her. Regina gaped. "Wait a minute, are you a ghost? No wonder killing you has proven so impossible!" She smiled. "Phew, I feel better now. I was starting to worry I was losing my touch."

"She's not a ghost," said Charming, entering the room. "I'm afraid we've pwned you again."

"What? How?" Regina demanded.

"The same way we do everything. With a little help from Rumplestiltskin." He held up the blindfold she had worn at her execution. "He used one of your hairs to create a protection spell. It will keep you from harming me and Snow White."

"What about everyone else?"
"Hey, protection spells aren't cheap," the quasi-prince defended. "They're going to have to get their own or take their chances."

"You tricked me?" Regina regarded them with new respect. "Huh, I didn't think you had it in you."

"It wasn't a trick," Snow defended. Charming and Regina both looked at her skeptically. "Okay, maybe it was, but it was a well-intentioned trick. I was hoping that, given the chance, you wouldn't try to kill me."

Regina broke into peals of laughter. Then she noticed the looks on their faces. "Oh. You were serious?"

"I hate to say I told you so, but I did," Charming reminded his fiancée.

She smacked him. "Shut up, Charming! And as for you," she said, turning to Regina, "you're banished."

"To where?" her stepmother wanted to know.

"The enchanted castle you stole from me. I never much cared for the décor anyway."

"My castle? The one filled with magical treasures, designer outfits, and my hot, naked love slave?" She laughed again. "How very cruel. I'll try to contain my horror."

---

Emma banged on the front door of the Stepford House, her parents in tow. "Open up! I have a warrant for your arrest."

Regina opened the door and snatched the alleged warrant, examining it. "This isn't signed. And it's written on a bar napkin, in eyeliner."

Emma looked a little sheepish. "It was the best I could do. I tried going to the D.A. for a real one, but he ran away screaming when he saw David with me."

"And what, exactly, am I being accused of this time?"

"Still killing Archie. I saw you do it with my awesome powers." Regina gave her a quizzical look. "Okay, I saw you with my awesome powers and a lot of help from Gold."

"Rumplestiltskin?" Regina laughed. "Don't tell me you're dumb enough to start taking advice from him again?" She glanced at David and Mary Margaret. "Must be genetic."

"This isn't about me; this is about Henry!" Emma snapped. "How could you betray the trust of your adoring child, who believed in you when no one else would?"

"Again," Mary Margaret interjected.

"I didn't!" the former queen protested. "And speaking of Henry, I'm filing a complaint with state social services about your blatant and repeated violations of my parental rights!"

"Screw your parental rights! I've never cared about the legality of my actions before, and I'm sure as hell not going to start now!" Emma whistled. "Sic her, Auntie Blue!"

"Glow of pwnage!" the Mother Superior cried, appearing from behind a tree and firing another blast of blue light at her enemy.
Regina conjured a baseball bat and swatted it aside. "Did you really think I'd be stupid enough to fall for that again?"

"Well, yeah," said Mary Margaret, as if that should be obvious. "I mean, no offense, but you were stupid enough to fall for my obvious dagger ploy."

Humiliated by the memory, Regina flipped out and blasted them all with magic. "Oh yeah," sneered Emma, rising to her knees to gather up her teeth. "This is definitely going to convince us that you've reformed."

"Oh right. My sacred quest for redemption. I forgot." Defeated, the Evil Queen 2.0 poofed off to her latest evil lair to drown her sorrows in some hard cider.

The Charmings were sitting at the bus stop in silence, when Emma suddenly blurted. "Henry's going to be here any minute!"

Mary Margaret looked at her worriedly. "Um, yes, we know. That's why we're here. Are you feeling okay?"

Emma gave her a double-take. "Wait a minute. If school is just getting out, and you've been with me all day, who the hell has been teaching Henry?" She dismissed the thought. "On second thought, don't answer that. I have an even more difficult question to tackle. How am I supposed to be a mother when I didn't have one of my own?"

"You think you've got it bad?" her father snorted. "We were parented by Regina and King George. If we can suck it up and try to be good parents, there's hope for anyone."

The savior considered his words. "But that's different." She pointed at each of her parents in turn. "You're a literal knight in shining armor, and you probably qualify for sainthood. Whereas I'm a semi-reformed criminal with severe anger management issues." She patted her chainsaw sadly.

"Who has so much love in her heart that it has to manifest itself through explosions," David reminded her. "Sweetie, I may have spent a grand total of fifteen minutes interacting with you, but that was long enough to see how awesome you are."

Mary Margaret hugged her. "He's right. We'll get through this catastrophe together as a family, for once."

Cheered, Emma smiled hopefully. "Does that mean you'll help me break the bad news to Henry?"

"Hell no!" As their grandson stepped off the bus, they shoved Emma at him and ran.

"Cowards!" she yelled at them, then addressed Henry. "Son, I've got something to tell you that's not going to be easy to hear."

Taking in her grim face and subdued demeanor, Henry got scared. "Oh no, what is it?" He gasped. "I'm not secretly related to Mr. Gold, am I?"

"Oh, Lord, no; nothing so horrifying as that!"

Regina watched from her luxury car of doom as her son became irrevocably lost to her, bursting into angry tears and tossing her copy of Righteousness for Dummies out the window.
The Evil Queen barged into her lair, as usual. She found her father and Rumplestiltskin on the couch, chugging beer and swapping horror stories about Cora. "...And one time, when I refused to get my hair cut like she wanted it, she waited till I was asleep and shaved my head!" the imp recounted indignantly.

"You think that's bad?" Henry the First laughed darkly. "You should hear what she did to me when I forgot to put the toilet seat down."

Rumplestiltskin shuddered. "Better you than me, dearie."

"What the hell is going on, here?" the Evil Queen demanded.

Henry the First gave her a smile. "Oh hi, pumpkin. Your Uncle Rumplestiltskin's here to see you. Says he's got a recipe for apple turnovers that he thinks you'd enjoy." He rose. "I'll just go and fetch your recipe cards."

Regina eyed the Dark One warily. "Well, now that he's out of the way, what do you really want? Are you here to put another curse on me?"

"No, I'm confident that you can do that yourself. Hint, hint." Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron.

When she realized what he was talking about, Regina smiled, which was never a good sign. "Daddy, never mind the cards," she called out. "Get me my megaphone. It's gloating time!"

Back at the docks, Hook was examining his titular appendage with concern. "Is that a freckle, or am I rusting?"

"Honey, I'm home!" Cora energized in. "I've been reconsidering your request to date my daughter. Tell me, how would you feel about letting me tear our your heart once she gets attached to you?"

Hook cringed. "Er, on second thought, I think I just became a confirmed bachelor."

Cora's face fell. "I'm disappointed but not surprised. Well, to show you there's no hard feelings, I brought you a present."

The pirate brightened. "Is it one of those delightful noise-free digital clocks?"

"Even better. I stashed it on the Jolly Rancher."

"Jolly Roger."

"Whatever." She led him down to the hold of his invisible ship, where she had Dr. Hopper hog-tied in a chest. A muffled, high-pitched sound could be heard coming from under the gag he wore. Cora hit him with her parasol. "Giving a little whistle can't help you anymore, I'm afraid!"

"Who's that?" Hook asked.

"The town shrink. I thought you could do with some grief counseling. This business of obsessing over some dead chick for three centuries straight can't be healthy. And if there's time after your first session, maybe you can see if he has any dirt on Rumplestiltskin."

"Sounds like a plan. But if that's Dr. Hopper, then who did you kill?"

"Eh, like it affects us."
The Outsider

Mr. Gold drove up to the town line in the obligatory black luxury car that all supervillains seem to own. Hearing a strange thumping noise in the trunk, he pulled over and popped the lid. A bound, gagged man was cowering inside. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my trunk?"

"I'm Smee," his captive reminded him. "You stuffed me in here seven weeks ago, after I kidnapped your girl, and apparently forgot all about me."

"Oh." The Dark One shrugged. "Well, as long as you're here, you can help me with my experiment. I could use a lab rat." He winked at the camera, hauled Smee out of the trunk, and snatched his hat. "Keepaway!"

"Hey, that hat's my trademark!" Smee protested, grabbing for the hideous thing. "How would you feel if someone were to steal that awesome walking stick of yours?"

"That's not advisable, dearie," Gold growled, dumping a potion on the hat and shoving it on Smee's head.

"What the hell are you up to?"

Gold laughed darkly. "Better people than you have tried to figure that out." He kicked the pirate over the line. "Now, what's your name?"

"Do you actually care?"

"Good point, no. What's my name, then?"

Smee groaned. "Please don't ask me to pronounce that monstrosity. I'm begging you."

Gold smirked. "Good enough." He whacked the pirate with his cane. "Now am-scary, and no more trying to kill my girl."

Pretty much everyone who mattered was gathered at Storybrooke's cemetery, around a grave reading, "Here lies Archie/Jiminy, Beloved Friend and Nag." Mary Margaret was delivering the eulogy, because Marco suffered from crippling stage fright. "Some of us knew him as Archie, others as Jiminy, others as the lovable Carth Onasi. But everyone except Rumplestiltskin's puppets knew him as a true friend. And though he may have moved on to that big cuckoo clock in the sky, we shouldn't mourn for him."

"Then why is your voice choked with dry sobs?" Ruby challenged.

"All right, you've got me." Bursting into tears, Mary Margaret started handing out complimentary Kleenex boxes. "Stoicism time is over!" she sobbed.

At the edge of the grave, Belle drew Leroy and the Mother Superior into a hug. The latter drew back uneasily. "Excuse me, have we met?"

"N-no," Belle admitted sheepishly. "Sorry, my social skills must have been temporarily crippled by grief."

"Why the hell are you so sad? Did you ever even meet Archie?"
"Yes, we were co-authoring a self-help book on the evils of enabling." She sniffled sadly. "Oh well. Maybe Bae will be willing to help me with it, once Rumplestiltskin tracks him down."

Marco approached the grave, looking like he'd just lost his best friend, which he totally had. "Oh Jiminy, I miss you so much! Who am I supposed to use as a scapegoat for all my problems now?" He wept brokenly. "If Pinocchio's still alive, he's going to be crushed when he finds out. If he's not, tell him I said hey." He settled Archie's lucky umbrella against the tombstone. "Here, this thing wasn't very lucky for you while you were getting murdered, but you may as well keep it anyway, since you always looked so adorable with it." He turned to leave. "Enjoy whatever afterlife we may believe in, homie."

Back aboard the Jolly Rancher, Hook was torturing poor Archie with a bug zapper he'd swiped in town. "AAH!" the human-turned-cricket-turned-human screamed in agony. "Damn it, none of this would be happening to me if only I had my lucky umbrella!"

"You're such a baby," Hook scoffed. "Why, I had my hand hacked off with a rusty sword, without any form of anesthesia, and I never so much as said 'ouch'." The pirate picked up a can of Raid and brandished it at his captive. "Now spill it! Where's the Dark One's all-powerful Achilles dagger?"

Archie rolled his eyes. "Do you really think Gold's dumb enough to tell me something like that, given my habit of blabbing my patients' innermost secrets to anyone who asks?"

"Hm. Good point." Hook thought a moment. "Well, frankly I know better than to try attacking him. Tell me, is there anyone I could hurt him vicariously through?"

"Well, he once mentioned a son…"

"No, I'm definitely not up to facing Bae again. That kid's got a scarier temper than both his parents put together. Are there any women in the Dark One's life?"

"Well, there's a rumor going around about him and someone named Cora…"

Hook cringed. "I was thinking maybe someone small and helpless, with no combat experience whatsoever."

Archie looked quizzically down at his own bonds. "You do this often, then?"

"Every chance I get," said Hook brightly. "So are you going to talk, or am I going to have to put in a call to your old friend, the Orkin Man?"

"No! Anything but that!"

Belle ran excitedly into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. "Rumple, what's the emergency? Did you get attacked by wolves, and now you need me to firmly yet tenderly nurse you back to health?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, good." She tried to conceal her disappointment. "What is it, then?"

He triumphantly held up a bottle. "I was cleaning out my deus ex alchemica box this morning, and I found this buried in the back. It will allow me to leave town if I pour it on the thing I love most."

Belle grinned. "I'm right here."
"No, an inanimate object." He took a tattered rag out of his safe. "I thought I'd use this shawl my boy use to wear during that cross-dressing phase he went through."

Belle was offended. "Hey, I thought you said my chipped cup was the only object you truly cherished?"

"That was a line."

"I suspected as much. Well, maybe I should come along and make sure you don't accidentally slaughter anyone on the way."

"You can't. There's only enough potion for one."

"So make more."

"All right, there's plenty of potion, I just don't want you cramping my style," Gold admitted.

She smiled indulgently and hugged him. "There, doesn't it feel good to be honest?"

Belle was sitting in a tavern, trying to get over her recent breakup by getting hammered and reading the latest Rumbelle smut. Unfortunately, a dwarf interrupted her just as she was getting to the good part. "Looking for an adventure?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid you're not my type." Then she recognized him. "Hey, I know you. Your name's Dreamy, right?"

Dreamy sighed wearily. "I don't even know anymore. I just came to tell you that I'm taking your advice and running away with Nova tonight, provided an even nosier woman doesn't take it upon herself to interfere in my love life between now and then."

"That's some fast work, my friend." She slapped him on the back. "Name your first egg after me."

"Will do."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the tavern, some level one newbies were attempting to gather a party for their first quest. "There's a fearsome beast ravaging a faraway land that may or may not be China. They call this creature the yaoguai. That's Chinese for demon, but don't let that deter you. It's just a name." There were no takers. "Come on, you all know the story of Prince Charming! Killing monsters is pretty much the only form of social mobility there is around here, so you may as well give it a shot."

Dreamy looked back at Belle. "He's got a point, you know. Why don't you go with them? Or failing that, home to the family you love so much that you sold yourself into eternal servitude for them?"

"Are you crazy? I can't go home—Gaston's there!" She shuddered. "And as for joining them on their quest, I'm afraid I've had bad luck with beasts in the past."

She sighed defeatedly. "Some beauty I'm turning out to be."

The dwarf shook her fiercely. "Get ahold of yourself, woman! If you don't take this chance to change your life and expand your horizons, you could end up bitter, lonely, and working some dead-end job in a diamond mine."

"That would be a fate too horrible to imagine," Belle had to admit. "Okay, you've talked me into it." She pecked him on the cheek. "Thanks for the pep talk. I'll send you a postcard from wherever the
hell it is that I'm going."

As she gathered up the luggage she'd acquired somewhere between Rumplestiltskin's pad and the nearest bar, Dreamy tugged at her sleeve. "Belle, wait. I had a feeling this might happen, after looking at the promos, so I got you a going away present." He tossed her a pouch. "Here, it's fairy dust."

"Where did you get this?" She gasped. "Dreamy, have you been embezzling?!"

"Hey, it's no more than I'm owed for all those years of hard labor without wages!"

Shaking her head, Belle tried to hand the dust back. "Sorry, but unlike certain people named Ella, I'm not stupid. All magic comes with a price."

"Oh, that old line?" Dreamy laughed. "That's just an urban legend Rumplestiltskin made up to scare anybody dumb enough to make a deal with him. At that, Belle burst into tears and ran off. Dreamy was more confused than ever. "What? What'd I say?"

---

A sign had been hung under the clock tower, reading "Storybrooke Public Library—Now Practically Dragon-Free!" Belle surveyed the place with delight. "Ah, the public library: last refuge of the geeky."

"Think again, love," Hook spoke up from an appropriately shady corner.

Belle paled. "Hey, I remember you. The guy who wanted to kill Rumplestiltskin." She looked him over knowingly. "This is because he looks hotter in leather than you do, isn't it?"

That accusation hit way too close to home for Hook, so he charged her with his sword. Belle, for the sake of anyone who hadn't yet picked up on her philosophy that knowledge is the most powerful weapon of all, retaliated by shoving a bookcase on top of him. "Belle smash!" she squeaked halfheartedly, barricading herself in the elevator and taking out her cellphone. "Hey Rumple? Not that I need a man to protect me or anything, but one of your many enemies is trying to kill me." She paused thoughtfully. "I'm actually kind of surprised that it took this long." No answer. "Rumple, are you listening to me? Ugh, men!" She flung the phone at the wall in disgust.

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold was starting to panic. "Belle, I can't hear you, you're breaking up!" He froze. "Wait a minute. A hot, terrified woman being mysteriously cut off by static? I know my horror flicks! That means there's a murderer in the house!" He vaulted heroically over the counter and out the door. "'Stiltskin away!"

Belle was reading in the back of a wagon, her cleavage bared in order to disorient any monsters they might meet along the way, when one of her companions leaned over and snatched her book. "Belle, how can you read this thing? There's no pictures." He shook his head reprovingly. "And when a woman reads, she starts getting ideas…thinking…"

"You're positively primeval," she chided.

He preened. "Why thank you, Belle."

She eyed him calculatingly. "Do you have a brother name Gaston, by any chance?"

"How did you know that?"
"Ew, leaving!" She grabbed her book and jumped for her life.

Belle tracked the yaoguai to a cave in the mountains. "Hm," she mused, standing at the cavern's mouth. "Maybe, being such a strategically-minded person, I should lay a trap for this thing while it's sleeping?" She examined her hands. "On second thought, screw it. I might break a nail." She drew her weapon. "I'm sure this butter knife I swiped from that last inn will do the trick."

As she attempted to proceed, she accidentally tripped the monster's adventurer-alarm. The fiery beast came bounding out, and started loading some kerosene into a suitcase for later. Looking from her little butter knife to the hulking beast, Belle had enough sense to cower. While she was thus occupied, Mulan came along and fired an arrow at the creature. "Yes! The first ever bulls-eye performed without the use of a magic bow! I'm gonna go down in history!" Weeping tears made of lava, the creature ran off to find a vet.

Belle rose to her feet, her eyes filled with gratitude. "You saved my life, and more importantly, this wicked outfit I'm wearing."

"Amateur." Mulan rolled her eyes. "I hope you're happy-I've been following trails of stolen picnic baskets for weeks in an effort to track down that ursine outlaw."

"You must be really incompetent, then. I found it in a day, and I'm the biggest noob since Prince Charming." She smiled hopefully. "Say, are you interested in hiring some brains to go with all that brawn of yours?"

"Sorry, sister, but there's only room for one feminist hero in this town!" Mulan clubbed her over the head and then ran off to take care of Princess Tiana.

Back in her elevator, Belle was still trying to come to terms with her new role as damsel in distress, when the doors rolled open. "Well, I guess this is the end. I sure hope Rumple doesn't decide to mourn my loss by smashing all his stuff again." But it was Gold, not Hook, standing on the other side of the doors. "Rumplestiltskin, I know you don't hear these words very often, but I'm so happy to see you!" She flung herself into his arms, all attempts at playing hard-to-get abandoned.

He reached into a box labeled "Damsel's Aid Kit" and took out a jacket to drape around her shoulders. "See? Sometimes it pays to be dating the King of Paranoia." He produced a cup of hot cocoa, some anxiety meds, and a couple of pamphlets on coping with near-death experiences.

She glanced around cautiously. "Where's your fellow leather-clad anti-hero?"

"Who cares? It's not like he's ever successfully hurt anybody anyway."

Over at the Princess Pad, Henry was staring mournfully out the window, giving one little whistle after another, to no avail. "Hey kid, you still grieving?" Emma inquired.

"Yep."

"Well, emotions make me uncomfortable, so let me know when you're done, okay?" Fidgeting uncomfortably, she rejoined Archie's wake in the next room.

Mary Margaret patted her shoulder consolingly. "There there, Emma. He'll get over it. He steps on bugs all the time, so it would be hypocritical if he let Archie's death bother him."
Leroy approached his monarchs. "Excuse me, ladies, but as president of the Mana Miners Local 815, I've been authorized to ask you when we're going home."

Mary Margaret blinked. "You want to go home, to your eternal servitude in a dank underground cave without any women?"

"That is correct."

The Mother Superior smirked proudly. "That's right. When the Blue Fairy brainwashes you, you stay brainwashed."

Everyone stared at her in silent shock, until Ruby finally broke the ice. "Okay, the dwarves' motivations are ridiculous, but mine aren't! I've seen what they do in this land to creatures who aren't supposed to exist. I don't want to end up sharing a dissection table with some Martian!"

"Those of us who survive will worry about that after it happens," said Emma.

Gold led Belle down the only street in town, back to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. She hung back hesitantly. "Rumplestiltskin, I know it's asking a lot, but for once in our relationship, can we bond without your creepy puppets watching?"

"I'm afraid not," he apologized. "I was actually planning to cut their heads off and hang them around your neck, so that Hook will be too scared to come near you again."

"That seems a little drastic. Haven't you ever heard of a little button called 911?"

"911 services in this violence-riddled town consist of one person, and she's busy right now." He sighed. "I keep begging her to hire a freaking deputy or twelve, but she doesn't seem inclined to listen to reason."

Belle couldn't argue with that. "Well, are you going to tell me why that pirate's out to get me, or force me to stumble around blindly, looking for answers, until I fall into yet another trap?"

"The latter." She slapped him. "All right, all right. We'll compromise and do both." He took a deep breath. "A long time ago, I was married to a heartless sociopath named Milah."

"Sounds like a match made in heaven. She was Baelfire's mother, then?"

"I guess she could be called that, in a very loose technical sense."

"So what happened?"

"Same thing that happened to ever other mother in our dimension. She died."

She followed him into the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, and found the place smashed to pieces. "Rumple, you really must learn to control your temper," she scolded. "What set you off this time? Did you get another spam email?"

"No, it actually wasn't my doing this time." He swore under his breath. "It must have been Hook's little stooge. I knew I should have murdered him when I had the chance!" He rounded furiously on his girlfriend. "Damn you and your good influence!"

"I'd say I'm sorry, but I'm too perfect to lie. Did they take anything?"

Gold didn't even bother to look before answering, "One guess."
On a nearby rooftop, Hook was peering through his spyglass. "That's right, baby, take it off—take it all off for Killian." He checked his watch. "Whoops, it's almost time for Rumplestiltskin's downfall." He shifted the glass and found Gold re-shattering his shattered possessions. "Ah, same old Rumple."

Down in the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold was whacking on a piece of delicious symbolism with his cane. Exasperated, Belle grabbed his arm. "Rumplestiltskin, stop smashing the shop. It's pointless, not to mention redundant."

Gold took a deep breath and counted to ten. "You're right, I shouldn't be wasting time smashing inanimate objects, when I could be smashing Hook's painfully attractive face!"

"Sounds like fun. I'll come with. I can help you by disorienting him with my mighty low-cut neckline." She opened her jacket.

"I thought I told you I didn't want you cramping my style!"

"If you want a woman who's going to stay home and knit while you march off to battle, you're on the wrong series."

"I choose not to notice that!" yelled Gold, who had been spending entirely too much time around Emma. He handed her a pistol. "Here, take this powerful weapon, but whatever you do, don't use it to help the man you love."

Belle shook her head ruefully. "You must be the stupidest evil genius ever."

"I'll take that as a yes."

Gold reached for the doorknob, but his girlfriend stopped him. "Wait. Remember our talk during the premiere, about you not killing people for revenge anymore? You know that still goes, right?"

Unable to come up with a suitable answer to that, Gold pointed over her shoulder. "Hey, look! It's Dominic Monaghan!"

"Really?" She turned to look.

"Sucker!" he cried, bolting out the door.

At some unnamed village in some unnamed country on some unnamed continent, Belle was fishing pennies out of the local wishing well, when Gaston's brother appeared, holding a dictionary. "I finally found out what 'primeval' means. You're gonna pay, princess!" He whistled for his cronies. "Come on, boys! Let's give the little geek a swirlie!"

They grabbed her by the ankles and dangled her into the well. "Ah! I'm wishing for someone to find me today!" she screamed.

"I guess that's my cue," said Mulan, appearing on the scene. "Drop the damsel, punks!"

"Make us!"

"All right." She drew her sword and clobbered them senseless. Then, just when they were sure they couldn't feel any worse, she removed her helmet. "PS, you just got beaten up by a girl."

"Well, it could be worse. At least we're not flowers." They dragged themselves to their feet and
slunk off.

Belle shook herself dry. "Mulan? I thought you were just a cameo. Glad I was wrong."

"Don't mention it, I was happy to help. You may be kind of a wimp, but at least you're not male." The warrior shuddered.

"I agree, men are pigs. Scaly green pigs."

Mulan grinned. "You're growing on me, stranger. Tell me, are you interested in breaking into sidekicking?"

"You know it, homegirl!" Belle noticed a gushing wound in her new BFF's leg. "But you seem a little busy bleeding to death right now. Don't you think maybe we should wait and—"

"I don't need to think. That's what I'm paying you for," Mulan snapped, dragging her off to the woods. "Let's move, soldier!"

Back at the library, Belle was sifting through the half-buried bookcase she'd dumped on Hook. "The general works section is a messy, messy weapon." As she worked, she stumbled across an intricate knot and a book titled "Google for Dummies." As she glanced from the book to the knot, she grew pensive. "Hm, this gives me an idea."

She opened the card catalog to the letter 'g'. "Let's see, Google; Grace (see also: Paige); Guai, Yao... Ah, here we go. Guides, nautical." She flipped through the recommended book and gasped. "The pirate captain came here on a ship? Wow, I never would have guessed!"

Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual, and Force-pushed Smee into a wall. "What part of 'no more trying to kill my girl' did you not understand?!" he roared.

"Ngh!" was Smee's strangled reply.

"Your eloquence won't save you now! Where's my trans boy's shawl?!

"I don't know! I'm just a bit character!" the pirate whimpered.

"Well, then, maybe I should free you to move on to bigger projects," Gold snarled, waving his hand and turning the pirate into a rat, which he swatted with his cane. "Now beat it—there should be enough cheese squirreled away in Billy's old place to keep you alive for years."

Having realized that Gold was right about Storybrooke's emergency services, Belle went down to the docks to retrieve the stolen property on her own. However, the docks were deserted, save for a large fish that was holding a distress flare in its mouth. Ignoring it, she looked around for Hook's ship, and noticed some birds building a nest in mid-air. "Wow, I'm the only one who's noticed this? Man, Storybrooke needs an optometrist. Badly." She grabbed some sand from the most convenient box ever and tossed it at the invisible object. Sure enough, a flight of stairs appeared. Belle smugly took out her cellphone and sent Gold a text. "Pirates found through deductive reasoning—one. Pirates found through dark magic—zero!"

Climbing aboard the pirate ship, Belle could hear a faint whistling noise coming from the hold. She traced it to a large grate, where she found Archie grinning broadly. "Whistling. It never fails."
"Thanks for noticing. You wanna get me the hell out of here?"

She mulled it over. "Can I be listed as lead author on our book?"

"Fine, whatever."

She grabbed a sword and hacked through his bonds. "Belle SMASH! Say, I'm getting better at this."
Cheered, she hauled him out of his tiny prison. "Find Mr. Gold. Tell him to get his sexy butt over here, and to leave the escargot forks at home."

Over at the Princess Pad, Henry devouring his seventeenth Zoloft cupcake of the day. David was getting worried. "This kid's awfully broken up over the death of his mental health care provider. I'd hate to see what kind of psychotic breakdown he would have if a pet died."

"Cut the kid a break," his wife whispered. "His shrink was the closest thing he had to a father. Which is seriously depressing all on its own."

David sat down beside his grandson. "Sorry for your loss kid, but having your loved ones murdered by Regina sort of comes with the territory of being a Charming."

"I know," the boy sighed, "but that doesn't make it any easier."

Pongo suddenly came bounding through the door, putting an end to their sad excuse for a heart-to-heart. "Ruff, ruff!" he barked.

"Again?" Henry groaned. "Look, I'm sorry Timmy's in trouble, but I'm not really in the mood to go bail him out right now. That kid needs to learn to fight his own battles."

"How did he get in here?" Mary Margaret wondered. "And how the hell did he get so muddy? It's not even raining today."

"I brought him, and we took a shortcut through the municipal swamp," Emma explained, following the dog in. "Marco and I had a chat. We agreed that a child with two adoring families needs a pet to keep him company far more than a lonely old man mourning the loss of his only son and his best friend."

"Naturally," said Mary Margaret. "But I fear Ruby will get jealous if she finds out I'm shacking up with another canine, so maybe your father and I should move out."

Emma was horrified. "Are you crazy? If you guys leave, I'll be alone with Henry all day. And to be honest, that kid still kind of creeps me out."

"Yeah, but on the plus side, you'd never have to worry about walking in on us in the sack again."

The savior grimaced at the memory. "All right, you've convinced me."

Back aboard the Jolly Rancher, Belle sat her gun on the counter with a note reading, "Plz do not steal—XOXO." Rifling through Hook's possessions, she found a lockbox that looked like it might contain Bae's shawl. But alas, when she got it open, all she found were a bunch of crushed pocket-watches. "Damn. I guess that would have been too easy."

"You know it, baby," said Hook, walking in and snatching her gun.
"Hey, read the note! That's mine!" she whined, grabbing for the weapon while he held it over his head, looking bored.

Belle and Mulan were making their way through the woods, having a jolly old time. "Let's get down to business, to defeat the beast! As we journey onward, through the nameless east!" they sang.

Then, seeing an ominous red glow on the horizon, Belle screamed. "Ah! Radioactive ogres! Run!"

Mulan grabbed her before she could flee. "No, no, that just the yaoguai." She hitched up her sword belt. "Guess it's my time to shine." Then her wound, which had been minor and healing nicely up until this point, spontaneously started gushing. "Rats. I should have known better than to try and shine during your episode." She handed Belle her sword. "Here, homie, whack him once for me."

Belle regarded the blade like a two-headed snake. "You want me to fight the yaoguai? Are you insane? I'm even more clumsy than I am trusting, and that's saying something! I failed gym class six consecutive times!"

But Mulan wouldn't take no for an answer. "You can do this. If all else fails, just flash that low-cut neckline of yours at the beast. That should distract it long enough for you to make your move."

"I'm not afraid of you!" Belle yelled at the murderous pirate with a gun to her head.

"Then clearly you're not as intelligent as I've been led to believe," Hook sneered.

"Give me the shawl or I'll use my pleading eyes on you!" she threatened. "Rumplestiltskin needs it to find his son. Or you could destroy it and force him to use my cup. Either way is good."

"And if his son doesn't want to be found?"

"What do I care? I've never even met the guy. I'm just sick of having to listen to Rumplestiltskin angst about him all the time." She squared her shoulders boldly. "To put an end to his whining once and for all, I'm prepared to make any sacrifice!"

"What's 'Stiltskin got to complain about? He's the one going around slaughtering innocent wo…er, women undeserving of death," he amended, in the interest of honesty.

Belle frowned. "I'm sorry, but you've lost me. I'm new to the regular cast—I must have missed an episode somewhere."

"Don't you get it? Rumplestiltskin killed his wife because she fell in love with me!"

"Why would she do that?"

Hook just smirked. "All women do."

"Not me."

The pirate glared at her. "I'm really not liking you."

"The feeling is mutual," she assured him, hitting him in the head with an oar and running off with the shawl.

He laughed evilly. "Ooh, I love it when they fight back!"
Belle ran up on deck, where Hook materialized in her path. "Ah! How the hell did you do that?"

"Cora bought a transporter off the same Romulans she got our cloaking device from," he explained nonchalantly. "Now fork over the shawl. It's chilly on this ship."

Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Unless your name is Hook, have no fear, Rumplestiltskin is here!"

"You're looking limp today, crocodile," Hook sneered.

"Is that supposed to be a double entendre, or did it just come out that way?" Gold wondered.

"Don't listen to him, Rumple. You look adorable," Belle assured him.

"Thanks, dearie." He looked back at Hook. "And as for you, die like an unblemished teacup!" He attacked the pirate with his cane, because Belle hadn't permitted him to bring his escargot forks.

"Honey, all this violence is a major turn-off at the present time," Belle protested as Hook's blood splattered all over her shoes.

Belle marched up to the yaoguai and tapped it on the shoulder. "Excuse me, but I think I've fallen in love with you." The monster roared, charging at her. She fled, wearing a self-satisfied smirk. "Aw yeah, if there's one thing I know how to do, it's anger a beast!"

She led it into an abandoned village, where she smashed open a pipe to douse its fiery mane. Thwarted, it flailed helplessly on the ground. "Sorry, but if you didn't want to be slain, you should have been born a panda." She reluctantly drew her sword, then noticed that the beast was puckering its lips at her. "Wait, are you under a curse? Sorry, but I already have a boyfriend."

Outraged, it started scratching symbols in the dirt. '"But you're a beauty and I'm a beast,'" she read. "Sorry, but I'm strictly a one-beast woman. You'll have to content yourself with this." She sprinkled the embezzled fairy dust over the creature's prone body.

A handsome prince was left standing in his place. "Whatever, I'm fighting off more than my share of babes as it is."

Belle blinked. "You're white."

"Yeah, so?"

"Why the hell were you writing in Asian characters?"

"I'm an otaku."

"Oh. Well, what are you doing way out here?"

"I'm Philip, prince of...I don't know, someplace. One of our homeland's many evil mages turned me into a monster and exiled me to this land for...I don't know, some reason. I tried to warn the villagers, but apparently, you're the only person in China who can read Chinese." He bowed. "I am forever in your debt. How can I repay you?"

Belle considered his offer. "Well, I've got a long and perilous transcontinental journey ahead of me. Maybe you could escort me, since you'll be going home the same way?"

Philip shook his head regretfully. "Sorry, but my girlfriend Aurora is the jealous type. If she ever
found out I'd been traveling around all alone with a strong, beautiful, intelligent heroine, I fear catfights would ensue."

"Oh. Well, no biggie. I'm sure I'll be fine on my own."

Aboard the Jolly Rancher, Gold was still hammering away at Hook's skull, while Belle, holding a mop, tried valiantly to keep up with the resultant tide of blood. "I'm getting really tired of having to clean up after your outbursts, Rumplestiltskin," she griped.

"You're wasting your breath, Belle," a semi-conscious Hook drooled. "Swinging that damned stick at things is what he lives for." The pirate leered. "Anyone who didn't know better might think he was compensating for something."

"Oh, that does it! You're dead!" Gold screamed, redoubling his efforts.

"Yes, do it! Kill me and send me to Milah!"

Belle raised her eyebrows and motioned at the gun he'd swiped from her. "It may not be any of my business, but if you're truly suicidal, it seems like putting that to your head and pulling the trigger would be a far more practical method than throwing yourself on the dull, rusty blade that is Rumplestiltskin."

"All right, I just said that for shock value," Hook admitted. "But my snide remark about his stick still stands!"

"That's it!" Gold conjured an escargot fork. "No more Mr. Relatively Nice Guy!"

Belle snatched the utensil. "Stop murdering people, or so help me, I'll finally cave in and make the Red Beauty shippers happy!" she threatened.

"But he tried to kill you! Three freaking times! Do you really think you're going to stop him by asking politely?"

"It worked with you."

"Oh, give me a break!"

Belle took out her cellphone. "Hey, Ruby, it's Belle. Are you free tonight, by any cha—?"

Gold grabbed the phone irritably. "Fine, I won't kill him, but at least let me call the cops and have him locked up." He dialed the sheriff's station, but all he got was a recording. "Hi, this is Sheriff Swan. I'm either away from my desk, trapped in yet another dimension, or just not in the mood to talk to you. If you're still alive tomorrow, try calling me back then. Thanks, and have a great day!"

Sighing heavily, Gold took his girlfriend's hand and limped off the ship. "How do I know I'll live to regret this?"

At the only restaurant in town, David and Mary Margaret were looking at the real estate listings for the new subdivision the Three Little Pigs had just finished building on the outskirts of town. "I really like this one," she said.

"It's made of straw," David noted disdainfully.

"Don't worry. I already have Ruby's promise that she won't huff and puff and blow it down."
"But we already have a castle. Do you really want to take on a second mortgage right now?"

She shivered, looking haunted. "I'd rather take on fifty mortgages than Cora. If we stay here, we can be safe, for once in our lives."

A strange giggling sound suddenly echoed through the diner. "What the hell was that?" David wondered.

"It almost sounds like…the writers are laughing at us."

Back at the Princess Pad, Henry was coloring, despite being eleven years old. Emma looked over his shoulder and greed flared in her eyes. "Is that a treasure map you're drawing? You've been holding out on me! That hurts, son. I would never keep secrets from you." Blushing guiltily, she surreptitiously tucked her swan pendant out of sight.

"No, actually, I'm designing a home security system in case my ex-mom comes after me." He showed off his blueprints proudly. "I'm especially proud of the blowtorch trap and the bed of rusty nails."

"That does it, young man! No more Home Alone for you!" She tore the map in two. "You're far too young to be arming yourself for a violent confrontation with an obsessive ex."

"Yeah, but what are you gonna do?"

"Anything I have to do to keep a blowtorch out of your fearsome hands. I'll get a concealed-carry permit for my chainsaw, I'll quit my job and patrol the house twenty-four hours a day; hell, I'll even break down and hire a deputy, if I have to!"

There was a knock at the front door. "Who is it?" Henry yelled.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise," came the reply.

Emma stormed over to the door. "Oh, for the love of…" She opened it up and screamed. "Ah! Cora's impersonating dead guys again!" She broke out her chainsaw. "Run for it, Henry!"

"No, it's me!" Archie yelped, shrinking back. "Cora kidnapped me."

"Really? Why?"

"Since when does she need a reason?"

Henry was ecstatic. "My ex-mom's innocent! I knew it!"

"Could've fooled me," Emma muttered, with a glance at his blueprints.

"Shut up." The boy's cheeks reddened. "We have to go apologize."

"Good luck with that," said Emma, her face a mask of pure dread. "Regina despised us enough just for existing. I don't even want to think about how bad she's going to be now that she has an actual reason."

Gold pulled up to the town line in his obligatory black luxury car, with Belle riding shotgun. "Thanks for keeping me from making an idiot out of myself again, baby. One would think you'd be getting tired of that by now."
"Oh, I am," Belle admitted. "But someone told me a long time ago that, if all else fails, you can't go wrong distracting a beast with a low-cut top. I figured it couldn't hurt to give it one more try."

Philip and Belle found Mulan with a group of villagers, taking bets on how Belle's fight with the yaoguai would turn out. "Okay, we've got fifty on 'eaten', eighty on 'incinerated' and two-hundred on 'both'. Any takers for 'she falls in love with it?'" Dozens of hands shot up. Noticing Belle, Mulan shooed her customers away. "Belle, you're alive? I, uh, knew you could do it," she fibbed. "Who's your hot friend?"

"I'm Philip, hot in a literal sense until very recently. I was under a curse, and Belle, here, broke it. Apparently, that's kind of her thing."

Mulan's eyes flicked over to Belle suspiciously, her hand drifting to the hilt of her sword. "Did you cure him with True Love's Kiss?"

"No."

The warrior relaxed. "Good. Then you can live."

Belle backed away nervously. "Well, I can see I'm becoming a third wheel, here, so I'll just be going back to Rumple. We all know it's going to happen eventually, and frankly, I'm tired of fighting it."

"You want me to come with?" Mulan offered.

"No, that would make far too much sense."

Belle stood on a ridge overlooking the road. "I'm coming back, Rumple, for all the good it'll probably do."

"Think again!" cried the Queen, emerging from the woods with her trusted stooges.

Belle groaned. "You again? What the hell is your problem? You can't get a man, so you have to make sure no one else does either?"

The accusation hit way too close to home, so Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Trust me, I'm doing you a favor. You haven't seen what happened to that monster's last love interest." She shuddered.

"You can't keep us apart forever!"

"Sure I can." She shoved the beauty in a cage. "See? It's easy."

"I don't care!" Belle ranted. "I'll never stop fighting for him, and neither will our many shippers!" She raised a fist boldly. "Queen of the Dearies forever!"

Belle followed Gold to the line, and he grew a bit hesitant. "Er, are you sure you don't want to wait in the car? I mean, since we don't have a talisman to protect you…"

But she was immovable on the subject. "I already told you, I'm not the 'stay home and knit' type."

"But you could lose your…"

"I am woman, hear me roar!" she thundered pointedly.
He sighed. "All right, come on. But, for the sake of my blood pressure, can you at least try to stand a few inches away from the line?"

"You're not the boss of me!"

"This can't end well," he groaned.

She draped the shawl around his neck. "Bon voyage, babe, and try not to get obliterated."

"Yes, dear." He took a step over the line. A surge of magic enveloped him, and he turned around to face Belle. "Lai Lai, is that you? I could sure use a drink."

"No!" cried Belle in horror.

He giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Naw, just playing, it's me."

She smacked him. "Will you just get out of here and find Bae so we can put an end to this constant parade of angst?"

"Sure thing, honey. I wish you could come with me."

"Really?"

"No, we established that earlier. I was just trying to be polite."

Belle rolled her eyes. "Well, don't worry, I love you anyway, and I'll be here waiting for you when you get back." She sighed wearily. "Probably tied to another railroad track, but here."

"A railroad track? I think I can be a little more original than that!" a familiar Irish voice rang out, followed by a gunshot.

Bleeding, Belle fell across the border and into Gold's arms. "Ow."

"Damn it, Belle! You're supposed to be the smart one! How did you not see this coming?!" her heartbroken boyfriend wailed.

"Oh, you poor dear," Hook jeered. "I can't imagine what it must be like to watch, helpless, as the woman you love is horrifically destroyed." He snapped his fingers sarcastically. "Oh wait. I can."

Gold was inconsolable. "Great, now where am I supposed to find a woman crazy enough to love me?" he sobbed.

"My heart bleeds for you," the pirate sneered.

"More prophetic words have never been spoken, dearie!" Gold screamed, conjuring his trusty escargot fork again.

But his latest murder was interrupted when a voice behind him cried out, "Villain Number Five, coming through!" A car with Pennsylvania plates barreled into Hook, but since Gold's cursed persona had taken "Stop, Drop, and Roll" training as a kid, he and Belle made it through unscathed.

Gold squinted through the darkness, studying the crashed car. "Not a black luxury vehicle," he noted, smiling down at Belle. "Don't worry, baby. This new 'villain' of ours is clearly nobody we need to be afraid of."
In the Name of the Brother

At the town line, Hook was sprawled on the ground, trying to sweet-talk his blood into returning to his body. The newcomer was passed out in his car, trying to play at being ominous, while Gold attempted to comfort a hysterical Belle, or whatever the hell her name was now. "Oh, stop whining! It's just a flesh wound. Here." He raised his hand and summoned magic to heal her injury, but wound up turning her into a snail instead. "Whoops, sorry dearie. Force of habit." He zapped her back into a human and magicked the wound away. "There we go."

"AH! What the hell?!"

"You're welcome."

"What the hell are you?!"

Gold genuflected. "The fairy-tale equivalent of Satan. You're still cool with that, right?"

"AH! AH! AAAAAAAAHH!"

The pawnbroker smiled adoringly. "Aw, this is like our first meeting all over again."

Apparently, Belle's screams were loud enough to be heard clear to the Charmings' house, because Emma and her parents suddenly pulled up in their squad car. "If there are any other emergency personnel in this town, now would be a good time to show yourselves!" the sheriff yelled into her radio.

David went over to Gold and Belle. "Are you okay?"

Gold rolled his eyes. "We're not going to dignify that with a response, are we, sweetie?"

"AAAAHH!"

"I think that means no." Gold explained. "She fell over the town line, you see. Now she has amnesia and can't remember who she is or who she loves."

"You too, huh?" David squeezed her shoulder sympathetically. "I feel your pain, babe. Don't worry, it'll all work out—just try not to marry anyone for a while."

Meanwhile, Emma had spotted Hook lying in the gutter. "Aw damn it, not you again!"

"Still playing hard-to-get, huh?" The pirate smiled indulgently. "You're too precious."

She brought her boot down on his busted ribs, and he screamed. "Flirt with me again, and the next kick will be aimed lower!"

"Do the words 'police brutality' mean anything to you?"

"Hell no."

"Just checking." He smirked. "Well, at least I can go to my grave secure in the knowledge that I destroyed an inoffensive little chick who's never harmed me or anyone else in her entire life."

"Yeah, 'bout that," said Gold, limping over to them. "You may not have noticed, but she was the only thing preventing me from torturing you to death, genius." He picked up his cane and resumed
the beating Belle had interrupted earlier. "The Beast is dead! Long live Rumplestiltskin!"

"Gold, are you insane?" Emma shrieked.

Everyone dropped what they were doing to stare at her quizzically. "...Are you new here or something?" Gold finally asked. He started laughing hysterically, giving David an opening to pull him off the thrice-battered pirate.

The paramedics arrived on the scene and ran over to Hook. "Good news, we exist!"

"Yeah, well, go exist over there," Emma grumbled. "Maybe we'll get lucky and Hook will die of his wounds before he gets the chance to betray us again."

Unable to argue with such flawless logic, the medics dropped him and went over to pry the unconscious Pennsylvanian from his mangled car. "Who is that?" Emma wondered. "Was he the scarecrow from The Wizard of Oz in our land?"

"No, he appears to be a tourist," David noted.

"Crap," said everyone present in perfect unison.

Down at the hospital, a disembodied female voice echoed through the corridors. "Accident victims in transit. Estimated arrival time: one minute. Warp core damaged, switching to impulse power."

"Huh?" slurred Dr. Whale, finally looking up from the beer tap he'd been sucking on.

"Just wanted to make sure you were still conscious," said the voice.

At magnificent mansion in a place called Monochromia, Victor Frankenstein was looking at his brother in askance. "Hey, aren't you supposed to be like seven years old? And aren't there supposed to be two of you?"

"Yeah." Gerhardt spread his hands helplessly. "And Peter Pan's supposed to be cute. Deal with it."

"Okay..." Victor glanced around the room uncertainly. "But where's dear Elizabeth?"

Their father snorted. "Knowing this show, she probably ran away to live with her birth family."

Victor shrugged. "Well, whatever." He raised his glass. "Here's to another fine year for what's left of the Frankenstein family."

"Who asked you, you crazy freak?" their father snapped. "Here, Gerhardt, I got you a present. It's your mother's watch. She wanted Victor to have it, but let's be honest, he'd just hock it for some black market organs." He handed his firstborn an envelope. "Here. I know it's not that cadaver you wanted, but it should top the lump of coal I usually give you."

As he opened the envelope, the doctor's jaw dropped in horror. "You're sending me away to military school? Aren't I a little old for that?"

"You're a little old to be living in my basement, too, but that's never stopped you before. It's time to grow up and get a real job."

"Dad, be reasonable," Gerhard admonished. "Without your support, Victor won't be able to continue his important work on a cure for this pandemic of colorblindness that's taking our world by storm."
Oh, and that resurrection gadget he's been fiddling around with is pretty cool, too."

Their father raised his eyebrows. "Does the word 'necromancy' mean anything to you?"

"Hell no!" Victor yelled, lightning crashing ominously behind him, as usual. "I have made my career choice and I stand by it; I look too good in a lab coat to do otherwise. The name of Frankenstein is going to stand for life, everlasting, if somewhat unsightly, here on whatever planet this is!"

---

Hook and the unconscious Muggle were wheeled into the hospital on gurneys. "This man was crushed by a bookshelf, hit over the head with an oar, beaten severely, hit by a car, and then beaten severely again," a paramedic informed the nurse on duty. "He should have died by now, but it looks like he's too ornery for that."

"I'll say," Emma muttered sullenly. She dug into her pocket. "Nurse, here's a fifty. If you could sneak some arsenic into his IV, I'd consider it a great personal favor."

Belle was more confused than ever. "Why are you people taking me to the ER? I'm not even injured! If this is some kind of insurance fraud scheme, I want no part of it!"

Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Quit scaring my girl! I can do it myself!"

Leroy ran in, holding a pickaxe, eyes sparkling eagerly. "Hey, I heard there was a ruckus, and I was wondering if Old Betsy and I could join in?" Meanwhile, out back, a gaggle of sobbing Hookers were holding a candlelight vigil for the object of their affection, while a mob of angry Rumbelle shippers picketed at the front door, periodically flinging broken china through the windows.

"Enough!" Whale stormed in. "I don't need all this noise, I'm hung over! Gold, you can relax. We're going to take good care of your girlfriend, unless she gets annoying, in which case we'll have to shoot her full of drugs."

"Christmas sucks. I much prefer Halloween," Frankenstein sulked, storming out of his father's house. "What I need right now is a long heart-to-heart with my best buddy Clerval."

"Apparently I'm him, too," said Gerhardt, catching up to him. "Here, I wanted to give you Mom's watch. It's not my shade of grey anyway."

"It's all right, you keep it. We're Swiss, it's not like good timepieces are in short supply around here, and anyway, Dad's probably right about me eventually hocking it for black-market organs."

They said their goodbyes, Gerhardt went inside to finish reading World War Z, Victor drove off to spend Boxing Day at Uncle Dracula's place, and Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual.

In Belle's hospital room, the Rumbelle theme music was playing, so Gold figured now would be a good time to give True Love's Kiss a try. She awoke with a scream. "AAAAHH! Cooties!"

"So…no good?"

Belle was hysterical. "The nice man who saved my life is showing me tentative signs of affection! Someone SAVE ME!"

Gold backed away, dismayed. "I guess this means make-up sex is out?"

"AAAAAAAAAAHHHH!"
"Okay, but you don't know what you're missing!" He fled.

In the room next door, Emma was handcuffing Hook to a bed. She paused briefly to go to the window and yell down at the mob of Hookers below. "If I hear even one smart remark out of you people, there's going to be hell to pay!" She whirled back around to face Hook. "And as for you, where's Cora?"

"I dunno. Painting the roses red?"

Emma brandished a plate of blue jello at him. "Don't make me use this."

Hook screamed. "No! Mercy, I beg you!"

She jiggled it menacingly. "Talk!"

"I don't know where Cora is! She said something about being overdue for a makeout session with Rumplestiltskin!"

"Oh." She relaxed. "Well, that's all right then. The Rumbelle shippers will have her hunted down and killed before she can cause any further trouble." The savior smirked evilly. "And then they'll be coming after you. Better get your affairs in order, punk."

Mary Margaret, David, and Leroy were gathered around the stranger's cellphone violating the Fourth Amendment. "We need to figure out his password. Try 'Zzzzzz_1'."

"David, that's your password." Mary Margaret shoved him aside. "Try 'Ih8Regina.' If he's from around here, it's a pretty safe bet."

Emma pushed them both out of the way. "Amateurs! The guy's name is Greg Mendel." She keyed in "PeasRYummy". "Bingo, we're in." She flipped through his menu. "Let's see, a bunch of pictures of himself, some pictures of his food, and reservations for ComicCon 2013." She raised her eyebrows. "This dude's social life is even more pathetic than mine, and that's saying something."

Ruby, who had arrived at some point, for some reason, was horrified. "Then he really is Pennsylvanian? We've got to drive a stake through his heart before he wakes up and starts chomping on our necks!"

"That's Transylvanians, Ruby," Leroy connected. "Pennsylvanians just dissect everything they don't understand."

"Now now," Mary Margaret interrupted. "I'm sure if we just explain ourselves to the gentleman, and maybe have Midas grope some of his possessions, he'll be cool."

"Snow, it's cute how you like to see the best in everybody," said David, "but with all due respect, that's what got us cursed in the first place."

Emma munched thoughtfully on a jello jiggler. "The good news is, Hook is still a pushover. The bad news is, Cora's not, and I fear Team Rumbelle can only hold her off for so long. Everybody panic!"

Mary Margaret grabbed the phone back. "Look, this debate over Greg is pointless. It's obvious that the only logical solution is to gaslight him until he doesn't know an ass from a wisecracking ogre, and for that, we'll need someone with experience. Where's Regina?"
"I tried sniffing her out," Ruby reported, nose twitching, "but it turned out to be a gopher."

"Well, someone with a less gimpy superpower needs to find her, before Cora does," said Mary Margaret. "If they meet up, they're going to start hurling fireballs at each other and crush the town underfoot, or team up and crush the town underfoot, or, or go get very drunk and then crush the town underfoot. Bottom line is, we're probably going to end up smeared on the sole of someone's shoe by this time tomorrow, provided Mendel doesn't pickle us in formaldehyde and haul us off to Area 51 before they get the chance."

"No worries on that front, he's dying," Dr. Whale reported.

"Yay!" cheered everyone but Emma and Mary Margaret.

Emma pointedly ignored them. "That's cool, we'll get Gold to help him. That never backfires, right?"

Mr. Gold rather halfheartedly popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I'm afraid I can't do that. We're only ten minutes into the plot, and anyway, with our luck, he'll probably turn out to be some crazed bigot with a fondness for WMDs." Looking back toward Belle's room, he shed a tear and turned to leave. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going home to binge on chocolate and reread Bed of Thorns."

"So…Gold's not going to tell us exactly what's going on, and why, and how to stop it?" Whale stared after him dumbly. "I've…never been in this situation before." Nervous murmurs of assent echoed all around him. "I guess we could always do the next best thing and seek moral guidance from the wise and mighty Henry. Where is he, anyway?"

"Who cares?" said Mary Margaret. "With him out of the picture, I'm the moral center of this town, and I say we keep the man alive!"

"Why?" asked everyone but Emma and Mary Margaret in unison.

"Because I'm your queen, damn it!"

"Aw, nuts, that again?" Leroy pouted.

"In the interest of sleeping in bed rather than on the couch tonight, I agree with my wife," David proclaimed grandly. "Dr. Whale, put the bottle down, take that funnel out of your mouth, and prep for surgery."

"Whatever you say…" The good doctor squinted drunkenly. "…Er, Walton?" He looked down at his hands, blinking dazedly. "Hey, have I always been this purple?"

Mary Margaret watched him leave uneasily. "Now that we can bring people here, we really ought to look into getting a second doctor. One with less baggage."

Victor and Igor were in their Not Evil, Just Misunderstood Lair, boxing up their equipment to take to the home of Dr. Jekyll, who had graciously offered to let them crash on his couch until they found a new pad. "Hey boss, are you sure we need to bring all of these pickled brains?"

"Yeah," Victor replied, "I've had calls from several zombie hordes who are eager to take them off our hands, but I'm still holding out for more money at the moment."

As Igor headed upstairs to stash them in Ye Olde U-Haul, Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Yo."
"Ah!" Victor screamed. "Who the hell are you and what is that you're wearing?"

"It's called color, dearie."

"Well, it's producing an error message in my optic nerves! Turn it off! Turn it off!" He covered his eyes.

"Get a grip, man!" Rumplestiltskin smacked him. "I'm here to talk business. My name is Rumplestiltskin, and I—"

Victor broke into peals of laughter. "Your name is 'Cute Little Gimpy Noisy Man'?"

Rumplestiltskin blushed. "Aw nuts, a German speaker!"

"Sorry, man," the doctor giggled, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes, "but I just don't think I'm going to be able to take you seriously as a villain, knowing this. You should go."

"But I've heard you can raise the dead," Rumplestiltskin said.

"How?"

"I read about it in the society pages, what do you care? The point is, it's seriously creepy, and us creepy people should stick together."

"I can't actually raise the dead," Victor informed him sullenly. "I tried, but they're surprisingly uncooperative. If you're wanting me to resurrect your dead wife or some such—"

Rumplestiltskin shuddered, looking haunted. "Don't even joke about that, dearie."

"Well then, what is your interest in my work?"

"I could explain, but it would just give you a headache," the Dark One warned, opening his treasured Bag of Holding and spilling exactly eight hundred and eighty two identical gold pieces onto the good doctor's floor.

Victor's eyes widened and drool poured from his mouth. I wanna live in that bag!" he cried, trying in vain to shove his head inside.

"Then it's a deal?"

"Sure, sure. You want me to throw in my soul, too? Because I totally will!" Victor cried ecstatically, wallowing in his heap of gold like the world's richest hippopotamus.

He was interrupted by a hand reaching for one of his coins. "Ooh, chocolate!" said Igor with glee. "You've been holding out on me, bro."

"No, even better. My new best friend Rumplestiltskin—"

Igor started giggling hysterically. "Hey, doesn't that mean-?"

"Yes, but that's not the point. The point is, he's made us rich enough that my grave-robbing habit can be classified as eccentric, rather than crazy." He donned his coat and stuffed some bolts in the pockets. "Get me my shovel, buddy! We've got bodies to snatch!"

At the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Gold was once again crying and chugging Jack Daniels out of
Belle's chipped cup. "And we're back to square one." He gazed sadly at a Princess Belle doll he'd swiped from some little girl. "Well, that whole romance arc was certainly pointless."

"I won't say I told you so, but I did," said Cora, barging in in her daughter's absence.

Gold looked bored. "Trying to catch me on the rebound, huh? Sorry, but even I'm not that hard-up. Anymore. So beat it or I'll sic my fangirls on you."

She pinched his cheek. "Aw, you're so cute when you're homicidal, but no. I've actually come to give you a gift." She indicated a box on the counter.

"Is it escargot?"

"No."

"Then go to hell."

"It's to help you find your son."

"Oh. That guy," Gold remembered. He opened up the box and examined the blank globe inside. "Hey, is this the fabled Rand McGuffin?"

"The one and only."

He eyed her skeptically. "And what do you want in exchange?"

"To reunite with my daughter."

Gold raised an eyebrow dubiously. "Er, you have heard what happened to your husband, right? And he was the parent she liked."

"Hopefully by now, she'll have realized that I'm too ornery to die."

"Whatever, it's your funeral. But while you're here, do you know of any spells for restoring memories? My girlfriend has succumbed to amnesia just like every other love interest in this town."

"Have you tried asking the Blue Fairy?" Cora suggested.

"Hell no! I don't love Belle that much!" Gold balked.

"You're on your own then, master."

Gold bristled. "Stop calling me that. You're going to spawn all kinds of smut fics."

"Sorry." She grabbed him by the lapels and hauled him in for a kiss. "But before I go, how about a nice makeout session for old times' sake?"

"Not interested."

"Then why are you putting on chapstick and puckering your lips at me?"

"Shut up." He kissed her. As she turned and left, he looked down at the Belle doll in his hand uneasily. "Don't look at me like that, baby, I was desperate. I haven't touched a woman in nearly an hour!"

At the hospital, Dr. Whale opened up a pocket watch. A scream could be heard coming from the
general direction of Hook's room. David walked in to investigate. "Dr. Whale, where did you get that watch? Have you been robbing corpses?"

"It wouldn't be the first time," the good doctor replied.

"How's your arm?"

"Undead, but otherwise fine."

Their conversation was interrupted by a sharp cracking sound. David turned around and found Mary Margaret standing in the doorway, cracking a whip at him. "Eep. Erm, Dr. Whale, I just wanted to tell you from the bottom of my wife's… I mean, my heart, that saving this man is the only moral thing to do." Mary Margaret nodded approvingly and left. Her husband sighed with relief. "But if, by some chance, you can't manage it, Leroy and I will be hosting a congratulatory part for you tomorrow at seven." David clapped the doctor on the back encouragingly. "And we've already arranged for Ruby to jump out of the cake. Just so you know."

At one of the many graveyards in the land of Monochromia, lightning was crashing ominously behind Victor, as usual. He dug into a fresh grave with his shovel, wiping a trickle of sweat from his brow. "Whew, I miss that version where I just bought a cadaver," he panted, exhausted.

Gerhardt appeared and hauled him out of the hole, face screwed up in disgust. "Ew, you really are a grave robber? I thought that was just a vicious rumor cooked up by Dr. Van Helsing!"

"Hey, I thought you supported my work?"

"Yeah, until I found out how creepy it was!" Gerhardt shrieked. "Victor, I told Dad you're not crazy. Please don't make a liar out of me. Let's just go home and you can get back to work on your colorblindness cure and we'll forget this whole nasty incident."

"All right," Victor agreed grudgingly. "Just let me grab this stiff's eyeballs, and I'll be right behind you."

A gendarme stumbled onto the scene. "What's this? Mild vandalism? Such a crime can only be punished by death!" He started shooting at them.

"Hey, don't we get a trial or anything first?" Victor screamed, dodging bullets.

"NO!"

"Just checking." He grabbed his brother and they fled to their getaway carriage.

Victor responded to this latest setback the same way he always responded to adversity: by getting plastered. He took a swig from a flask and made a face. "Blech, this vice sucks. Maybe I should trade it in for lechery." He glanced over at his brother. "What do you think, bro? Bro, are you even listening to me?" Gerhardt's cloak fell to the side, revealing a plethora of bullet holes. "Oh no! You're dead, and worse yet, that awesome watch is broken." He plucked it from the corpse. "Well, at least it didn't stop at 8:15. That would simply be too much irony to bear."

The Charmings and their loyal Cartoon All-Stars were pacing in the lobby when Greg's phone started vibrating. The caller ID read, "None of Your Damn Business." "Well, he's got us there," Emma had to admit.
"I wonder who it is?" Mary Margaret mused. "Another misunderstood villain, perhaps?"

"Nah, we're already overloaded with those," said David. "It's probably just his girlfriend."

"A girlfriend?" Mary Margaret repeated. "Well, that settles it, we have to do everything in our power to save him. Women tend to incite apocalypses when I'm involved in the death of their boyfriends. Maybe we should call her and disavow all responsibility before she has the chance to get bitter and take up witchcraft."

"No, we can't. The police could trace the call. I should know, I'm kind of, sort of, not really one of them," said David.

"They can trace the phone without us using it," Emma pointed out.

"Nooooo! We're doomed!" wailed Mary Margaret hysterically.

"Oh for Pete's sake!" Leroy spat, grabbing the phone and smashing it with his pickaxe. "There, problem solved. You're welcome."

Mary Margaret sighed with relief and hugged him. "Now I remember why I keep you around!" She glanced at her daughter. "Is the surgery almost over, or should I pass around another bottle of Xanax?"

Right on cue, an orderly walked in. "Hey, have any of you guys seen Whale? Some giant puppet is asking to see him, and he looks pretty upset."

"August? Tell him he's got the wrong Wha—wait." Emma frowned. "He's not in the operating room? Page him!"

"A pager?" The orderly looked skeptical. "What is this, the eighties?"

"Just do it!" The orderly obeyed, and they heard a beeping sound coming from the hamper. Emma dug in and pulled out the doctor's lab coat and pager. "Dr. Whale is attempting to take a break?" She gasped. "How dare he?! He knows full well that his only purpose in life is to revive corpses! Hunt him down like a mad dog!"

"I resent that remark," said Ruby, sniffing his abandoned coat. "Yuck. Smells like angst."

"Well, that's no excuse for dereliction of duty. He's hardly the first person around here to have that problem," Emma snapped, shoving Ruby toward the door. "Fetch, girl!"

"Ugh, this is so degrading," the werewolf complained.

Mary Margaret was lost in thought. "Hey, if she gets distracted by another gopher, we could always have Doc do the operation."

"No, he's not an actual doctor, he just made that up to impress chicks," said Leroy. "It didn't work."

"Then looks like we're stuck with our second choice, Whale. Story of my life," she sighed.

David glared at the reminder. "I should've let Zombie!Daniel finish him off when I had the chance," the quasi-prince growled.

Emma was confused. "Wait, Daniel came back from the dead, like Frankenstein's monster?"

"Not like Frankenstein's monster. As Frankenstein's monster," her father corrected.
"That does it!" she exploded. "Fairy tales I can learn to accept as part of our universe, Arthurian legend and Greek mythology, fine, Chinese history...eh, whatever. But Frankenstein? This is getting even more ridiculous than usual. I'm starting to think his departure is probably for the best."

"But we can't just let him fade into the background! He looks so cute in a lab coat!" said Ruby, because Mary Margaret couldn't with David present.

"True." The sheriff sighed. "Fine, go get him, and whatever you do, don't let him talk you into any detours through the graveyard."

At that very moment, the good doctor himself was running down the only street in town, a wooden August close on his heels and waving an axe. "I already told you, you've got the wrong guy!" he screamed.

Down in his Not Evil, Just Misunderstood Lair, Victor made an incision in his brother's chest. "There, now we can safely channel electricity into his heart."

Igor shrank back against the wall, a little disturbed. "And what was the purpose of all those other incisions?" He pointed at the ugly scars, unskillfully stitched with catgut, running all over Gerhardt's corpse.

"Just a little canon nod." The doctor winked, then turned his attention back to his brother. "Don't worry, Gerhardt. I'll save you from the eternal bliss of the afterlife!" He flipped a switch on the wall from "Dead" to "Undead."

Clouds of dark smoke billowed from Gerhardt's chest cavity. "Oh no! Magic is coming! Run!" screamed Igor.

Victor seized him by the collar as he bolted for the door. "Get ahold of yourself and cover the body! And remember, if the people at the funeral home ask you, it was like that when we found it."

Just then, Victor's dad stormed down the stairs. "Victor, I just realized that I haven't verbally abused you for several hours, and I've come to rectify that, you worthless little scum-sucking maggot."
Spotting his younger son sprawled on the table, he nudged him. "Gerhardt, you've got nice, strong hands. Will you be a dear and slap him for me?" He finally noticed the stitches in Gerhardt's icy flesh. "Gerhardt?" He gaped at Victor in horror. "Holy crap, were all of these stitches really necessary?"

Victor shrugged helplessly. "It could be worse. He could be green."

"You sicko!" He stormed out. "You'd better not let me catch you anywhere near my grave!"

Cora Alohomora-ed her way into the Stepford House, which she'd found by consulting a phone book that Hook had been beating Archie over the head with. She searched the place. "Video chess? Aw yeah, this is my kind of dimension!" She made her way into the kitchen, peeking into the fridge. "Uh oh. She's out of cyanide," the witch noted, scribbling the item on a shopping listed magneted to the door.

Next, she examined the clothes in her daughter's closet. "Black, black, black, black, black...grey?! What's this doing in here?!" Appalled, she grabbed the offending article and went off to find a trash can. Her search took her by a vanity table, where she found a picture of mother and son. A crude set of horns had been doodled on the former's head. Beside the photo was a plaster handprint bearing the...
inscription, To Mom-slash-Great-Grandma. "Hm, interesting…"

Henry came knocking at the door of the family mausoleum, because he's creepy like that. "Mom-slash-Great-Grandma? Grandpa Number Three? Anybody home?" Being a Mills, he barged in, making a beeline for Henry the First's coffin. "Shove over, hot stuff. Evil coming through." He pushed the casket aside and descended into Regina's vault, knocking on his mom's crate of snakes. "Yo, Sir Hiss, have you seen my mom lately?"

Regina was watching him through the invisible walls of her backup lair. "Henry? It's midnight. Shouldn't someone be watching you?"

"Yeah, but what are ya gonna do?" She let him in, and he launched himself into her arms. "Oh Mom-slash-Great-Grandma, I…I lo…" He cringed inexplicably. "I…I-love you," he managed to choke out, looking utterly revolted.

"I'll take it!" Regina cried happily. "And I want you to know, I didn't kill Archie, though I did use my magic to sneak some purple and green dye into his shampoo." She sighed wistfully. "I was truly heartbroken when I learned he'd never get the chance to use it."

"I know all about that. I'm the one who killed him."

"That's my boy!" Regina frowned. "No, wait, I'm good now." She shook a finger at him sternly. "That was very wrong of you, son, and I'll be taking away your video chess privileges as punishment."

"Just try it," he dared, morphing into Cora.

"Ah! Save me, Daddy!" Regina screamed. "No, wait, I killed him. Damn it!"

Down in his Not Evil, Just Misunderstood Lair, Victor stuffed his brother's body into a bacta tank. "If this doesn't work, I'm going to have to have a word with those Jedis."

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "You see, this is what happens when people try to accomplish things without help. They crash and burn faster than the freaking Hindenburg," he lectured imperiously.

"You again, Cute Little Gimpy Noisy Man?" Victor groaned. "Haven't you ever heard of knocking?"

"Yeah, I just don't care. I came to inform you that I have access to magical, if poorly-animated hearts, that can help you save your brother. I'll give you one if you'll allow me to subcontract my latest evil scheme to you."

"Ooh, subcontracting. My dad's always nagging me to get a real job—this could be just the thing to get him off my back. Please go on," the doctor invited.

"I'm going to bring you a friend with a magical, inter-dimensional top hat—hey, put that straight jacket down! I'm not mad! Neither is Jefferson, but feel free to call him that anyway. It annoys the hell out of him." The Dark One giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Anyway, he's going to take you to a woman named Regina. You'll have to pretend to be a failure, which shouldn't be too difficult." He indicated Gerhardt's mangled body.

"Hey, man, I do the best I can!"
Regina brandished a mirror at her mother. "Don't make me use this again! I'll do it! I'm crazy!"

Cora smiled indulgently, checking her makeup in it. "Sure you are, honey."

"How did you even get here?"

"Beans, beans, the magical fruit."

"Oh. Well, what do you want?" She gasped, eyes wide with horror. "Have you come to take over my wardrobe?"

Cora looked her daughter's designer outfit over calculatingly. "Tempting, but no. I came because I need help killing Rum…uh, I mean your forgiveness and love."

After several minutes of incredulous gaping, Regina reached the conclusion that her mother was serious. "Are you insane? You murdered the only man I've ever loved right before my eyes!"

"Yeah. My bad."

"You forced me into a loveless marriage and ruined my life!"

"Um, oops?"

"You physically, mentally, and emotionally abused me for decades on end!"

"These things do happen."

"You sold my soul to the freaking Dark One!"

"If I told you he manipulated me into it with sex, would that get me off the hook or just traumatize you further?"

"Ew!" Regina shrieked. "And you framed me for Archie's death, too! Even I know that killing someone that adorkable is a crime against nature! Do you really think I'm dumb enough to fall for this stupid repentance act?"

"Well, you were dumb enough to fall for Snow White's stupid dagger ploy. Just saying."

"Shut up!" Blushing, she shoved her mother out the door, still clutching the mirror in one hand. "You're coming with me to clear my name with Emma and Henry."

"Henry…about that, don't you think the name Cory goes a lot better with Mills?"

"I said SHUT UP!"

Cora pouted. "Fine, it was just a suggestion."

Having finally shaken Pinocchio, Whale wandered down to the docks to enjoy a nice, painless death without any axes. He opened up his watch and threw it into the water. "Don't want any white rabbits stealing this baby off my corpse." He crept to the edge of the pier and prepared to jump in after it. "Goodbye, cruel existence that I stupidly spent years trying to prolong!"

"Whale, no!" cried Ruby. "How can you be so selfish? If you die, every sick and injured person in this town is doomed to follow you!"
"That's their problem!" He jumped, but Ruby used her super-speed and super-strength…which she apparently possessed, to catch him in mid-air. "Whoa! Ruby, I take back every word I've ever said about your superpowers being lame."

Back in Victor's Not Evil, Just Misunderstood Lair, the newly-reanimated Gerhardt raised his hand. "Hey, can I get some sentience over here?"

"Don't push your luck, bro."

Victor's father was thrilled when he heard the good news. "Victor, if you have really given me a second chance with your brother, I owe you a great debt. I'm going to put in a good word for you with Elizabeth!"

"Score!" cried Victor. "Well, then, let's get this party started. Come in, Gerhardt!"

His brother staggered in, twitching and disoriented. "Phew, I must be wasted," he groaned.

"That's my boy!" His father reached out to ruffle his hair.

Gerhardt recoiled. "You know, I've never noticed it before, but dying really puts things into perspective. You're a jerk, Dad!"

"You've got a smart mouth on you." Their father turned to Victor. "I choose to blame that on you, just like everything else that has ever gone wrong or ever will."

"But Dad-!" Victor protested.

"Really, son, if you're going to profane the laws of nature, the least you could do is not suck at it!" He thumped his son over the head.

"I call child abuse on that!" growled Gerhardt, wrapping his hands around his father's throat. "Domestic violence must end!"

"Then stop killing our father!" Victor screamed frantically.

Gerhardt dropped the old man's broken corpse to the floor. "Oopsie."

"You moron!" Victor smacked him. "I'm not taking the fall for this like I did for that lamp you broke!"

Back on the docks, Whale's mental state had been downgraded from suicidal to midlife crisis. "I wanted my name to stand for life, but I ought to have known better. Frankenstein is so guttural and uninviting. I knew I should have changed it to Prometheus," he lamented. "I guess this is what comes of taking help from Rumplestiltskin, huh?"

"Yeah. Thank the gods I was never dumb enough to try that," said Ruby. Whale started crying, and she draped an arm sympathetically around his shoulders. "Hey, come on, you think you've got it bad? I'm a bloodsucking monster who unwittingly ate the only man she's ever loved, accidentally killed her own mother, and spent most of her adulthood ducking lynch mobs. If I can face the world with a smile, I don't see how anyone else around here has room to go around complaining about their problems."
"Hm, good point." His eyes roved over her body. "Hey Ruby, I could make all kinds of lewd remarks about wanting us to do the Monster Mash, but I'm going to be a gentleman and refrain. Does that earn me any brownie points with you, perchance?"

She looked him over thoughtfully for a moment, then handed him his lab coat. "Put this on and we'll talk."

Cora and Regina were rolling along in the younger evil queen's obligatory black luxury car. "Are we codependent yet?" Cora asked her plaintively.

"No."

"Are we codependent yet?"

"No."

"Are we codependent yet?"

"No!"

"Are we codependent yet?"

"NO!"

"Are we codependent yet?"

"NO!"

After several minutes of this, Regina was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and who could blame her? "Are we codependent yet?" Cora whined again.

"Yes, fine, anything, just shut up!" Regina finally screamed.

"Atta girl. So, how should we kill Rumplestiltskin? An execution-style shooting, or shall we kick it old school and just eat his heart?"

Regina gave her a weird look. "I don't want to kill Gold. I just want to get my son back and be a family again. I thought that was the whole point of all this?"

"Oh…uh, yeah, me too. I was just being abstract," Cora saved, hugging her.

As she fell into her mother's arms, invisible drums thumped ominously. "I choose not to notice that," she sniffled, covering her ears stubbornly.

Whale strolled into the hospital, followed by Ruby. "The doctor is in!" He twirled his stethoscope and wiggled his eyebrows suggestively at the werewolf.

She giggled, turning as red as her namesake. "Victor, not here!"

"I don't even want to know," Emma grumbled.

At a gloomy old fortress in the land of Monochromia, lightning was crashing ominously behind Victor, as usual. "Dude, that's really getting annoying." He smoothed down his static-tinged hair and
went into his brother's cell.

Gerhardt sat on his bunk, dressed in one of the formal parade uniforms that made up his entire wardrobe, staring vacantly at a TV that was playing The Jersey Shore. Victor shuddered. "Wow, you really have lost your mind. Maybe this will be for the best." He pulled out a gun and held it to his head, noticing dark blotches creeping across his face. "Another canon nod, huh? Is that green? It's so hard to tell here."

Gerhardt looked up at him hopefully. "Is there an ETA yet on the sentience you promised me?"

"I'm working on it, I'm working on it." Sighing, he put the pistol away. "Look, I'll make you a deal. I'll let you live, if you take those stupid bolts out of your neck. You're perpetuating all kinds of ridiculous stereotypes about our family." Gerhardt unscrewed and surrendered them. "Atta boy. I'll see you tomorrow." He walked out the door. "Hey, what's with that enormous purple smoke cloud? Oh crap!"

Whale burst into the waiting room and ran over to Ruby. "Where are all your nosy friends?"

"Trying to rewire the coffee machine into dispensing cinnamon cocoa."

"Excellent." He pressed her against the wall and started kissing her. "That should give us a few minutes alone before my next quadruple shift starts."

Ruby reluctantly pried him away. "Wait, what about the patient?"

"Who cares?" he mumbled, lips moving to her neck.

"Victor!"

"He's alive, now shut up and kiss me."

"No, I want to go show you off to all my friends," Ruby bragged, hauling him over to the now-dissected coffee machine. "Good news, everybody! I landed me a doctor! Oh, and he saved that extra of yours, too."

"Yay!" cried Mary Margaret and Emma ecstatically.

"Yay," sighed David and Leroy without enthusiasm.

"I want to talk to him, and find out if he saw anything," said Emma.

"Hey, maybe you should bring that lie detector Spencer used on me," her mother suggested.

"I don't need a lie detector. I am a lie detector!"

"Sure you are, honey."

Emma glared at her parents. "Just for that remark, you two don't get to come."

Upstairs, Gold was handing amnesia!Belle his iPad. She examined it quizzically. "A Bed of Thorns? What the hell is this?"

He grinned lasciviously. "Trust me, if this doesn't convince you to give me a chance, nothing will."
She scrolled through it, her eyes going wide. "AAAAAAAAH! I can never un-see that!" she screamed in abject horror.

Gold's face fell. "Okay, let's try Plan B." He took his tablet back and handed her their chipped cup in its place. "Belle, this is Chip. Say hi, honey."

"Um…no. Just no."

"Belle, come on, just give it a try. I finally enchanted it to protect your memory, like I should have done last night at the border."

"Huh?"

"What, you don't recognize it? Haven't you ever seen Beauty and the Beast? What kind of female in your generation hasn't seen Beauty and the Beast?" He took a deep breath. "Look, the point is, I had just stolen you away from your home and ordered you to skin children the children I hunt for their pelts, when—"

"This is your idea of a pickup line?"

"It was all very adorable in context, you have to believe me!"

"That does it!" She flung the cup at the wall. "You're not the only one who can smash things in anger, you know!"

"Chip! No!" Gold was crushed. "Do you have any idea how much I could have sold that for on Ebay?"

The nineteenth-century Silesian geneticist blinked his groggy eyes open. "Nurse?"

"Oh yeah," said Emma. "All the nurses in this hospital wear black spandex. We're quirky like that."

"Cool. Can you get me some water?" said Greg, who was utterly blind to sarcasm.

"Here, try one of these instead," said Emma, offering him a Zoloft cupcake.

Greg took a bite and giggled. "Hey, did I hit someone? Is this like Grand Theft Auto—do I get points for that?"

"Since it's Hook, yes," said Emma, presenting him with a thank-you plaque on behalf of the city of Storybrooke. "So, can you tell me what's going on here?"

"My name is Owen Flynn. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

"I beg your pardon?"

Then he remembered he was still crippled and drugged. "Uh, I mean I'm just passing through on my way to Skywalker Ranch. Can I go now?"

"Yes, I suppose you're in a hurry to get there and back before your brothers at the monastery realize you're missing." She offered him her hand. "Well, it was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Mendel, and I'm truly glad I won't have to kill you."

"Erm…thanks."
Emma headed back down to the lobby, where Leroy was passing out torches and pitchforks, just in case. "The Muggle's clueless. We're in the clear."

David breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, good. Now maybe things can calm down for ten minutes and we can catch our breath."

"Shut up, David! You're going to jinx us!" Mary Margaret hissed, swatting him upside the head.

"Oops, sorry."

His wife buried her face in her hands miserably. "Well, I guess this means we'd better start preparing for war."

Since he could no longer chug Jack Daniels out of his chipped cup, Gold decided to cheer himself up by heading back to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors and taking his new Rand McGuffin for a spin. He pricked his finger and let a drop of blood fall onto the globe. It coalesced into a map, concentrating itself in Bae's location. "Huh, I guess I really am Bae's biological father. Who would've thunk?" He examined the marker. "Let's see, according to this, he's...somewhere in New England. Well, that really narrows it down."

Henry came staggering down the stairs of the Princess Pad. "Have you guys been adventuring without me?" he accused.

"Sorry, kid, but child labor laws are a real pain."

"Well, what happened?"

"Rumplestiltskin and Captain Hook had a gunfight. Belle got shot and the father of genetics got injured, but Dr. Frankenstein managed to save the day with a little help from his new girlfriend Red Riding Hood, aka The Big Bad Wolf.

The boy chuckled. "Oh, only in Storybrooke. But wait...Dr. Frankenstein? He's not a fairy tale."

"You're telling me." Mary Margaret snorted. David looked profoundly relieved.

Desperate for a change of subject, Henry ran to fetch the Big Book of Deja-Vu. "Dr. Frankenstein isn't in the book. This means that anyone, from any world, could be here in Storybrooke." His face fell. "Aw man, we'd better brace ourselves for a Harry Potter episode next season." Everyone groaned.

There was a knock at the door. "Well, at least we know it's not Regina," said Emma, going to answer.

It was Gold. "Hey, Swan, you know that favor you owe me?"

"Er...no?"

Gold rolled his eyes. "Oh please, you're even worse at telling lies than you are at detecting them."

"Aw, come on, Gold, that was a season and a half ago! Don't these things have an expiration date?"

"'Fraid not. I need you to help me find my son." He pointed at Henry. "He looks kind of like that, only older."
"Aw, nuts," Emma griped. "I don't suppose there's a snowball's chance in hell that you're going to let me weasel out of this?"

"'Fraid not. And remember, if any harm comes to Belle while I'm gone, I'll kill the lot of you…or just let it go and move on with my life. Either way is good."

As he walked away, Emma attempted to comfort her trembling son. "No need to be afraid of Gold, Henry. We'll just get this trip over with, and then you'll never have to have anything to do with him again."
When Gold came over to the Princess Pad to retrieve his latest pawn, he found Henry cheerfully stuffing Swiss Miss into a suitcase. "Hey kid, who invited you?"

"I did," said Emma. "Cora's on the loose, so I'm taking him out of this death trap like I should have done weeks ago."

"Besides, you won't succeed without me," Henry piped up. "No one ever does."

Gold giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Hey, if you're dumb enough to let me near your child, then that's your problem. Come on, let's get this show on the road before Hook turns up and we start fighting over who gets to kill him."

As Emma and Henry grabbed several shakers of cinnamon for the road, Charming led Gold aside. "Gold, you're going out there with my family. If anything happens to them, I'll—"

"What? Send a pregnant girl to capture me in your stead again?" sneered Gold.

"No. I'll tell everyone about your sensitive side."

Gold paled. "I'll be good."

They zoomed toward the town line in Gold's obligatory black luxury car. "So where exactly is this kid of yours?" Henry wanted to know.

"Somewhere in New England. Or possibly one of the Mid-Atlantic States or Canadian Maritime Provinces. The borders on that globe were kind of blurry."

"Excellent," said Emma. "By the time we find the guy and return to Storybrooke, several decades will probably have passed, Henry will no longer be cute, and Regina will lose interest in him." She eyed his shawl skeptically. "You know, you have even worse fashion sense than my ex, Neal."

"This isn't a fashion statement, it's going to keep me from getting amnesia. And it's a damn good thing—I think our viewers are getting sick of that particular plot device."

"Are you sure it'll work?"

"What the hell do you care?"

"I don't, I'm just trying to be polite." She jerked a thumb at Henry. "Gotta set a good example for the kid now."

They hit the town line, and their hair fluttered dramatically in the breeze. Gold turned off the air conditioning, and it stopped. "Sorry about that. I don't know what's up with this thing, lately. To answer your question, my name is Rumplestiltskin, my parents were complete sadists, and we're going to find my son."

David strutted into his kitchen wearing a pair of holsters. "I'm too sexy for my guns, too sexy for my guns, just check out these buns!"

"Oh, believe me, I am," his wife assured him, eyes wandering.
"As much as it pains me to say this, cuddle time's going to have to wait until later. There's still the matter of Cora running loose in our town."

"Her again?" Mary Margaret groaned. "Can't those damn Mills women give us five minutes to ourselves, for once?"

Regina barged in, as usual. "Not today, I'm afraid."

"Hey Mom," Mary Margaret greeted sheepishly. "I know this is going to shock you, but you didn't kill Dr. Hopper."

"You don't say," Regina deadpanned.

Mary Margaret did notice the sarcasm, but pretended not to in order to end this awkward conversation more speedily. "It was actually your mom. Apparently she's as sick and violent as ever."

"Talking trash about my mama? First you falsely imprison me, now this?"

"You wanna talk to us about unjust imprisonment?" David arched an eyebrow. "Does the word 'dungeon' mean anything to you?"

"Look, I didn't come here to keep score. I want to see my son!"

"No can do. Emma took him to New York."

"Taking my child across state lines without asking my permission? I'm pretty sure that's illegal."

Her stepdaughter was unmoved. "Yeah, and so is buying babies from crooked pawnbrokers."

Lacking a good comeback for that, Regina unleashed her Glare of Evil. Screaming in terror, the Charmings slammed the door in her face and scrambled for their weapons.

The Charmings decided to pump Hook for information, since his word had proven so reliable in the past. "How are you feeling, Hook?" Mary Margaret asked as he led them down to the docks.

"Are you kidding? I'm fabulous! Check out this limp!" He flashed a mangled leg at her. "At this rate, I'll soon have a peg-leg to match this wicked hook of mine." He sidled up to her suggestively. "Wanna ditch Blondie and check on the rest of my body personally?"

David smacked him. "Tell me something. If I put a dress on that rock over there, would you try to charm it into loving you?"

"Oh, I wouldn't try, mate. I'd succeed!"

David smacked him again. "Just shut up and tell us where the ship is."

"You know, you could simply throw some dirt around like that Belle chick did and save all this trouble."

Leroy smacked him. "Don't tell us how to do our job!"

Mary Margaret called her watchdwarf off. "Relax, Leroy, he'll help us without further police brutality."
"Why should I?" Hook challenged.

"Because if you don't, we'll ground our daughter so she can't date you."

"Hm, fair enough. Right this way, then," the pirate said cordially, leading them to the cloaked Jolly Rancher.

Leroy inspected the vessel curiously. "Say, this boat is a lot nicer than mine. I could impress quite a few chicks with this. You interested in selling, bro?"

"Sorry, but I can't sell. Without this ship, I'd have to start calling myself Mr. Hook, and that would sound seriously lame."

"Then can I be your sidekick? I've got the Pirates' Code memorized, and I can even talk with a creepy British accent when the mood strikes me." He demonstrated. "'ello, poppet. 'Ave you seen my good friend Ragetti?"

"No dice."

"Well then, can you at least sail us back to our land? I'm sick of all the misrepresentations of dwarves that exist in this universe. Do you have any idea how many short jokes I've had to listen to?"

"No dice," Hook replied. "My ship is one fine piece of CGI, but it can't cross realms. It could back when it had that priceless magical flying sail, but I torched that years ago."

"Er, why?"

"I'm not entirely sure. I was probably drunk."

"That seems highly likely," David agreed. "So what's Cora doing here? Is she going to destroy us all, or is she just here to hook back up with Rumplestiltskin?"

"I've been helping Rumplestiltskin's girlfriend all this time?! Damn it, I really need to start running background checks on my sidekicks." Hook banged his head against the nearest hard surface. "In light of this new information, allow me to offer you the key to one of her various evil schemes."

The pirate unveiled a large packing crate with some holes poked in the top. The box rattled. "Yo, my water dish is empty!" a voice inside complained.

At the top of a weight-bearing cloud, six giants gathered around a table for dinner. "Hey, quit hogging all the frobscottle, Abraham!" one of them whined, wrestling a pitcher away from his brother.

A small, or less giant giant shuffled in, wearing a t-shirt that read "I Heart Humans!" "You're late," his eldest brother Arlo admonished. "If we had parents, they'd be so disappointed in you."

"What's with the shirt, Tiny?" Abraham asked.

"A little mermaid named Ariel was selling them down at the beach," Anton replied. "She taught me a cool song, too." He took out a tiny harp and began to strum it. "Look at this stuff, isn't it neat? Wouldn't you think my collection's compl—hey!"

Arlo snatched the harp and threw it out the window. "What's with all this tolerance and enlightened multiculturalism? You're completely out of touch with medieval culture, Anton, and I'm sick of it! Hang your head in shame!"
"Yes sir." Anton hung his head meekly.

"And don't let me catch you giving any of our beans to those dirty normals!"

"Not even if they offer me a cow?"

"Especially not if they offer you a cow."

"But why are we bothering to grow the damn things if we're not going to let anyone use them?"

"Because they make a mean salad." Arlo passed his youngest brother a bowl of three-bean salad. "Now shut up and eat."

"Screw you! I don't even like beans! I'm out of here!" He stormed out the door. "And stay out of my room!"

Leroy, Hook, and the Charmings peered into Anton's cage. "Cora used magic to make him travel-sized? But why? If she needed a giant, why didn't she just use magic to make herself enormous?"

Hook shrugged. "Apparently, she has her daughter's flair for the dramatic."

David advanced on him menacingly. "You're lying!"

"So what else is new?"

"True." David relaxed a bit. "So what are we supposed to do now?"

"Well, after I lie to a guy, I usually steal his wife." He grinned lasciviously at Mary Margaret. "You game? We could definitely have some fun."

David slammed him against the wall. "You and I are going to have some fun!" the quasi-prince threatened.

"I'm flattered, but I don't swing that way." Hook smirked. "Oh come on, you walked right into that one!"

"We do not need any more fuel for the shipping wars, David," Mary Margaret growled. "Please, just leave him alone before he has the chance to flirt with you further."

"Yes, dear."

They unlocked the cage and Anton emerged cautiously. "Where's that witch?"

Mary Margaret shuddered. "I have a terrible feeling we're going to find out, but that doesn't matter. You're temporarily safe now."

The giant's eyes fell on David. "It's you!"

"No, I'm not Josh Dallas," David demurred, "but I understand your confusion. We do look an awful lot alike."

"No! You're—eh, to hell with this, explanations are for sissies." He punched David in the face.

The quasi-prince lunged for his gun, but the giant kicked it out of his hand. "Ugh, I'm bad at this," he groaned, falling back on the deck with a thump. "I knew I should have stuck with a sword. You
"Don't mess with the classics."

"Don't worry, gorgeous! I'll save you!" Mary Margaret pointed an arrow at the giant's head. "Man, is it just me, or does this feel kind of inverted?"

Anton backed away from the prince, glaring. "This isn't over yet. I'll get you, my pretty, and your little wife, too!"

Over at the hospital, Belle, or whatever the hell her name was now, was sitting in the common room watching Beauty and the Beast. "Ew, he's all hairy!" she spat disgustedly, turning off the TV.

"Happens to the best of us," said Ruby, walking in. She held out a basket. "Here, I brought you a get-well present."

The beauty cringed. "It's not a cup, is it?"

"No, nothing so horrific, just some cake and wine. Oh, and a book."

"Ugh, why does everyone keep giving me these damn things?" Belle tossed the book out a window. "Who the hell are you, anyway?"

"Your BFF."

Belle looked hopeful. "Then maybe you'll be willing to help me get out of this oppressive cuckoo's nest?"

"Sorry, homie, but I don't love you quite that much." Ruby took out a rifle and fired a tranquilizer dart into the beauty's neck. She turned and met Greg Mendel's horrified eyes. "What are you looking at?"

Leroy and the Charmings considered hunting down the angry giant before he could cause more trouble for their town, but it sounded boring, so they decided to go to Granny's and eat cupcakes instead. "What the hell was that guy's problem, anyway?" Mary Margaret wondered around a mouthful of frosting. "Do you think he's jealous because you're so much cuter than he is?"

"Nah," David replied. "He's probably just mad at my evil twin. I don't know what I'm supposed to do about it, though. I mean, 'don't hurt me, my evil twin did it'? Even I think it's a lame excuse."

The original Prince James was in the sack with his latest tramp, when King George walked in. "This is disturbing, but at least you're not harboring a chaste passion for a heroic princess. That would simply be too shameful to bear."

"Get lost, Dad, I'm trying to score."

George glared. "I think I'd like you better if you were dead."

"Fat chance of that," the prince sniggered. "So, Dad, I presume you want to put a sword in my hand and throw me at some vicious monster? That seems to be the only time you ever bother talking to me."

"Bingo."
"Your evil twin?" Mary Margaret groaned. "I should have known he'd come back to haunt us eventually. What are we gonna do now?"

"We're going to take a page out of our daughter's book: figure out what this stranger's problem is and solve it."

Anton peered into the window of a human tavern. "Eye-eye-eye-I eat you now!" The patrons screamed and scattered. "Was it something I said?"

James shoved past them, girlfriend in tow. "Jeez, don't you people know a joke when you hear one?"

"Finally, someone who gets my sense of humor!" Anton beamed. "Name's Anton. I'm a giant, but I'm looking to change careers at the moment. Are there any openings available in humanity, perchance?"

"Today's your lucky day." James' girlfriend held up a piece of mushroom. "Apparently, I'm a great hero, and was given some magic mushrooms—not the kind you're thinking—as a reward for slaying a horrible monster."

"Really?" Anton looked disappointed. "That sounds pretty awesome. I would have liked to see that."

"Me too," James echoed.

She was getting impatient. "Do you want the damn fungus or not?"

"Yes'm. But could you tell me your name? Arlo always told me never to take treats from strangers."

"My name...well, it just happens to be a slang term for theft, but that doesn't prove anything. Now shut up and eat your veggies."

Mr. Gold was currently facing down the only thing more evil than himself: post 9/11 airport security. "Have you ever been out of Storybrooke, Mr. Gold?" Henry asked curiously.

"Does the word 'curse' mean anything to you?" he snapped.

"Hey, I was just making conversation," the boy defended.

"Well, knock it off or I'll kill you sooner."

A TSA agent who rightfully recognized Gold as a potential mass-murderer shepherded him to a metal detector. "Hand over your scarf and cane."

Gold glared at him. "I'm pretty sure taking away a handicapped person's walking aids is against the law."

"Fine then, just the scarf."

"Touch my scarf, and I swear I'll...I'll...uh...whine and yell impotently."

"Hey man, I'm doing you a favor. That thing's hideous."

Gold was trying to work up enough common sense to just bribe the guy, when Emma intervened. "Sorry, my father's just a little nervous. We're going to Disneyland and he has a lot of enemies there."
As they moved along, Gold shot her a withering look. "Your father? That was the best lie you could come up with? If it ever turned out we were related, I'd throw myself off a tower!"

"That makes two of us, old man."

Hook entered a deserted alley and placed a playing card on the ground. The Joker appeared, wearing his usual sinister grin. "Hey Hook, what's up?"

"I need a favor. I've made myself an enemy, and I need you to help me take her out with some of those sweet nitroglycerin cigars of yours."

The pirate laid a second card on the ground, and Regina appeared before them. "Hello, boys." She flashed her mighty Glare of Evil at them.

The Joker trembled at the sight of it. "You're on your own, bro!" the supervillain screamed, running toward Gotham as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Damn it, I really need to start picking my allies more carefully." Hook cursed.

"I could say the same," Regina snapped. "That was a bang-up job you did killing my mother, by the way. You're an even worse hitman than Graham, and I didn't think that was possible!"

"To be fair, you couldn't kill her either."

"Shut up. Mom wants to know if they've found your ship."

"I survived my near-fatal beating and subsequent car crash, thanks for asking."

Regina was unmoved. "If you want allies who care about your problems, evil isn't the way to go. Now where's Mom's giant? She needs him for her planned crop of magic beans."

"What does your mom want with magic beans?"

"They make a mean salad."

"Well, that's going to have to wait. The giant's a little busy killing Prince Charming right now."

"Sounds like my kind of guy. Tell me, is this giant cute?"

Anton strutted down the middle of the only intersection in town, dodging cars. "Hm, maybe I should try asking for directions." Then reality sunk in. "Wait, I can't do that. I'm a man now."

James and Jack took Anton inside and sat him down at their table. "Want some frobscottle?"

Anton took the proffered bottle happily. "Boy, you guys sure know how to treat a giant. Say, what would my bedtime be if I came to live with you guys?"

"Whenever you wanted, champ."

"I'm sold!"

"Well, it's been lovely meeting you, Anton, but I've got panhandling to do." James rose, donning a cardboard sign that read: *Family killed by ninjas—Need $$$ for karate lessons.*
Anton looked at Jack quizzically. "But James is a prince. Why does he need to run cons?"

"Well, apart from the cheap thrill it provides, it helps fill the royal coffers," Jack explained. "All of the gold in them disappeared recently, replaced with a bunch of graffiti reading 'Rumplestiltskin Wuz Here.' Now James is heavily in debt to another kingdom, and they're going to invade and plunder this realm if he can't pay them back."

"That seems a little harsh. Someone around here really ought to invent collection agencies." Anton looked thoughtful. "So, this other kingdom, will they only accept gold coins, or are anthropomorphic harps also acceptable?"

"Anthropomorphic harps are okay, but magic beans would be even better," Jack hinted unsubtly.

Anton somehow managed not to understand what she was suggesting. "Eh, magic beans are highly overrated. Here, try these instead." He handed her a packet of Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans.

"Um…thanks."

Anton sat in a clearing, staring mournfully over the river. "Fee fie foe fum, loneliness has made me incredibly glum."

Regina barged in, as usual. "Don't get glum, get even."

"Get away from me!" the giant screamed. "You're probably a mass murderer just like every other human I've ever met!"

"Well…yeah, but that's beside the point. The point is, I hate the Nameless Wonder as much as you do."

"Really? Why?"

"Well, he…uh, and he…and one time he…" She sighed. "All right, I've got nothing, but he's cute and happy, so he's got to die." She handed him a piece of-ahem-magic mushroom.

"Aw, nuts, this stuff again?" Anton whined. "I don't know. Last time I took it, I had a bunch of weird hallucinations involving chain-smoking caterpillars."

"Just take it!"

"Fine, but I'm pretty sure this qualifies as peer pressure." Anton took a bite of the proffered mushroom and swelled back to stompin' size. "All right!" the giant bellowed happily. "Time to crush my archenemy, along with thousands of innocent people who have never harmed or even met me!"

Regina's smile briefly turned genuine. "You know, Anton, I think I could learn to like you. If you survive your rampage, we should go grab a caramel apple together."

Meanwhile, at the airport, the situation between Gold and Emma had somehow managed to get even more awkward. "Well, Golden Swan is starting to look like a bust," Gold grumbled.

Emma said a silent prayer of thanks. "Hey, are you doing okay?"

"Stop trying to reach out to me! I'm about to reunite with the son I abandoned to an uncertain future many years ago, and I'm worried he'll hate me for it! You have no idea what that's like!" He stormed off to the restroom to cope with stress by smashing stuff, as usual.
Back at the castle on a cloud that was not affiliated with Les Miserables, Anton was shoving gold into a pillowcase. "Who says you can't buy love?"

"I do," said Arlo. "Do you have any idea what time it is, young man? I was worried sick! I would have called the cops if they weren't racially-inferior human scum!"

"Bite me, Dad! I mean, much older, oddly paternalistic brother. I don't need you anymore! I've got friends now!"

"No you don't," James informed him gleefully, appearing at the door with Jack.

The giant stormed down the street(s?) of Storybrooke, flinging a car at a group of children. "You've got a lot a nerve, existing like this!" he roared.

David and Mary Margaret sat on a bench, sipping cocoa and watching the chaos idly. "Hey, baby, do you think we should do something about this, seeing as how we're the monarchs and all?" the quasi-prince wondered.

"Sure, what the hell? It could be good for a laugh."

"Have you ever fought a giant?"

"Just once, while playing Dungeons and Dragons," she replied.

"I don't think that counts." He stood up and waved his arms at the giant. "Hey, Beanpole! Over here!"

The giant charged at him furiously. "I find that term offensive!"

"Sorry, sorry, I don't want any trouble. Look, whatever you're mad about isn't my fault, and it's certainly not the fault of that little old lady you just stepped on. The guy you're after is my long-lost twin brother, James. But don't judge him too harshly. He was raised by an insane, and possibly mentally handicapped king."

The giant rolled his eyes. "Oh, come on! 'My evil twin did it'? Do really expect me to buy that?"

David sighed defeatedly. "No, I guess not."

"We're Emma's parents! She says 'hey'!" Mary Margaret interrupted, turning on the Charming Family Charm.

"Give me a break. Emma's older than you are. You should have at least had the sense to tell a plausible lie."

"There's a perfectly reasonable explanation for that! You see, we sort of stuffed her in a closet as a baby—"

"Seriously? This is how you try to convince me that you're people of good character?" Anton roared incredulously. "I'm through talking! Kill all humans!"

As they fled in terror, Leroy joined them. "Hey, should we try tranquilizing him like Emma did?"

"No, that would be repetitive," said Mary Margaret. "We'll come up with an interesting and original way to get rid of him eventually. Just give us some time to think."
"We've come to steal your beans and sell them to Rumplestiltskin," James informed the giants brazenly. "I'm not sure why he hasn't bothered to simply come up and swipe them himself, but his loss is our gain."

"Go to hell," said Arlo.

"Da—uh, Arlo, you're embarrassing me," said Anton. "I'm sure this is all just part of the hazing. Right, Jack?"

"Wrong."

Anton waved his alleged brother forward with a sad sigh. "Carry on, Arlo."

"Don't make us hurt you," James threatened. "You may be fifty feet tall, with the wisdom of centuries under your belts, and an endless supply of magical plants at your disposal, but we've got pointy things!" He waved his tiny sword menacingly.

"Oh no! Run!" the giants screamed, retreating.

Leroy followed the Charmings down the street, Anton hot on their heels. "Wait, if you're actually Prince James' twin brother and not the prince himself, doesn't that technically make your claim to the throne completely bogus?"

"Would you rather serve King George?" David challenged.

"Your Majesty." Leroy saluted his alleged prince. "But what's your real name?"

"It's David."

"Oh come on, seriously? That's the lamest name reveal since Mario and Luigi Mario!"

"Hey, it's better than Honeymuffin," the quasi-prince panted.

Leroy couldn't argue with that. "Well, what are we running for, whoever you are?"

"We're trying to lure him away from our subjects, 'cause we're noble like that."

"Great plan," Mary Margaret wheezed, "but if we keep running toward the town line, you're going to turn into the most ignoble creature who ever lived."

"Not David Nolan!" Charming shuddered. "Ugh, suddenly being crushed to death by an angry giant doesn't look so bad." He stopped in his tracks and whistled at Anton. "Okay, you can kill me now. Just promise me you won't hurt anyone, and that you won't kill me with any sort of head trauma that might spark yet another bout of amnesia."

"David, are you crazy?" Mary Margaret shrieked.

"Crazy awesome!" David prostrated himself at the giant's feet.

The giant pounced, but Mary Margaret hauled her husband out of his reach at the last minute. "Stop with the heroism, before you outshine me!"

The ground broke under Anton's weight, leaving him stuck in a hole. "Man, is it just me, or is your town extremely structurally unsound?" He tried to tug himself free, but apparently, his immense...
physical strength was only good for hurting people. "Aw, nuts. Please, no Winnie-the-Pooh jokes."

David snickered. "Hey, Eminem, you know what would be hilarious? If the enlargement spell were to wear off now."

The enlargement spell wore off, leaving Anton clinging to a pipe in the middle of the hole. "Ah! You jinx!" the giant screamed.

"The humans have killed Abraham, Andre, and the rest of the A-Team," Arlo reported grimly.

"Seriously? An army of giants was brought down by a couple of little twerps with knives? You guys are the worst bean guardians ever!"

"Hey, I didn't see you helping!" Arlo snapped.

Anton blushed. "Point taken."

"Yeah, yeah, just make yourself useful for a change and go raze the fields," his brother snapped. "We don't want the humans taking our beans. They might try to actually use them for something meaningful."

Anton brandished a torch, his face a mask of determination. "Over my dead body!"

Granny, Ruby, and the dwarves were helping the Charmings with their search and rescue mission, because the Storybrooke Fire Department was still busy celebrating its rescue of Archie and Henry back in Episode Five. Mary Margaret cinched a rope around her husband's waist, eyes shining with pride. "Most people would allow the rampaging psycho who tried to murder them and countless others to die when presented with the opportunity, but not my Honeymuffin!" She kissed him dreamily. "We really are made for each other, aren't we?"

"And how." He dove into the hole. "Anton, give me your hand."

"Dude, I've got to weigh at least four hundred pounds. I'm pretty sure trying to lift me qualifies as a suicide attempt."

"You underestimate the depth of my awesomeness."

Anton sighed. "Eh, even if you could do it, what's the point? I can't trust humans, and my own species apparently consisted of seven people, so I'm doomed to a life of loneliness either way. Maybe I should just jump."

"Comfort mode."

"My will to live has suddenly been rekindled." Anton held out his hand. "All right, let's see this awesomeness of yours in action."

David and the townsfolk hoisted the on-again, off-again giant back to the surface. Anton looked at the quasi-prince in disbelief. "You know, it's crazy, but I'm starting to think that ridiculous 'evil twin' story might have actually been true."

Jack plunged her sword into Arlo's ankle. "That's for killing my father, you bastard!"

James glanced up from the treasure chest he was looting. "When we get home, I'm going to have to
"Damn it all, why didn't I think to wear socks today?" Arlo grabbed his attacker. "Ah well. If I go down, I'm taking you with me!" He pulled out a golden fly swatter and crushed her under it.

"Gah!" She looked up at James pleadingly. "Can you give me a hand? If he keeps this up, I'm not going to be pretty anymore!"

"Sorry, baby, but if you want allies who care about your problems, evil really isn't the way to go." The prince scooped up one last golden goose and bolted for the exit. "So long, suckers!"

As he stepped over her twitching body, Jack flung her limbs out and raised one arm over her head. "Must…match…pose…" she croaked with her dying breath.

Arlo hit the floor with the force of a hundred Buicks, but the puff of water vapor beneath him didn't falter. His brother rushed to his side. "Anton…the poison is in my blood, and I don't have a girlfriend to kiss it better, so I'm not going to be able to weasel out of dying. Did you endanger that species like I told you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." He handed him a cutting from one of the bean plants. "Now un-endanger it."

Anton glanced quizzically from Arlo to the cutting. "But doesn't this defeat the whole purpose? I mean, if one of the humans kills me and takes that cutting, we'll be right back to square one."

"Then don't get killed."

"But I'm so tiny and gullible!" Anton protested. "There's got to be someone better you could entrust with this task."

"You'd think so, but no." Arlo shoved the cutting into his hand and dropped dead before any further arguments could be made.

The Charmings and their Cartoon All-Stars led Anton into the diner. "This is the only hotel in town," said Leroy. "You'd better hope you like it here, because if you don't, you'll have to sleep in your car."

"I don't have a car. I'll sleep in the woods."

"Please don't," said Ruby. "Nothing good ever happens in those woods."

"Or the rest of town, now that you mention it," Mary Margaret mused. "But unless Gold suddenly learns the fine art of sharing, which seems unlikely, we're stuck here."

"I guess that's my cue." Anton reached into his pocket. "How's the farmland here?"

David shrugged. "Uh, dirty?"

His wife blinked. "We have farmland here? How big is this town, anyway?"

"Let's not go there, honey." He looked back at Anton. "Why do you ask?"

The on-again, off-again giant held up the cutting. "I have a magic beanstalk. I'd be willing to plant it for you, provided you all promise not to lure me onto it and then chop it down."
Anton inspected a patch of conveniently-vacant farmland while the Charmings and their Cartoon All-Stars looked on. "Well?"

The giant ran his fingers through the soil. "You're right. It's dirty."

"Then you can grow more beans?"

"Yeah, provided Cora doesn't swipe them to make salad."

"Don't you worry about her." Leroy brandished his pickaxe, as usual. "Me and old Betsy will make short work of her."

"What, like you did with me?" Anton challenged sarcastically.

"Shut up."

Anton beamed. "Ah, this feels just like sibling rivalry. By gum, it's been a while."

"I'm glad to hear you say that." Happy tossed him a pickaxe. "Sneezy's still got that whole amnesia arc going on, and we're sick of having to introduce ourselves as 'the Six Dwarves.' How do you feel about adoption?"

The giant looked wary. "I don't know, I've heard it doesn't usually go well around here…but I'm lonely and desperate enough to try anything."

They drew him into a group hug. "That's the spirit, bro!"

Belle, or whatever the hell her name was now, was reading in her hospital room. "Ugh, how am I supposed to read this thing? There's no pictures."

The father of genetics appeared in her doorway. "Hey, I'm a patient here, just like you, except I'm actually injured."

"I'm delighted to meet you. Or maybe that's just the Diprivan kicking in." She giggled vacuously.

"Uh, right." Greg gave her a weird look. "Word on the street is, you're crazy."

"No, just gaslit."

"You and me both, homie." He patted her back sympathetically. "Speaking of which, if you ever meet a goth chick by the name of Regina, do yourself a favor and barricade yourself into the nearest closet."

Belle giggled again, her eyes going crossed. "Hey, man, are you aware you have three heads?"

Greg sighed. "I'll come back later."

David emerged from the only diner in town with a pair of coffees. "Bad news. Henry and Emma took all the cinnamon cocoa with them."

"Damnation!" Mary Margaret took a reluctant sip of her coffee. "Well, I guess it could be worse. We could be smeared on the bottom of Anton's shoe."
"Nah, we're too cute to die," said David dismissively.

Mary Margaret smiled. "I've missed being cute with you. I have to say, I definitely prefer it to all the lies and adultery."

"Then why don't we go home and unleash the Charming Family Charm on the ogres together?"

"No, we can't leave Emma again. She's still angsting over the first time."

"You're worried about her, aren't you?"

"Well yeah. She's with Gold and Henry, and I can only imagine what kind of over-the-top super-scheme those two minds are capable of devising for her."

David slipped into comfort mode. "No need to worry. She took her chainsaw with her."

Henry, Gold, and Emma had boarded their plane and were settling into their seats, while the pilot, a guy named Lapidus, welcomed them aboard over the loudspeaker. Henry opened up a box of cinnamon buns. "Mmm, the only thing that could make these better is some Zoloft."

On Emma's other side, Gold was hyperventilating with terror, as usual. She tried to give him a comforting pat on the back, but then he tried to bite her hand off, and she thought better of it. "Hey, relax, I'm a Charming-this can't fail. We're going to find your son."

"I know, the freaky blind kid told me," he snapped. "Now shut up, I'm trying to brood."
Manhattan

Milah was sitting in her home doing something constructive for the first and last time, when her husband bounded through the door. "Hey, honey, guess what?"

"You're taking up armed robbery?" she asked hopefully.

"No, but there will be bloodshed involved. Does that earn me any sex appeal points?" Rumplestiltskin held up a conscription notice. "I'm off to pit my skeletal body and arsenal of crochet hooks against horde of rampaging monsters. Isn't it great?"

"Are you high?"

"Just on testosterone, baby!"

Milah was hesitant. "I don't like this. Don't soldiers have to fight in wars?"

"And how!" He took out a hobby horse and capered around the room giddily. "Whee! Time to stab some bad guys!"

Milah raised her eyebrows. "Er, honey, how old are you supposed to be, again?"

"Beats me." He looked in the mirror for a few seconds, then shrugged carelessly. "I guess it doesn't matter. What matters is, military service will repair the damage my reputation took when word got out that I have a father who wears tights."

"Yes, and while I can never look at you the same way after finding that out, I still know you'll make me proud." She kissed him. "Just be safe, and remember that I love you almost unconditionally."

He smiled dreamily. "And when I get home, we can start a family that won't be plagued by selfishness, black magic and abandonment, for a change."

Gold, Emma, and Henry arrived at an apartment building so large it had managed to show up on a world map. Emma was skeptical, as usual. "Are you sure we've got the right place? And the right time? I mean, theoretically, your kid should be two-hundred-years-dead by now. Maybe we should check the graveyards…"

"No, he's got to be here. The artifact given to me by my murderous, backstabbing ex-girlfriend said so, and if I can't trust her, who can I trust?"

Said psychopath had just discovered Chanel, and was feeling magnanimous, so she decided to throw her daughter a bone and be comforting for once. "Are you okay, pumpkin?"

"Oh, sure," Regina sneered. "I mean, my curse has been broken, my child's been kidnapped, and the only person left in the universe who cares about me is a bloodsucking murderer, but other than that, I'm peachy. How are you feeling?"

"I'm not," Cora replied cheerfully. "You should really consider giving it a try."

Hook stormed into the room. "Hey, what's the deal? I just went to kill Rumplestiltskin, and all I found was a sign on his door that said, 'Gone Reconcilin'. What the hell is that supposed to mean?"
"Who cares? With him out of the picture, my status as the coolest villain in town is undisputable!" Regina smiled broadly. "My Evil Regals are going to be thrilled."

The pirate sighed. "As much as I would love to stick around and challenge you for that title, I can't afford to pass up an opportunity like this. While Rumplestiltskin's outside Storybrooke, he'll be powerless to defend himself against me. Unless he starts whacking me with his cane again, in which case, I'm screwed."

"My money's on Rumple," said Cora. "Or you could ally yourself with me, if by some miracle, you're crazy enough to try that again."

"I'm pretty sure I am," Hook replied nonchalantly.

"It's your funeral. Well, what we've got to do is find his magic dagger, and I don't mean the one in his pants."

"Ew!" her companions screamed in unison, running to the bathroom to wash their ears out with some bleach. "Still not clean! Still not clean..."

Inside the geographically-overrepresented apartment building, Henry was scanning the names on the intercom. "No Baelfire. I guess it's a name that's simply too cool for this world."

Emma pointed at a blank name. "This has to be him—it obviously belongs to a person who doesn't want to be found or likes acting mysterious. Either way, it's a clear sign he's related to you."

Gold was offended. "Hey, he might not be running. He might have worked through his abandonment issues and discovered the healing power of forgiveness."

Emma laughed. "On this show? Not likely." She buzzed the apartment. "Yo, open up, I've got an emotional Pandora's Box to deliver."

"Oh gods!" a tearful, slightly drunken voice on the other line wailed. "I'm hearing her voice in the intercom again!"

They all exchanged confused stares for a long moment, until a guy fleeing down the fire escape mercifully provided them with a change of subject. "Well, you called it, Swan. All that remains is for you to hunt him down and work the Charming Family Charm until he agrees to give me another chance."

"I'm kind of a newbie, but I'll do my best." She took off after the love of her life with a huge rock, like her mother before her. "Just make sure Henry doesn't die again while I'm gone."

"No promises," the pawnbroker replied curtly.

The other pedestrians took no notice of the woman chasing her ex-boyfriend through the streets with a rock. It was New York. Finally, her prey tripped over a little tabby kitten named Oliver, and she was able to tackle him to the ground. "Neal?!" she shrieked in disbelief. "You're the son of a cold-blooded criminal mastermind? I'm shocked. Well, not that shocked." She pried herself off him. "What are you even doing here? I thought you went to Canada."

Neal shrugged sheepishly. "I tried, but it was cold."

"Explanation accepted. That just leaves us with the little matter of you BREAKING MY HEART AND SENDING ME TO JAIL!" She punctuated each word with a swing of her rock.
"There's a very good explanation for that."

"Then why didn't you ever tell it to me?!"

Neal's mouth worked soundlessly as he tried to remember what the hell he'd been thinking at the time. After a few minutes, he finally gave up and changed the subject. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm working for your dad."

"Wow. And to think, for all these years, I thought you were smart."

Neal looked disappointed. "But wait, you tried to reunite me with a long-lost family member? What kind of sadist are you? And how dare you betray me like that after all I've done for you? I mean, what about my needs? What about me? What about-" She gave him another smack with the rock, and he shook his head dazedly. "Whew, I think I just had an out of character experience. Thanks for snapping me out of it." He motioned for her to follow him. "Come on, let's go somewhere private. I need to grovel and I don't want the kitten to see."

Henry munched happily on a hot dog, while Gold held a vial labeled "Baby Poison" over it. Then the kid looked up, and Gold hastily shoved it into his pocket. "Thanks for the hot dog, Mr. Gold."

"Hey, you helped reunite me with my son. The least I can do is give you a last meal."

Unfortunately, being Snow White's grandchild, Henry was terrible at recognizing when someone wanted him dead. "You know, I forgave Emma for hocking me to a crooked pawnbroker like I was a kilo of crack or something. There are those who say I'm not bitter enough about the whole thing, but I say let bygones be bygones. Maybe your son will be the forgiving type, too."

"I doubt it. He's related to Milah, after all." He mussed the boy's hair. "But thanks for trying to cheer me up, kid. I'm gonna miss you."

A bartender sat two five-gallon buckets of beer in front of Neal and Emma. Neal shook his head. "Bigger."

"Are you sure, buddy?"

"If you had any idea how awkward this conversation was going to be, you'd understand." He handed the buckets back and turned to Emma. "So, what did you want to know?"

"I want to know what your Oscar picks for this year are, of course!" she sneered sarcastically, giving him another smack with the rock. "I want to know why you framed me and abandoned me with a ba —uh, a bundle of psychological issues!"

Wishing with all his heart that he'd had the foresight to wear a helmet that day, Neal nodded. "Fair enough. Well, when I went to fence the watches, I ran into your friend August."

"Oh right, August. Whatever happened to him, anyway?"

"I don't know, but whatever it was, he probably had it coming," Neal grumbled, waving his empty wallet at her. "So, he told me about the curse, and proved it was the truth by showing me a box with the words 'I know you're Baelfire' inside it."

"Wait, August knew you were Baelfire? How?" Emma massaged her head, which was really starting to hurt.
"I dunno. Anyway—"

"And why didn't he just say so?"

"It's August. Dramatic reveals are air and water to the guy."

"And how the hell do you know how to read English in the first place?"

"Do you want to hear the freaking story or not?" Neal snapped. "Anyway, he told me I had to break your heart and sever all contact with you for your own good." Neal sighed. "I believed it at the time, but in retrospect, I think he had a thing for you and was trying to get me out of the picture. It's the only thing that makes sense."

"You sent me to jail because Pinocchio told you to?!"

"Gee, when you say it out loud, it does sound pretty stupid." He averted his eyes sheepishly.

"Are you saying you didn't know who I was?"

"No, although I kind of suspected after that comment you made about moving to Neverland."

"So, you're telling me that Rumplestiltskin's son managed to live for three hundred years, and find and score with Snow White and Prince Charming's unwitting daughter, in a world of seven billion people, by accident?"

"Hey, we're dealing with the same minds that decided to make Jack Shepherd and Claire Littleton long-lost siblings," Neal reminded her.

"You must think I'm dumber than Dopey and Cinderella put together!" Emma hoisted her rock menacingly.

Yelping, Neal shielded his head with both hands. "Okay, how about this? Maybe it was fate?"

Emma was unmoved. "Where did you get that line? A fortune cookie?"

"You mean there was nothing good that came from our time together?" Neal prodded. "August said there was, but the cryptic bastard wouldn't tell me anything specific." His eyes lit up. "Say, that gives me a great idea! Why don't you tell my father that August is his son? They've got enough in common to make it more than plausible, and that way, I get off the hook and get my revenge on August in one fell swoop!"

"That idea might work, if I didn't hate your lying guts. I loved you, and you betrayed me!"

Outside, a group of Swan Queen and Captain Swan shippers were watching them through a window. "She said 'loved', in the past tense!" A mighty cheer rose up from the crowd.

"What was that?" Neal looked over his shoulder for the source of the noise. "Eh, I guess it doesn't matter. But tell me, if you really hate my guts, why are you wearing that keychain I swiped for you?" he challenged.

"Uh...Swan Princess reference," she fibbed. "Now come on, it's time to go reunite with your father."

"Aw, but I don't wanna!" Neal griped.

"Then tell him yourself! I'm not your freaking answering service!"
Neal pouted. "I should have stuck with Wendy. She never nagged me like this."

At the front lines, Rumplestiltskin was dressed up as an RPG character. He tugged uncomfortably at his hauberk. "I don't think the warrior class suits me. Maybe I should've gone sorcerer instead."

An officer approached him. "Soldier?"

Rumplestiltskin glanced around confusedly, until realization kicked in. "Oh, you meant me? Most people just call me 'Legs.'"

The officer's face twisted with revulsion. "Ew, you mean you're the son of that tight-wearing sissy who everyone's been talking about?" He shuddered. "As much as I hate the idea of seeking help from such an accursed creature, I'm desperate." He indicated a covered cage nearby. "I need you to guard this crate, the contents of which will make or break our defense."

"If it's so important, why don't you do it?"

"Because the crate told me my baby mama is cheating on me with my stepfather, and now I have to go commit suicide." The officer headed off to the nearest weapon rack, giving a little wave. "Goodbye, cruel world."

"Ouch. Poor guy."

"Rumpelstiltskin?" a voice from the crate called out.

"No. My name is Rump-el-stiltskin," the spinner corrected.

"Eh, close enough." The creepiest child he'd met since his father peeked out between the bars. "Can you get me a drink of water?"

"Why should I?"

"Because the Geneva Convention says so."

"Never heard of it," the spinner replied coldly. "So tell me, how do you almost know my name?"

She held up her hands, revealing a pair of blue eyes embedded in the palms. "I can see the future."

"Eep." Rumplestiltskin recoiled. "Why, exactly, do you need eyeballs on your hands to see the future?"

"That's not relevant to the plot. What is, is the fact that Milah's pregnant."

"Um…exactly how long have I been gone, again?" Rumplestiltskin began counting on his fingers pensively.

"Just trust me on this. Your wife will bear you a son, and your actions on the battlefield tomorrow… will one day lead his girlfriend to dump him for his stepfather!"

"NOOOOOOOO! PLEASE, DEAR GOD, TAKE ME INSTEAD!" Rumplestiltskin wailed in despair. "But…wait, that doesn't even make sense. You're probably just making that up." He unplugged the television in her tiny cell. "I think you've watched enough Jerry Springer for today, kid."

"It's not pretty, but it's true," the seer persisted. "When you see the army ride cows into battle, you
will know I speak the truth."

Annoyed, Rumplestiltskin covered the cage and stalked off. "I hate cryptic, disfigured magical beings. Boy, I sure hope I never become one."

"Gold is Henry's grandfather? You've got to be kidding me!" Mary Margaret repeated incredulously into her phone. "And who the hell is his great-grandfather, Obi-Wan Kenobi?"

"With our luck, probably," her daughter predicted grimly.

"So what do you want me to do about it?"

"I want you to talk me off this skyscraper," said Emma, pointing her video app at the ledge she was standing on.

"Comfort mode," said her mother.

Emma stepped down. "Thanks. So, what am I supposed to tell Henry?"

"Uh, the truth?"

"I don't know, this seems like a really inconvenient time to start doing that."

"Look, Emma, whatever this guy did to you, he's Henry's father. Don't keep them apart to punish him—your daddy will take of that in due time." She went to the closet and lovingly removed Charming's sword.

Henry was standing at a window back at Neal's apartment building, while Gold crept up behind him, ready to push. The boy turned around at the last second, and Gold cursed loudly. "What's wrong, Mr. Gold?" Henry asked innocently. "Are you nervous about meeting your son?"

"Um…yeah, that must be it."


"Only when the plot demands it."

"Drag." He took out his Big Book of Deja-Vu. "Well, would plotting some brilliant schemes cheer you up?"

"…Yes." They bent over the book together, giggling evilly.

Emma walked in, groaning loudly when she saw them together. "Oh crap, this explains so much."

"Hey Emma," Gold greeted obliviously. "Did you find my son, or am I going to have to kill you, too?"

She surreptitiously wiped away a tear. "Sorry, but I'm afraid your son has left without a trace, as usual."

Belle was in her hospital room, heavily drugged, and chained to the wall just for good measure. "Something feels oddly familiar about this," she slurred sleepily.
Regina barged in, as usual. "Hey, Belle. I'm here to attack you again."

"Are you my mommy?" Belle babbled incoherently.

"Um…sure, why not?" She took out a tranquilizer gun. "Here, allow me to knock you unconscious like I do with all my other children." Firing a dart into the beauty's carotid artery, she began rifling through the contents of Belle's purse. With magic, for anyone who hadn't realized she was off the wagon yet.

With her last shreds of consciousness, Belle stared at the purse. "Where did that thing come from? I didn't have it when I came here…"

" Shut up." Regina fired another dart at her, without taking her eyes off the bag's contents. "Ah, here we go." She snatched a card from the card catalogue out of mid-air. "Thank the gods she still hasn't realized computers are a thing."

She took the card to the library, where she found Hook awkwardly trying to flirt with Cora, for lack of anyone better. Hook looked at the card she'd stolen skeptically. "This seems like a dumb idea, but at least the book we're seeking is numbered nine-fifteen instead of eight-fifteen. That gag was really starting to get old."

"No, Regina's right, it's got to be here," said Cora. "Rumplestiltskin wouldn't risk crossing the town line without entrusting the dagger to someone, and since Belle is the only person in this universe or any other that doesn't want him dead, it's a pretty safe bet that he chose her."

"After careful examination of Disney Animated Features canon, I'm pretty sure she hid it in a book. But not Beauty and the Beast. That would be way too obvious."

Cora hugged her daughter proudly. "Now you're thinking like a villainess, pumpkin."

"That's the closest you've ever come to telling me you love me, Mom." She blinked back tears. "How depressing." To get her mind off the issue, she began searching for the book, but all she found in its place was a very, very poorly drawn map. "What's this? Looks like one of Jefferson's creations."

"Hey, I think this is some kind of treasure hunt," Hook realized. "Well, today's your lucky day. During my stint in Neverland, I spent some time working with Jake and the Neverland Pirates. Let me see what I can do."

David and Mary Margaret were sitting in their kitchen, looking deeply disturbed, and passing an economy-size bottle of McCutcheon's back and forth. "I now share a grandchild with Gold?" David groaned. "Great, how am I supposed to compete with a grandfather who can conjure dirtbikes for him at will?"

"You think you've got it bad?" Mary Margaret shuddered. "I'm competing for grandmother with Cora." She handed him an envelope. "While we're on the subject, I've made out my will. Please pay special attention to my request not to be posthumously made out with."

David was still too busy trying to puzzle out the family tree to protest. "So, Henry now has three grandpas and three grandmas, two of whom are evil wizards, two of whom were shockingly murdered, and two of whom are disenfranchised monarchs…and we're only halfway through the second season."
"Hey, let's not go there. I'm still trying to get over the fact that I'm my grandson's sister."

"It's a good thing we don't have Thanksgiving in our land, because that dinner would suck," David observed.

"David, shh! The fanfic writers might hear you!" Frantic, she clamped a hand over his mouth. "He didn't mean that!" But alas, it was too late.

"Screw this, it's time for me to take a page out of Regina's book." Gold smashed the security door open and barged in like a pro.

"What are you doing?" Emma demanded.

"Stalking a loved one," Gold replied.

"Neat. Can I come with?" Henry asked excitedly.

Gold regarded the boy thoughtfully. "How's your Charming Family Love Radar coming along?"

"It's at full capacity, sir," Henry boasted.

Gold waved him forward. "You're in."

Emma ran after them. "Doesn't anyone care what I think about this?"

"No," grandfather and grandson replied in unison.

Rumplestiltskin looked down at his broadsword with disdain. "This is just…wrong."

A squad of medics carried a series of grievously wounded soldiers past the spinner and his fellow soldiers. "If you survive the battle, this is probably what you're going to look like," one of Rumplestiltskin's comrades informed him grimly. "But don't worry. Your chances of surviving are pretty slim."

Rumplestiltskin eyed him quizzically. "Who the hell are you?"

"The regimental motivational speaker."

An officer shoved him aside. "You're fired. And as for the rest of you, after months of training, the duke has decided to revamp you into cavalry a few minutes before the battle. It's just the kind of brilliant military leader he is." He handed the spinner a saddle. "Have a cow, man."

Rumplestiltskin screamed. "Oh no, the freaky blind kid really can see the future! There's no way she could have simply overheard a slang term popular among the soldiers who constantly surround her"

"I beg your pardon?" His commander blinked.

"Uh…I need to go to the bathroom."

"Damn it, I told you to go before the battle!" The officer grudgingly handed him a hall pass.

Rumplestiltskin ran to the seer's cage, but found it empty, so he decided to cope with stress by smashing stuff, as usual. "It's all true!" he wailed miserably. "I'm going to have a son, and my actions are going to cause his girlfriend to dump him for his stepfather! Well, I would rather crawl naked
He spotted a sledgehammer that was lying around for some reason. "Or that could work, too." He picked it up, swung it at his foot, then crumpled to the ground screaming. "AAAAAAAH!" he sobbed. "In retrospect, I probably should have gotten drunk first!"

Emma followed Gold and Henry into Neal apartment nervously. "I really don't think we should be doing this. What if the cops catch us?"

"You are the cops, and I've already bought you off," Gold reminded her, rifling through his son's possessions.

"Hey, I remember this. Neal took this when he left, along with my humanity and those hideous glasses."

Gold looked at her suspiciously. "Does that dreamcatcher mean something to you?"

"N-no. I am so totally over this dreamcatcher."

"Then why are you sobbing hysterically?" he demanded.

"PMS?" she lied tearfully.

"You're lying!"

Emma looked put-out. "Hey, I thought lie-detection was supposed to be my superpower?"

Henry started laughing. "Oh Mom, I'll never get tired of that old joke!"

She glared at her son. "Hey, if you're going to keep talking trash about me, you can just go in the other room." She shoved him into the bathroom and locked the door behind him.

Gold snickered a bit, then resumed his interrogation. "Did you speak to my son? What did he say to you?"

"Well, it sure as hell wasn't an apology," she grumbled bitterly.

The pawnbroker brandished his cane at her. "Start making some freaking sense or I'll bash your head in!"

Emma revved up her chainsaw. "I'd like to see you try."

Unfortunately, before this battle of wills could escalate into something truly epic, Neal charged in. "Don't worry, my lady! I'll save you!" he cried heroically.

Emma nodded at her chainsaw. "Actually, I don't need any help, thanks."

Rumplestiltskin limped home to his hovel in agony. "Damn it, some pixie dust would really come in handy right about now." He flung open the door. "Honey, I'm home!"

"So what d'you want, a medal?" Milah snapped, cramming a pacifier into her crying son's mouth. "And as for you, shut up! You're almost a week old! It's high time you stopped coming to me with all your problems!"

The spinner's eyes fell on his newborn son. "Aw, how precious! It's the first of many long-lost family
"Baelfire. And his middle name is Baggage."

"Baelfire. Hm, that's catchy. I wish I'd thought of it."

"Thanks, I stole it from a Neil Gaiman novel," said Milah. "I figure he's going to need a strong namesake to look up to, considering his father's a deserter and his grandfather's a prancing sissy in tights."

Rumplestiltskin looked hurt. "Hey, what's with the attitude? You didn't even want me to fight in the first place!"

"Yeah, well, I'm having an out-of-character experience."

"But you said you loved me almost unconditionally, and...aw, nuts, I forgot about the 'almost'!"

"Sorry Rumple, but you've proven yourself too wimpy to be a bad boy and too self-preserving to be a knight in shining armor, so how the hell am I supposed to be attracted to you?" She grabbed his wallet. "Now, if you're done whining, I've got places to go and pirates to screw."

Rumplestiltskin's face fell. "Well, if you really don't love me or want to be with me anymore, then maybe we should cut our losses and get divorced, before we end up causing each other and our son further pain."

"You're not the boss of me!" She dumped the baby in his arms. "Here, take this damn thing off my hands; it's heavy."

Rumplestiltskin glanced from mother to child quizzically. "But I thought you said you wanted a kid?"

"Yeah, but the fact that I gave him life and nurtured him in my body for nine months means nothing next to the fact that I'm annoyed with you."

"But—"

"Out-of-character experience!" She slammed the door in their faces.

Rumplestiltskin stared down at his son sadly. "Well, Bae, looks like it's just us guys. But maybe it's for the best." He pointed in the direction Milah had fled. "These chicks have way too many mood swings for my taste."

Gold looked at his son in disbelief. "Bae, can it really be you?" He inspected the other man's face carefully. "Well, at least the eye color is right this time."

"Shut up, Dad!" Neal bellowed. "I'm just here to protect Emma."

Emma waved her chainsaw in his face. "Are you deaf? I said I don't need protection."

He embraced her soothingly. "It's okay, sweetheart, you can rest easy now. Nealfire's here."

"Okay, even the awesome power of my psyche cannot make sense of this situation," Gold complained. "What the heck is going on?"

"She's my girlfriend," Neal explained. "Or at least, she would be, if not for this abandonment theme..."
plaguing our family. Speaking of which, go to hell."

"I'm sure I'll get there eventually," said Gold indolently. "But in the meantime, I want some answers."

Emma raised her hand. "Me too."

"Me three." Henry emerged from the bathroom, his trusty screwdriver and grappling hook in hand. "Boy, I'm glad I was smart enough to hang on to these. So, what's all the shouting about? Do you need me to work Charming Family Charm on these guys, Mom?" He tossed his hair gallantly.

Neal frowned. "Did that kid just call you 'Mom'?"

"That's right, buster," she said smugly. "You're not the only one with horrible, devastating secrets to unleash on the unsuspecting." She shepherded Henry back to the bathroom. "Now, sweetie, I know no jail can hold you, but if you could just humor Mommy for another minute or two—"

"Wait a minute, no jail can hold him?" Neal's jaw dropped. "Well, that clinches it. He's got to be my son!"

Henry shook his head, confused. "No, you're not my father. My mother already told me, my father was a great Jedi knight and star pilot, who was betrayed by the evil Darth…oh, Lord, did I seriously fall for that?" Humiliated, the boy jumped out the window.

"This is the most awkward moment in this history of our family, and that's quite a distinction," Gold observed.

Emma sighed. "Well, I guess I'd better go talk Henry down from that ledge, although part of me wants to just let the poor kid jump. He's obviously lost his last scrap of hope for any sort of normal life."

Neal headed after them, planning to sprinkle some pixie dust on his son as a precaution, but Gold stopped him. "Bae, wait."

"Why don't you make me?"

"Look, you have to talk to me if you want to fulfill the bargain and protect Emma."

Emma’s voice drifted through the open window. "I can protect myself! Do you guys not understand English?!"

Neither of them seemed to hear her. "Well, all right, if my woman needs me," said Neal.

At the hospital, Greg was on the phone with 'None of Your Business.' "Hey, baby, check out this sweet video I took of the mayor using magic. All we need to do is figure out a way to prove it's not photoshopped, and boom! Secret's out."

Back at the library, Hook was dancing in circles around the treasure map. "Way-hey, well done crew! Everyone knew just what to do! Way-hey, with help from you, it's time to slice Gold's heart in two!"

Regina hit him with a silence spell. "Will you knock that off and just give us the info?"

"Sheesh, I was just trying to go about it with a flair, like I do everything else." Pouting, Hook pointed to a spot on the map. "Dagger's over here."
"Thanks, you've been very helpful," said Cora benevolently, raising a hand and blasting him across the room. "As a reward, we'll injure you instead of killing you."

"Ow!" Hook groaned, crumpling into a heap. "Don't make me add you to my revenge list, ladies!" He took out a thirty-two foot scroll and a quill. "Let me see…I think there's some room over here…no…or maybe I could pencil you in between Baelfire and my bookie…"

Cora led her daughter out of the building. "Don't worry, pumpkin. By the time he finds room in his schedule, I'll have taken Rumplestiltskin's power and we'll be invincible."

Regina's head was reeling. "Wait…why are we stealing Rumplestiltskin's power, again?"

"Uh…because reasons."

"Oh, for the love of…"

"Because reasons involving Henry?" Cora tried.

"That's better," said Regina, mollified.

"Why did you lie to me, Mom?" Henry demanded angrily.

"Hey, I didn't expect you to actually believe that stupid Jedi story!" Emma defended. "I just said it to make you laugh."

"You're lying again," Henry noted.

"Geez, everyone's ripping off my superpower today," the savior griped. "Look, Henry, what was I supposed to tell you? That your father was a career criminal who may or may not have statutorily raped me?"

"Emma, my adoptive mom is a freaking mass murderer! I think if anyone is equipped to handle difficult truths about their parents, it's me! I want to meet my dad!"

"All right," Emma relented, handing him a carton of smokes. "But take these first. When he sends you to juvie, as he inevitably will, you can use them to trade for stuff."

Inside, Gold was trying to remember how groveling worked and failing miserably. "Here's the thing, Bae. I've suffered because of my horrible decisions, so you owe me your forgiveness."

"Ugh, I think I'm going to be sick."

"What, no good?" Gold thought a moment. "Okay, how about this? I can be a better man now. I've changed."

"Is that why you were preparing to murder the love of my life three minutes ago?"

"Okay, so I made one mistake..."

"How's Mom?" Neal asked sarcastically.

Gold cringed. "Uh, Mom who?"

"And does that vial hanging out of your pocket say 'baby poison'?!"
Gold tucked the vial away, sweating bullets. "Um…no?"

"You're full of crap, you know that? You abandoned your only son!"

"So did you," Gold pointed out.

"Yeah, but I regret it."

Gold raised his hand. "Um, hello?"

August appeared at the window. "Excuse me, it may not be any of my business, Gold, but the reconciliation speech you gave me was a lot better. Maybe you should try that one on him instead."

"Get lost, you lying heap of kindling!" father and son roared in unison.

"Sheesh, I was just trying to help."

Neal shut the blinds. "As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, I had to grow up with Grandpa because of you, Dad. Grandpa."

Gold flinched. "Okay, that was truly unforgiveable."

"Damn right. You can't restore my lost childhood!"

"Yes I can."

"In that case, I don't want you to."

"I do!" August yelled.

"You stay out of this!" Neal screamed.

"All right, Bae, what do you want?" Gold tried.

"I want you to drop dead. Slowly and painfully, if possible."

Gold burst out laughing. "Yeah, right, sure you do. I give it a week."

"Shut up!" Neal stormed out of the room. "And for the record, you didn't dump me, I dumped you!"

The Dark One walked into a forest clearing, where the freaky blind kid had grown into a freaky blind young adult. "Good to see you again, Rumple," she greeted. "The sorcerer levels suit you."

"Don't try to butter me up with compliments!" Rumplestiltskin snapped. "You pulled an Oedipus Rex on me!"

"Yeah, well, it's no less than you deserve for denying water to a starving, crippled child."

Rumplestiltskin nodded thoughtfully. "Good point. But I'm evil now, and no longer have to worry about pesky things like ethics." He started strangling her with one hand, munching cheerfully on some escargot with the other. "It's so easy being green!"

"Urk!" the seer gagged.

"Right then, to business. How can I find my son?"
"Didn't the Blue Fairy already tell you that?" the girl choked.

"Yeah, but I don't trust a word out of that chick." He released her. "Talk!"

"Fine, a curse will bring you together again. What a shocker, right?"

"Tell me more."

"Sorry, but as a fortune teller, I reserve the right to be constantly and incessantly cryptic."

The Dark One's face lit up like a child's on Christmas morning. "Ooh, that sounds like fun. Can I do it too?"

"Sure, go nuts," she replied, holding out her hands and surrendering her powers.

Rumplestiltskin glanced down at his palms, then breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew. I somehow managed to avoid inheriting the eyeballs. My fangirls will be so relieved."

"You tried to keep my son from me," Neal accused Emma angrily.

"Don't take it personally, I tried to keep him from me, too," Emma said. "Besides, I think I might have inadvertently done you a favor. If you're truly opposed to magic, spending time around Henry is going to be torture for you."

Neal steeled himself. "I'm willing to take the risk. I won't abandon him like my father abandoned me!"

In the next room, Gold laughed darkly. "Famous last words!"

"I don't hear any corpses hitting the floor in there!" Neal yelled at him impatiently, before crawling out onto the fire escape.

"Hi, Dad, nice to meet you," his son greeted brightly. "My name is Henry Mills-Swan-Blanchard-Nolan."

"Darling-Cassidy-Gold," Neal added proudly.

"All right, then. Henry Mills-Swan-Blanchard-Nolan-Darling-Cassidy-Gold of the House of Charmingstiltskin." He swayed precariously on his feet. "Whoa. Pops, can you catch me? Pronouncing all of that seems to have depleted my oxygen supply."

Neal wrapped his arms around the boy. "Daddy's got your back, little dude."

Rumplestiltskin stared off into the distance, trying to focus on the images assaulting his mind. "Oh my gods, they're going to cancel Firefly after just one season?!" He screamed, horrified. "I don't want to hear anymore!" He clutched his head. "Make it stop! Make it stop!"

"No can do, you child-caging bully." The seer smirked victoriously. "In fact, because I despise you so much, I'm going to throw an extra prophecy your way. A boy will, in a very convoluted and indirect way, lead you to your son. And that boy will prove to be your undoing."

Rumplestiltskin blinked. "'My undoing'? What the hell does that mean? Is he going to kill me, redeem me, help me undo my coat? There's got to be something more specific you can tell me!"
"Nope." She jerked her thumbs toward her chest. "Fortune teller. Sorry."

"Well, I guess I'd better smash his cute little head in, then, just to be on the safe side."

Back in Neal's apartment, Gold was staring calculatingly out the window at his son and newly-acquired grandson. "Well, on the bright side, Bae's got my genes, Dad's, and Milah's all working against him. Sooner or later, he's bound to get sick of the kid, and then I can make my move." He patted the vial of baby poison in his pocket self-assuredly.
A young (though not as young as she should have been) Snow White, walked up to her mother wearing an advertisement for Andalasia Fashions. "How do I look?"

"Even prettier than Princess Regina, and there are magic mirrors who will back me up on that," Queen Eva replied proudly, giving her daughter a hug. "Come with me, I have a birthday present for you. It was passed down to me from a long line of hypocritical snobs, but I'm hoping you'll be the one to finally break that cycle."

Snow followed her mother to the next room, where one of the servants had donned a tiara and was admiring herself in the mirror. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, please don't fall from grace and spy on us all."

"Hey!" Snow spluttered. "Are you usurping my crown, Johanna? What kind of mother figure are you?"

The princess took a cat-o-nine tails from somewhere on her person and prepared to nip this plotline in the bud, but her mother held her in check. "I know it's tempting, but don't bruise the servants, honey. For some unfathomable reason, they seem to take it personally."

"But Mom—" Snow whined.

"No buts!" Eva said sternly. "Now apologize, before this one swears vengeance on us, too."

"Aw, Mom, that'd never happen here. You're forgetting all the anti-depressants Daddy had pumped into our nation's water supply."

"Just do it! In this family, we treat our subjects with respect."

Snow White stared at her, confused. "Since when?"

"Since now, damn it!"

"Well, when you put it that way, it makes perfect sense." The princess turned to her servant. "Sorry, Johanna. I'll try to start taking after Daddy from now on."

Eva pinched her daughter's cheek affectionately. "That's my girl!"

Snow put on the tiara moved to stand in front of the mirror. "What beautiful cubic zirconias!"

"Yeah. You'd better appreciate the darn thing; we had a devil of a time getting it back from that Flynn Rider guy." Then, without warning, Eva's legs gave out, and she fell into Johanna's arms. "Aw, nuts, a fainting spell. This has to mean I'm either pregnant or dying."

"Snow, fetch a doctor!" Johanna cried.

"Which doctor?"

"The only doctor there is, of course!"

Mary Margaret walked into the kitchen over at the Princess Pad, and found her man whipping up some special Zoloft pancakes. "Why are you cooking breakfast?"
David shrugged. "Well, we're always reversing traditional gender roles in our relationship, and I figured, why stop now?"

"Liar. You're trying to do something nice for your wife on her birthday!" She slapped him. "You pig! How dare you!!"

While David hung his charming head in shame, Mary Margaret went to inspect a package on the table. "You got me a present, too?" She slapped him again. "What kind of sick pervert are you?!"

"It wasn't me, I swear!" David cried. "I would never, never violate you like that!"

She opened the box and found her tiara inside, along with a note reading "Love, Johanna." She relaxed slightly. "Hmph, looks like you're off the hook this time."

David still wasn't technically a cop, but since the only real cop in town was busy stalking innocent people on behalf of a warped old baby dealer, the people of Storybrooke had collectively decided to let him slide. Walking into Mayberry Jail, he went to check the answering machine that had been filling in for him during the high-crime hours, and found himself face to face with an angry Hook. "Aw, nuts, you again?" He groaned. "I knew it was a mistake not to jail you for that latest murder attempt."

"Live and learn, loser!" Hook sneered. "Time for you to find out what I do to people who show me mercy!" He clubbed the quasi-prince, then grabbed his titular appendage off the wall, where it had been repurposed into a coat hook. "Ugh, how undignified."

While Mary Margaret had no idea what Johanna's name and address were in Storybrooke, she was a Charming now, so she had the woman tracked down within the hour. "Dang, your house is a lot nicer than my house," Mary Margaret observed as she entered her former servant's spacious yard, looking mildly annoyed. "Curses blow."

"You!" Johanna gasped when she saw her. "Can it really be my eventually-dear Snow?"

"I go by Mary Margaret now."

Johanna regarded her quizzically. "Er...why?"

"The name was a gift from my stepmom, and if I reject it, she'll probably get offended and curse me yet again," Mary Margaret replied. "So tell me, why didn't you come to see me as soon as the curse broke?"

"Hey, I have a life outside of you, you know."

"Really?"

"...No," Johanna admitted. "So, does the tiara still fit, now that you've hacked off all your gorgeous hair for some reason?"

"Like a charm." Mary Margaret modeled it proudly. "Tell me, how did you happen to come by it?"

"I stumbled across it in Gold's shop, while looking for my daddy's razor collection," Johanna replied.

"And Gold just gave it to you?"

"He was in the supply closet at the time, making out with Belle, so I just helped myself. So far, he's
been too busy to call me out on it."

Trying to get that mental image out of her mind, Mary Margaret looked long and hard at the patch of flowers Johanna had been tending. "Snowdrops. Subtle."

"Thanks, I try."

Mary Margaret glanced over her shoulder. "Hey, did you hear that? It sounds like evil laughter."

"Oh no! Run!" Johanna screamed, tugging at Mary Margaret's shoulder.

The former princess didn't budge, lost in thought. "Hm, I could do that…or I could stumble off into these dark woods and investigate it on my own."

"Er, maybe you should consider taking some sort of weapon with you, honey," Johanna suggested mildly. "Or at least call that prince of yours for back-up. I mean, he's not really a cop, but he comes closer than you do."

"Hey, who's the queen in this town?" Mary Margaret barked.

"Oh, Snow, that question is a riddle for the ages," Johanna sighed weakly.

Mary Margaret wandered into the woods, where she found Regina digging in the dirt with a stolen pickaxe, while Cora lounged on a beach chair nearby, sipping a cocktail beneath an umbrella. "Hey, watch it!" the elder evil queen barked at her daughter. "You almost got dirt in my margarita! And I don't see any ancient South Asian daggers around here! I can't believe you were dumb enough to put any faith in words that came out of Hook's mouth! You're the worst sidekick ever!"

"Hey, I'm not the sidekick! You're the sidekick!" Regina protested.

"Let's not start this debate again, darling," said Cora. "Let's just focus on finding Rumplestiltskin's dagger so that we can get dear little Cory back."

"For the last time, his name is Henry!"

Mary Margaret bounded into Mayberry Jail, hoping a dose of the Charming Family Charm would settle her nerves after that disturbing revelation. But alas, her man was still passed out. Panicking, Mary Margaret kissed him. When it didn't awaken him, she began to hyperventilate. "I'm all out of ideas now!"

David stirred. "Jeez, haven't I spent enough of this season unconscious?"

"David, what happened here? Did King George attack you again?"

"No, it was the other unrepentant murderer I inexplicably allow to run free."

"Hook? What did he want?"

"Revenge on Gold."

"Well, he's going to have to take a number. Cora and Regina are already way ahead of him. They're going to find the Dark One's dagger and use it to steal his powers so that they can kidnap dear little Cory!"

"Who?"
"Uh, I mean Henry. I sent Gold a message, but you know how he is. I'm sure he'd much rather die than give up the cryptic act." She rolled her eyes. "I think we'd better assume we're going to be on our own." Mary Margaret went over her options carefully. "I guess I could try reasoning with Regina."

"Aw, come on, Eminem!" David whined. "Every time you try reasoning with Regina, someone always ends up dead!"

"Well, you know the old saying. Ninety-eighth time's the charm!"

Henry and Neal walked down the streets of New York, swapping horror stories about life as the child of an evil sorcerer. "...And after she killed me, Mom flung a fireball at me, kidnapped me, and had me wrestled into submission by a giant tree-monster!"

Neal fumbled for a story that would top that. "Um... my daddy dropped me?"

"I win!" Henry crowed. "That means you're paying for lunch!" He dragged his dad into a pizza joint.

Emma and Gold hung back, sadly watching the sons they loved, but had unintentionally hurt, just as they had been hurt by their own parents. "Wow, we sure do have a lot in common," Emma observed uncomfortably. "Do you think there's still hope for Golden Swan after all?" They stared at each other in mutual horror for a long moment.

"Yay, Swanfire! Swanfire for life! Swanfire is my gospel!" Gold blurted, waving a flag emblazoned with a dreamcatcher. "And speaking of Swanfire, how would you feel about seducing my son so he'll come back to Storybrooke?"

"When can I start?!" Then Emma caught herself. "I mean, how dare you?!"

"Aw, come on!" Gold prodded. "In addition to giving you the opportunity to hook up with Bae, this would also guarantee that Henry's runaway attempts stay local."

"I don't want to hook up with Bae! He sent me to jail for an even stupider reason than Regina did!"

Gold smiled indulgently, putting an arm around her shoulders. "Oh, don't be silly. You just need to have your beloved to die for you to realize how you feel. You know, like I did."

"Aw nuts, more common ground!"

Neal and Henry emerged, the former glaring suspiciously at the arm his father had draped over his baby mama. "Oh gods, is there hope for Golden Swan after all?!" he demanded, aghast.

"No, your father and I were just discussing the pros and cons of canes versus chainsaws for intimidating your enemies," Emma saved. She looked at her son. "So Henry, still bitter, I take it?"

"Yep."

"You should really stop that, before you turn into a broken, lonely mess like us." She indicated herself, Neal, and Gold.

"Screw you," the boy snapped. "And by the way, I'm demoting you from Mom back to Emma."

Her eyes narrowed. "Hey, if you don't like our arrangement, I can always put you up for adoption again."
Henry cowered. "I'll be good."

"I can as soon as I heard!" Regina barged into the diner, as usual, and ran over to join Mary Margaret. "I can't believe Henry just found out he's related to Peter Pan! Oh, my poor little boy!" she sobbed. "He must be devastated!"

"Relax, Cory's fine; I made the whole thing up to get you over here."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "For the last time, his name's Henr—wait. You heard us?"

"Fraid so." Mary Margaret shook her head, looking tired. "Regina, seriously? You'll forgive your mother for tearing out Daniel's heart and butchering him before your very eyes, but you're going to kill me for accidentally making her mad at him?"

"No. I'm going to kill you because you neglected to make small talk with me at the party the other night, like a good host would have." Regina sniffled indignantly.

"Wow. I'd hate to see what you'd do to someone who bumped into you and forgot to say 'excuse me.'"

"He's right here." Regina reached into her pocket and retrieved a shrunken head.

"Ew." Mary Margaret set her plate aside queasily. "Regina, because you're just too cool to hate, I'm going to offer you one last chance. Come over from the dark side, and we can rule as mother and daughter."

"Hey, I don't need to come over from the dark side! You need to come over from the dark side!" She began pointing wildly at everyone else in the diner. "And you need to come over from the dark side! And you! And you! Ooh, and especially you!" She glared accusingly at little Alexandra Herman.

Mary Margaret took out her cell phone and called up David. "Okay baby, you called it, reason was a bust."

Queen Eva lay in her bed, under the tender care of Dr. Frankenstein, while Johanna and Snow looked on. "Hey, aren't I supposed to have a husband somewhere?" she asked.

"His Majesty says he's sorry, but he can't visit your deathbed because he's busy distributing Zoloft cupcakes to the homeless," Johanna apologized. "So, Doctor, what's the prognosis?"

"Not great," Frankenstein reported grimly. "Her only hope is to take some cyanide pills immediately, and then let me reanimate her." The doctor happily reached for his shovel. "Whee! It's crypt-crashing time!"

Eva leaned away from him nervously. "Uh, thanks, but I think I'll just take my chances and trust in prayer." She indicated a plate on the dresser. "Snow, honey, can you hand me those double-fudge cookies Princess Cora baked for us? Maybe one of those will lift my spirits."

Snow handed her the cookies, then turned to Johanna and Frankenstein. "Is Mom going to die?"

"And how!" Frankenstein exclaimed with glee.

"Get out of here, you downer!" Johanna shoved him out the door.
"Medieval medicine seems pretty useless," Snow noted. "But this is a high-magic setting. Isn't there some kind of cleric or druid or something who we can call on for healing?"

"Well, there's always the Blue Fairy. She's an old friend of your mom's."

Snow was confused. "How did my mom happen to meet a fairy?"

"She was a selfish brat when she was a kid, so the Blue Fairy decided to turn her into wood," Johanna revealed. "Confronted with the business end of a magic wand, Eva suddenly decided to turn over a new leaf, and they've been friends ever since."

Henry trotted down the street beside Gold. "Okay, I've already got a Grandpa, and a Gramps, so I can either call you Pop-Pop, Grampy, or my personal favorite, Daddy Rumkins."

"I'd rather you called me your doom," Gold seethed.

"I love you, too, Pop-Pop," Henry chirped obliviously.

Behind them, Neal and Emma were making awkward conversation with each other. Again. "He's a good kid," said Neal.

"Yeah, well, thank Regina. I've only had him for a couple of weeks." Emma admitted.

"Who the hell is Regina?"

"His legal parent. Speaking of which, we really should be getting him home to her, before she has us prosecuted for kidnapping. Or starts killing everyone again."

"But I can't go to Storybrooke. Papa's there, and I'm still playing hard-to-get with him."

"Would it change your mind if I told you I've developed a habit of walking by my windows naked?" Emma asked coyly.

"Ooh. Tempting." Neal stared at her longingly, then jolted back into reality. "But unfortunately, Tamara exists."

"Who's Tamara?"

Neal shrugged. "I don't know. Every time I ask her, she wigs out and threatens me with her taser."

Arriving at Neal's building, Henry slammed the security door in his mother's face, while Neal hung a 'No Parents Allowed' sign on it. Bored, Gold decided to entertain himself by harassing Emma for a while. "Did you seduce my son yet?"

"No, and stop asking me that! It's creepy and wrong!"

Hook appeared in the doorway. "I'm afraid it's about to get creepier. Your father-in-law-slash-lover is here!"

Emma rolled her eyes. "Hook, for the last time, you are not my lover."

"Your lips say 'no,' but the script for Season Three says 'yes!'" He held up a manuscript triumphantly.

Emma sighed. "Is there a reason you're here?"
"Oh, right." Hook smacked his forehead absently. "My other true love." He jammed his titular appendage into Gold's chest. "You took Milah from me—my love, my happiness!"

"Yeah, and you took Belle from me, so what's your point?" Gold sank to the ground. "I thought the whole purpose of all this was to make me live forever with the agony of having lost my one true love, like I did to you." The sorcerer shook his head, looking a little disappointed. "I should have known you weren't smart enough to pull off such a brilliant and poetic revenge."

Being genetically obligated not to let Gold die, Emma reluctantly sprang into action. Careful not to damage Hook's face, for fear of angering his fandom, she picked up a chair and thumped the pirate over the head with it. "Emma SMASH!"

Hook crumpled in a heap on the floor. "Oh, stop playing coy, woman—you know you want me!" he scoffed as his eyes fell shut.

Emma knelt down to assist her baby-granddaddy. "Are you okay?"

"Oh yes, I love getting stabbed in the chest. It's a hobby of mine," Gold sneered, touching his gushing chest gingerly. "Mortality blows."

Neal came down the stairs. "Dad, what are you still doing here? Didn't I tell you to drop dead?" Then he noticed Gold's wound. "NOOOOO! Papa, please don't leave me!" he wailed.

"Will you make up your freaking mind already? Gold groaned.

"What happened?"

Emma indicated Hook. "An enemy of his, and pretty much everyone else's, attacked him."

Neal hauled his father upstairs, while Emma stuffed Hook in a closet. "Hook's clearly not in any shape to make trouble for us," she reported, rejoining the three generations of bitter, abandoned Gold men. "When I tied him up, he didn't even try to turn the situation into a sexual innuendo." She held up a piece of paper. "And check out what I found while shoving my hands in his pockets...er, to check for weapons and not feel him up," she added hastily. "A map. It looks like he came here on the Jolly Rancher."

"Wait, he didn't follow you? Then how the hell did he know where you were going in the first place?" Neal wanted to know.

"Oh no!" Henry gasped. "He must have found some way to steal our Charming Family Love Radar! That fiend!" The boy took a deep breath, collecting himself. "All right, all right, one problem at a time. Is Pop-Pop going to be okay?"

"Call me that again, and I swear I'll crush you under my boot!" Gold snarled. "In fact, even if you don't, I probably will!"

"He'll be fine," Neal deadpanned, grabbing Emma and clearing out of the room to give his son some time alone with the wounded, desperate murderer.

Henry approached his non-charming grandfather tentatively. "Comfort mode?"

Gold snapped at the proffered hand like a proverbial crocodile. "Stop comforting and resembling me! I'm trying to hate you! You caused this!"
"Now, Pop-Pop, I can't take all the credit," Henry demurred. "Hook had a little something to do with it, too."

Neal and Emma reentered, the former eyeing Gold's ugly green wound suspiciously. "Hey, I thought dreamshade was supposed to turn your flesh black?"

"A wizard did it," Gold snapped. "Now get me back to Storybrooke so that I can palm this stuff off on Cora." He raised a feeble fist. "Nobody dumps Rumplestiltskin and lives," the sorcerer coughed weakly. "Nobody."

Neal produced a crowbar from somewhere on his person. "I'll get a car."

"Did I mention I'm a cop now?" said Emma.

He tossed it aside. "Uh, just kidding."

"How about we take the Jolly Rancher?" Gold, who wasn't about to let a little thing like imminent death deprive him of his role as puppetmaster, proposed. "It's the fastest ship in the realms, though not as fast as it would be if Hook hadn't pointlessly torched the magic sail."

"Go aboard the Jolly Rancher again?" Neal was hesitant. "I'm uneasy about this. Are there any creepy, omniscient children in this realm?"

"Just our son," Emma replied.

"Then I'll chance it." He reached into his locker and pulled out a captain's hat.

Mary Margaret and David sped up to the convent. "Mother Superior! Take a break from splitting up loving relationships and get out here; we have a problem!"

The nun came running down the front steps. "I sense a disturbance in the force."

"Then why didn't you warn us, instead of sitting around filing your nails and waiting for us to find out ourselves?" Mary Margaret demanded.

"God helps those who help themselves. I never have, mind you, but maybe He will," the former fairy replied indolently.

"Blue!" David exploded. "This is serious! Cora and Regina are after Gold's dagger!"

"What do I care? Cora would probably be a lot more benevolent toward me than Gold has ever been. He's really not hard to top in that respect."

Mary Margaret decided to try another tactic. "Help us stop them or I'll set Leroy on you!"

She whistled, and Leroy came bounding out of the bushes, pickaxe in hand. "Ooh, this is gonna be sweet!" he growled.

"Ah!" The Mother Superior caved. "Fine, I'll help you, just call him off!"

Stars overhead, little Snow White emerged from the palace and headed for the woods. "Excuse me, Your Highness," a nearby guard protested, "but I'm pretty sure it's against regulations to let the nine-year-old heir to the throne wander through the woods in the middle of the night without an escort."
Snow held up her cat o' nine tails. "Don't make me use this."

The guard gulped, taking a step back. "Carry on."

She made her way to the middle of the woods. "When you wish upon a star, not knowing what you're asking for, anything your heart desires, you'll live to rue!"

A tiny blue creature fluttered down to meet her. "Hello, Snow." She held out a plate. "Cookie?"

"No thank you, ma'am. I just need a cure for my mom. If she dies, I'll have no one left to raise me but Daddy, and he's always too high on happy pills to be much help."

"Oh believe me, I know," sighed the fairy wearily, "and I'm not unsympathetic to your plight. But unfortunately, cheating death is dark magic, forbidden to fairies."


"NO!" the fairy spluttered. "I mean, uh, no, you're a child. Rumple would probably hock you before you could even get a word out. You'd better let me handle this, after all." She produced a box and offered it to the girl.

Snow examined the contents quizzically. "The Black Flame Candle? What good will summoning a bunch of dead witches do?"

"No, it's not the Black Flame Candle; the Sanderson Sisters and I just go to the same chandler. This one will steal one person's life force and transfer it to another. All you have to do is hold it over your victim's heart."

"Sweet." Snow lit the candle and shoved it at the Blue Fairy's chest. Nothing happened. "Hey, it's not working. This thing is defective!"

The fairy's face flamed. "It is not! Just take it and get out! And remember to keep this a secret."

Snow broke into peals of laughter. "Hah! Yeah, right, good one!" Then she noticed the look on Blue's face. "Oh, you're serious?"

Neal took out his cellphone and sent a text. "Who are you talking to?" Emma asked.

Neal bristled. "Hey, what's with the third degree?! I'm not on trial, here!"

"Jeez, the mysterious act again. I don't know how I didn't figure out you and Gold were related sooner." Emma grumbled. "So, where did you learn to captain a pirate ship?"

"Many centuries ago, I bonded with Hook. Something I can't recommend, by the way." Neal held up his wrists, displaying a collection of rope scars.

"I choose not to notice that," said Emma, still thumbing through the script she'd taken off Hook.

Neal glanced back at his phone. "Ah, our ride is downstairs. I'd better go meet her—uh, it."

"You want me to come with you?"

"No!" Neal screamed. "Uh, I mean, no, thank you."
"Are you sure? You're looking a little unbalanced."

"Get away from me or I'll have my dad Stupefy you!" he threatened, fleeing.

Henry walked in, Emma's phone in hand. "Hey, Emma, you need to see this message."

"Who do you think you are, August?" she snapped. "Just tell me."

"No, I'm still not speaking to you."

Emma snatched the phone irritably. "Uh oh. Bad news, Gold. The worst imaginable."

"Cora's met Belle and they're swapping anecdotes about how I am in the sack?!!" Gold yelped. He buried his face in his hands miserably. "Oh gods, I've changed my mind! Just let me die!"

"Ew, no. Cora's teamed up with Regina and they're after your dagger."

"I knew it was a mistake, showing her that thing," Gold lamented sheepishly. "I just wanted to impress her, and unholy artifacts of the blackest magic seem to be the only way to do that. Well, no matter. I hid it at the home of the only person I trust. She'll never think to look there. Not in a million years!" He tried to giggle evilly, but it turned into a strangled wheeze.

"Are you delirious or something?" Emma smacked him upside the head with his own cane. "Come on, Gold, you've got to tell David and Mary Margaret where it is so that they can keep it safe. I know you've got trust issues, but if you can't have faith in your estranged son's estranged baby mama's estranged parents, who can you have faith in?"

David, Mary Margaret, and the Mother Superior stood out in front of the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, held back by the protection spell Gold had cast in order to keep Johanna from coming back for more of his loot while he was away. "Prepare to be bippity boppity Blue-ed!" the fairy cried, waving her magic wand. "Or not," she amended, spell fizzling.

"Well, you're as useless as ever," David grumbled. "Come on, Eminem. Let's go find Sidney and see if he can magic his way through it. Or at least let him the hell out of that basement, already."

"Wait," said Mary Margaret. "Mother Superior, I remember a time many years ago, when for one brief, shining moment, you weren't useless. Could you do that again?"

The Blue Fairy looked genuinely perplexed. "What on Earth are you talking about? I've always been useless and always will be. It's in my employment contract."

Mary Margaret was getting impatient. "Look, if you're still trying to keep it a secret, you're wasting your time. I spilled the beans, in front of a room full of people, about three hours after you told me not to. You know what this is about. You offered me a viable solution to a personal problem, and displayed honest sympathy for my dilemma, instead of getting all judgmental like you usually do—"

The former fairy slapped her. "How dare you accuse me of such a heinous act!"

Luckily, a ring from David's phone interrupted them before a full-blown catfight could break out. "Hey Emma. He told you where it was? How did you manage that? You used the Charming Family Charm? And your chainsaw?" He smiled proudly. "That's my girl."

Little Snow ran to her mother's bedside. "Mother, I've done something terrible! First of all, I tripped
and hit my head on the way in here, and I think I might have damaged the part of my brain that's responsible for keeping secrets. Which brings us to my second point: I could have saved your life by taking some random peasant's, but I chose not to!"

"What?" Eva cried indignantly. "This is an outrage, I'm ten times as important as…" Then she noticed the Blue Fairy hovering near her head, wand raised threateningly. "Uh, I mean, I'm so very proud of you. Selflessness is the greatest of all virtues." With a nod of satisfaction, the fairy fluttered away.

Snow was too busy crying to notice the exchange. "But now you're going to die, and I already fired Dr. Frankenstein!"

"Eh, death won't be so bad. At least I won't have to sit through any more painfully-awkward tea parties with Cora. Hey, speaking of Cora, can you pass me another of those double-fudge cookies she made? Those things are to die for." Snow passed her a cookie, and she took a huge bite. "Ah, nuts!" she gasped, keeling over dead.

The little princess broke down in tears, and Johanna came forward to embrace her. "There there, dear. Johanna will take care of you now, since your father seems unwilling to trouble himself with such things lately."

David and Mary Margaret scaled the clock tower and snatched Gold's dagger from behind one of the hands on the clock. "We did it! We're the most powerful people in Storybrooke!" David cried happily. "Hey, as our first command, let's force Gold to pick his nose, then take pictures to post on the internet!" The quasi-prince and his queen giggled.

Cora energized into the tower, Regina close behind her. "Hey Snow. You're looking a good deal edgier than the last time I saw you."

"Thanks for noticing, but flattery won't get you the dagger."

"I don't need flattery to get the dagger." Cora punched her and snatched it. "See?"

The tiny woman grabbed helplessly as she held it out of reach. "Hey, come on, you're being a very bad sport!"

"Fine, we'll do this the traditional way." Regina handed the dagger back, then summoned Johanna into the tower and ripped out her heart. "Fall in line, or your never-before-seen mother-figure gets it!"

Clad in black, Snow glumly allowed Johanna to help her into her tiara. "You're making me bury my mom on my birthday?" The girl shook her head in disbelief. "What's next, are you going to make me strangle some puppies, just to make the day complete?"

"No, I know you're busy, so I rescheduled that for tomorrow," Johanna informed her cheerfully. "Now, get out and lead the mourning—your daddy's still too plastered to do it himself, and apparently, none of your other relatives cared enough to spare you the burden."

"This family sucks," Snow grumbled. "You know what it needs? Some witches to jazz it up a little."

She headed into the vaguely Catholic structure hosting the funeral and placed a very subtle snowdrop on her mother's chest. "Bye, Mom. Tell my late goldfish I said 'hey.'" The princess turned to face the altar and mourned as hard as she could, red-faced and straining with the effort.
Several hours later, her subjects were getting a little creeped-out by this display, so they got up and left. Johanna came over and hoisted Snow to her feet. "Come on, honey. Let's get out of here before you give yourself an aneurysm."

"But shouldn't someone bury Mom first?"

"Eh, what's the point? Frankenstein will dig her up eventually anyhow."

As their footsteps died away, the Blue Fairy fluttered in and morphed into Cora. "Ugh, I hate wearing stuff that's not black. It makes me feel so…clean." She shuddered, approaching the corpse. "Hey, Eva. You're not so tough without your high heels, are ya?" The witch smirked. "You raised your daughter well. Mine hates me, just because I unrepentantly slaughtered one or two of her loved ones. Brat. But she's all I've got, so I'm giving her your throne and destroying your child's soul anyway." She laughed evilly. "No one trips Cora and lives! NO ONE!" She placed a kiss on the dead woman's lips because reasons.

A janitor walked in carrying a mop; his jaw dropping when he saw them. "Uh, if you two are in the middle of hate sex, I can come back later," he offered uncomfortably.

"No, that won't be necessary. I'll leave the necrophilia to Prince Charming."

"Now, Regina, Cora," Mary Margaret began, "I know we've had our differences, but surely you'd never harm an innocent in the pursuit of power."

Johanna facepalmed. "Well, I'm doomed."

David suddenly remembered that guns existed and he had one, so he reached for his holster. "Look out, Mom!" Regina warned instead of simply zapping David with her mighty powers, possibly realizing, on some subconscious level, that she'd be better off letting him shoot the old witch.

Cora, being far less complex than her daughter, zapped David with her mighty powers. "Nice try, honeymuffin."

"Just leave me, Snow," Johanna interjected. "I was destined to die the moment I formed a meaningful relationship with you. I'm so tired of fighting it." Regina squeezed her heart menacingly, and she yelped in pain. "Hey, stop that, I have arrhythmia!"

Cora glanced at her watch impatiently. "Look, my daughter may enjoy taunting her prey, making bad puns, and all that other traditional supervillain crap, but I consider myself above such things. Quit dragging this out and hand over the dagger." She conjured up a cookie jar. "And help yourself to one of these, while you're at it."

"Wait a minute!" Mary Margaret cried. "The Blue Fairy offered me cookies, too! Oh my gosh, and the reason she told me to keep the candle incident a secret—"

"Nice job with that, by the way," Cora sneered.

Mary Margaret ignored her. "…was because it was really you in disguise!" She snatched a cookie from the proffered jar. "And are these double-fudge?"

"With cyanide chips," Cora confirmed.

"You killed my mother?!"
"Hey, the woman once tripped me," the elder evil queen defended haughtily. "What was I supposed to do, take it in stride and get on with my life?"

"That's the weakest motive for murder I've ever heard in my life, and I've heard hers," Mary Margaret scoffed, indicating Regina.

"Okay, I also wanted Regina to be queen, in case the name hasn't made that painfully obvious already," Cora admitted.

"Wait, what?" said Regina, giving her mom a double-take. "Eh, screw it; it's already been established that I'm never going to turn on you, no matter how much you may deserve it." She turned back to her stepdaughter. "Gimme the freaking dagger."

"Why should I?"

"As your mom, I forbid you to play with knives."

Mary Margaret looked to David helplessly. "She's got me there." She tossed the kris to the ground, and Cora summoned it into her hand. Mary Margaret frowned. "If you knew how to do that, why didn't you just summon it out of my hand and save us all this drama?"

"Hey, you're the one who wanted us to be good sports about this." Regina shoved Johanna's heart back into her chest and shoved her at them. "Here you go."

As they ran to embrace her, Cora shoved her out the window. "Just kidding."

"No, not Mother Figure Number Three!" Mary Margaret wailed in despair.

"Bwa hah hah!" Regina laughed evilly. "You can now tell Dr. Hopper I've officially quit rehab!"

Mary Margaret wept bitter tears as her stepmom and grandma fled. "You two are so off my Christmas card list for this!"

Mother and daughter Apparated back to the Mayoral Lair, the former plopping down at Regina's desk. The younger evil queen frowned. "Mom, are you usurping me?"

"No, of course not. What kind of sick, twisted mom does that?"

Regina hit her with the Glare of Evil. "Hey, we're talking about your mistakes right now. Why didn't you ever tell me that the whole reason I'm queen is because some brat tripped you sixty years ago?"

"Actually, the whole reason you're queen is because I spooked Snow's horse that day at the stables."

The younger evil queen blinked. "Um, yes, I believe I already figured that out, and told you so, the day after it happened. Don't change the subject."

"What do you care, anyway? I thought you just said you were done with rehab, and ready to put the 'Evil' back in Evil Queen."

"I care because you've got Rumplestiltskin's dagger." She nodded at the kris on the desk. "And if that thing can turn a pathetic, sniveling wimp into the monstrosity that is Gold, I don't even want to think about what it's going to do to you. You're scary enough already. And I've intermittently got a son to think of."

"Relax, honey. All I care about is what's best for Cory."
Emma followed Neal down the street, toward their borrowed car. "So, now that Hook has tried to murder me, Aurora, Mulan, my mother, Belle, Archie and your father, all in the space of about a week, do you think maybe I should take him to jail?"

"Nah, I'm sure he's learned his lesson this time."

"Good enough for me. So tell me, why are you trying so hard to save your father? Did his fangirls threaten you or something?"

"Nah, I suddenly remembered how he charged into a burning building, sold his soul, and fought a horde of ogres for me," Neal replied.

"Does that mean you forgive him?"

"Not yet, I have to leave some character development open for next season."

"Well, it'll be nice to have you in Storybrooke. You can crash in my bed, if you want. Er, to be closer to Henry, of course."

"That's okay, I don't want to put you out."

"No trouble. We can share," Emma offered coyly. "It's not even illegal anymore."

Neal fanned himself, eyes smoldering. "Well, when you put it like that—"

Tamara walked over. "Hey, baby."

"—When you put it like that, Tamara and I are happily engaged," Neal finished hastily.

"Yeah, right, sure we are." Tamara smeared some concealer on a suspicious collection of love bites. "Nice to finally meet you, Princess Em—I mean, who's your friend, Neal?"

"I didn't touch her!" Neal screamed. "I swear I didn't touch her!"

"Oh Lord, I almost pulled a Mary Margaret Blanchard." Emma facepalmed. "Could this day get any worse?"

David and his wife stood in the graveyard, before a mound of freshly-turned earth. "It was a beautiful service. I only wish we could have afforded an actual headstone, instead of more unsubtle snowdrops. Damn this civil servant's salary!" he cried, shaking a fist at the sky.

Mary Margaret was inconsolable. "All my life, I've held fast to the principles of selflessness my mother reluctantly taught me, and look what it's gotten me. A bad haircut, a baby that's older than I am, and a novel-length list of dead extras."

David took his wife in his arms. "Comfort mode."

She pushed him away. "The Charming Family Charm can't solve every problem, honeymuffin. I mean, I made the right decision by sparing Regina's life—"
David pointed down. "The grave disagrees with you."

"Exactly! It's time to stop this stupid catch-and-release game we've been playing for the past sixty years and just kill the damn psychos, already."
A younger, slightly less diabolical Cora arrived home to find her father passed out drunk, as usual. "Dad, you're more useless than the Blue Fairy and the Genie of Agrabah put together!"

"If you don't like it, then why don't you move out?" her father slurred. "You've got to be at least thirty years old."

"I'm afraid leaving an abusive parent is illegal in our universe, unless you're a plucky little boy descended from the Dark One," Cora informed him sadly, piling flour sacks into a wheelbarrow. "Which reminds me, if my boyfriend Jiminy drops by, tell him I've gone to deliver the flour, but I'll be back in plenty of time for our puppet show date."

Cora arrived at the palace and began unloading the flour sacks. "This job sucks. There's not nearly enough violence involved."

"Allow me to rectify that!" said Princess Eva, tripping her as she walked past.

"Hey! What the hell was that for?" Cora spluttered, scrambling to her feet.

"Injuring servants is a hobby of mine, and all mine have quit, for some unknown reason. So I thought I'd borrow one of his to hone my skills on," Eva replied, indicating King Xavier.

"Sounds perfectly reasonable to me," Xavier said cheerfully. "Now apologize to Princess Eva."

"For what?" Cora asked incredulously.

"You forgot to say, 'Thank you, Your Highness, may I have another?'"

"Do you always treat your subjects like this?"

"Yes, he does," the king's valet, who was badly bruised and missing a number of body parts, replied for him.

Cora arched an eyebrow quizzically. "Does the word 'revolution' mean anything to you, Your Majesty?"

"Just cave in immediately and do as you're told," a younger, hotter, inexplicably taller Henry the First urged her. "I always have."

"Really?" Cora looked utterly dazzled. "I think I'm in love."

Eva tapped her foot impatiently. "Excuse me, but my ego hasn't been stroked in several seconds."

"You heard the lady," Xavier prodded. "Apologize, or I won't let you work for me anymore."

"Fine, then take this job and shove it." She dumped the flour on the floor and started to leave.

Henry the First grabbed her by the arm. "But if you quit, we'll never get another chance to flirt!" he protested.

Cora checked him out for a moment, then turned to Eva. "Complaint withdrawn. I beg your pardon, Your Highness."
Henry was standing at the helm of the Jolly Rancher, steering under his father's watchful eye. "Hey Dad, we've both picked up the art of sailing remarkably quickly. Does that mean we're somehow related to the sea god Poseidon?"

Neal just groaned. "Please, son, don't give the writers any ideas."

Belowdecks, Emma was tending Gold's wounds. "Why are you being so nice to me? To spite Neal?" he asked curiously.

"No, I'm helping you because, apparently, allowing a serial murderer who threatens the lives of one's whole family to die is now considered evil." The savior shrugged helplessly. "I don't make the rules, but as protagonist, I'm obligated to follow them."

"You do realize that saving my life is probably going to doom pretty much everyone, right?"

"Yeah, probably, but you're my estranged son's estranged father's estranged father, and such an intimate familial tie far outweighs my duty to the town full of innocent people I've sworn to protect."

Back in Storybrooke, David was on his cellphone with Mary Margaret. "According to Emma, this wound is so bad that even kissing probably couldn't cure it."

Mary Margaret gasped. "But kissing cures everything!"

"Not this time, baby. They're on their way back here to cure him."

"Er…why?"

"Because he's distantly related to us now, and nepotism is stronger than hate or logic."

"Well, I guess it's as good a reason as any. Just let them know that wicked woman has the knife, and will probably be descending on them with her army of playing cards any minute now."

At the Mayoral Lair, Cora knocked the speaker she'd been eavesdropping on them with to the floor. "Cora SMASH!"

Regina gaped at her. "Mom, are you…angry?"

"Yes."

"But that's an emotion."

"Hey, I have every right to be mad! That magic box called me wicked! And I'm not wicked; I'm evil. There's a big difference, as you'll learn in the not-too-distant future."

"It's not a magic box. It's a wiretap."

"How am I supposed to know that? And furthermore, how do you? It's not like you have a cursed persona to fall back on." Cora brushed the question aside. "Eh, you can handwave that later. Right now, we've got bigger problems to worry about. Like Rumplestiltskin and his giant brain."
"But he's injured. And physically handicapped. And crippingly depressed. And no longer magical, apparently." Regina frowned. "Come to think of it, even if we can enslave him, how much help is he going to actually be?"

Cora glanced down at the dagger, and found the Dark One's name fading. "Aw, nuts, he's going to die before I even get the chance to score!"

"I've asked you a hundred times not to say stuff like that in front of me."

"Sorry, pumpkin. The point is, since he's dying, I'll have to become the Dark One. If I do that, there's nothing I won't be able to do. Unless somebody pokes me with a hook. Then I'm screwed." Cora turned to admire herself in one of Regina's many mirrors. "I'm going to miss these gorgeous teeth, but it'll be a small price to pay for unlimited power."

"Mother!"

"Oh, and my daughter's happiness," Cora added absently.

The younger evil queen sighed. "Mom, I'm not stupid. I thought I maybe could pretend, ignorance being bliss and all, but I can't. You don't care about Henry, at all! You're just trying to steal Gold's power."

"Relax, honey, I'm just trying to protect you."

"I appreciate the sentiment, but last time you tried to protect me, I ended up with a dead fiance and a borderline-abusive, mildly perverted husband."

"Hey, don't make me sing 'Mother Knows Best', young lady!"

At the king's palace, Xavier was holding a masquerade ball to honor, or at least insult less than usual, his son Henry. While an intruder, who was dressed as the Red Death and ranting about some show called Don Juan Triumphant, had the rest of the guests distracted, Cora snuck in and swiped a mask.

"I hate these slimy bastards so much. Why the hell am I risking life and limb for the pleasure of their company?"

Henry the First strutted over, dressed as a slab of meat. "Yo."

"Oh, right. The hottie." She looked him over. "What's with the costume?"

"My dad gave me the choice between wearing this, or a thong and a bottle of hot oil." The prince sighed. "It seemed like the lesser of two evils."

"So all these women are here to buy your hand in marriage?"

"Yeah, but if you can't afford marriage, I'm authorized to offer you five minutes in the coat closet for just three easy payments of nineteen ninety-nine." King Xavier walked by, surreptitiously elbowing his son. "I also accept Visa, Discover, and travelers' checks," Prince Henry added reluctantly.

"Er, how about a dance?" Cora suggested uneasily.

"Okay, but if you're planning on feeling me up, there's a fee for that." He led her out onto the dance floor. "So what brings you here?"

"My fairy godmother sent me in a carriage made out of pumpkins."
Henry the First laughed his head off. "Yeah, right, good one!"

"Thanks, I try," Cora demurred.

"Excuse me, son, but I've noticed that you're having fun, and I've come to put a stop to it." King Xavier shoved the prince aside. "Get back out there and show some skin, damn it!" He fell into step with Cora. "And as for you, I thought I told you to ditch the self-respect!"

"You've got a lot of nerve, talking to me about self-respect. You're prostituting your own child for wealth and power. Why, I wouldn't be caught dead doing something so vile!" Cora scoffed.

"Cut me some slack, it's been a real strain on the treasury lately, putting down all the revolutions that I've incited with my undisguised hatred of my subjects. Speaking of which, drop dead, worthless slave."

"I'm not worthless. I can grind grain into meal, which is one more job skill than you'll ever have, you lazy old pimp."

The king yawned. "Bor-ring."

"Uh, I can eat with chopsticks?"

"No you can't, that's physically impossible."

"I've gone my entire life without whoring a loved one?"

The king was still not impressed. "Wait a few years."

"Okay, how about this? I can spin straw into gold."

"Yeah right, then prove it."

She stuck out her tongue. "Make me."

"All right." He whistled. "Guards, take her to the tower!"

"Damn, still a peasant," she cursed under her breath. "I keep forgetting."

David, Mary Margaret and Ruby were waiting at the docks when the Jolly Rancher pulled up. "Are you okay?" Mary Margaret asked her daughter.

"Well, the love of my life is marrying another woman, my son hates me, and we're all about to die, but other than that, yeah, I'm cool. How are you?"

"The woman who raised me was just flung to her death before my very eyes, by the other woman who raised me, thanks for asking." She held up a large platter of Zoloft cupcakes. "Care to join me?"

"Oh hell, yes."

Meanwhile, the men of the Charmingstiltskin family were doing some catching up of their own. "Gramps," said Henry to David, "I'd like you to meet my dad. And put down the sword—you're scaring him."

"Henry, he knocked up my daughter, abandoned her, and had her wrongfully imprisoned!"
"But just look at that face. How can you possibly stay mad at a face like that?" Henry prodded Neal, who shyly flashed his patented Little Orphan Bae smile.

"He's so...charming," a dazzled David breathed. "That settles it. This guy was born to be one of us." He clapped Neal on the back. "Welcome to the family, son."

"Ahem," said Gold. "I'm still dying over here, if anyone cares."

"Sorry," said David. "Is Cora working her magic remote on you yet?"

"No, you're all alive and my pants are still on."

Mary Margaret shuddered. "And for either of those things to change would be an unspeakable horror." She took up her bow and quiver. "Time for me to do what I do best."

"Please don't, honey," David begged. "My doctor says if I throw myself in front of any more of your arrows, I could lose my arm."

"David, Cora murdered my mother in cold blood, and is about to do the same thing to us and everyone we hold dear. What are we supposed to do, yell at her and take away her Xbox?"

"No, I'm okay with you killing her. I just don't want you killing her in vengeance."

"Oh, swell. I'll kill her out of affection and gentle good humor, then," Mary Margaret grumbled.

Emma went over to Gold and offered him one of her cupcakes. "Are you okay?"

"Can we all please stop asking each other that? I think it's been established that absolutely no one in this family is okay right now." He collapsed into the back of David's truck. "Now take me back to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors. Maybe we'll get lucky and Cora will be too frightened of the puppets to come in after us."

"Can I come?" Henry asked.

"No, you'd only uncover the villains secrets, unravel their schemes, and reunite us with our loved ones some more," Emma scoffed. "You'll be much safer in the clutches of this werewolf known for dabbling in cannibalism."

"Hey, I only did that a couple of times," Ruby protested, leading the boy to her car.

Locked in her tower full of straw for the night, Cora nervously peeked out the window. "Damn it, where's Abu when you need him?"

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "You'll never get out that way, dearie. I mean, I guess there's always a chance that, before you hit the ground, a fairy will happen to fly by with extra fairy dust that she'll be willing to sprinkle on you. But it's a pretty slim one."

"Who the hell are you?"

"A cackling, leering green monster. I'm sure there's nothing suspicious about that?"

"Of course not." She offered him her hand. "Name's Cora."

"Hey, that's the Greek name for the goddess Persephone. Does that mean you're romantically attracted to dark, brooding villains, too?" He batted his eyelashes coyly.
"Dude, I'm about to die," she reminded him. "I'm not really in the mood right now."

"Oh, right. My evil plan," he said absently, sitting down at the wheel.

"Which evil plan is that?"

"Number #2,302,912," he replied nonchalantly. "You see, in the first of many, many, many coincidences, I just happen to know how to spin straw into gold."

"No you don't. You're probably just saying that to impress me."

"Well, it's actually a little of both," he admitted, spinning a strand of gold and holding it out for her perusal. "Is it working?"

She smiled coyly. "Yeah. So, what do you want in return for helping me? Sex?"

"No."

"Damn."

"I want your child."

"I'm flattered, but not interested," said Cora, playing hard-to-get.

Rumplestiltskin giggled. "That's a great line. Mind if I borrow it sometime?"

"Knock yourself out. So, what do you want with my child?"

"To warp and abuse her."

"Aw, but I wanted to be the one to do that!" Cora whined.

"Take it or leave it."

Cora considered the offer. "And, gold aside, you can really spin an entire room full of fibers into thread in one night? Do you have powers of super-speed you're not telling me about?"

"Yep."

"Cool! Can you teach me that? Oh, and the gold trick, too?"

"Well, on one hand, giving my secrets away like this could destabilize the balance of power in this dimension and unravel my entire life's work." His eyes traveled down her body. "But on the other hand, you're sexy." He genuflected. "Call me Rumplestiltskin. Or if you can't pronounce that, I also answer to 'hot stuff.'"

Cora burst out laughing. "Your name is 'Cute Little Gimpy Noisy Man'?! I can't call that out in the throes of passion! I'll be the laughingstock of the entire dimension!" Her eyes traveled down his body. "But on the other hand, you've got leather pants.

At the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, the Charmings settled Gold on the bed he kept at his workplace to facilitate the creation of smutfics. Emma walked in, holding an empty jar. "What the hell did you make me dig up this empty jar for? Are we going to bludgeon Regina to death with it?" she inquired hopefully.
"No, there's invisible chalk in it. Emma, I want you to draw a line in the front doorway with it. Bae, I want you to get the rosary beads out of the display case and pray that the evil queens don't realize there's a back door and a bunch of windows they can easily use to get around it."

Neal and Emma obediently went into the next room together, David following to make sure another grandchild wouldn't ensue. "Da-ad, you're embarrassing me!" Emma whined.

Mr. Gold summoned the last of his strength to giggle evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. Mary Margaret sighed. "All right, spit it out. What evil scheme are you going to drag me into this time?" Gold handed her Cora's citronkilla candle. "How did you get this?"

"The same way I got everyone else's possessions."

"...Which is?"

"None of your business."

Emma and Neal were kneeling on the floor of Gold's front room; the former miming with all her might, the latter clasping his hands and bowing his head. Setting his beads aside, he cracked one eye. "So...you have magical superpowers because your parents loved each other? How the hell does that work?"

The savior rolled her eyes. "You don't get to make jabs about other people's family trees. You're the two-hundred-year-old scion of an interdimensional dynasty of pirates and witches."

"I choose to take that comment as an expression of jealousy toward Tamara."

"...Huh?"

David hauled the two lovebirds apart. "Neal, I really want this relationship to work, so I think you should stop talking to her until you can start making sense." He placed an arm around the older man's shoulders. "Come on, son, I'll give you a crash course in the Charming Family Charm."

"How are you doing?" Mary Margaret asked Gold, looking fearful of the answer.

"I thought we all agreed not to ask each other that question anymore," the pawnbroker growled. "If, for some unfathomable reason, you want to save me, you'll have to use the candle."

"I wouldn't use this candle to save my own mother!"

"It's a damn good thing, too. If you'd grown up around her influence, you'd probably be a real jerk."

"Shut up!" she snapped. "I'm not going to sacrifice Cora's life for yours! Killing, under any circumstances, is evil!"

"Then why did you embark on a career as a freaking warrior?"

"That was completely different. The guys I killed back home didn't have names."

Gold was getting annoyed. "Look, this is in your best interest. If I die, you'll have no one to go to for advice every week."

Mary Margaret thought for a moment. "I could steal Cora's heart, enslave her, and then go to her for advice when I needed it."
"You've got to be kidding." Gold rolled his eyes. "The first rule of the fantasy genre is that people enslaved by magic always end up breaking free of their chains. Remember Graham?"

"Who?"

He facepalmed. "Then save me for Henry's sake. After all, I'm his dear…" Gold cringed. "Pop-Pop."

Luckily, Emma walked in before he could demean himself any further. "I drew the invisible line…I think. What now?"

"You're going to cast a protection spell."

"How?"

"I'll show you, but you have to sit in my lap and let me grope you first." David, Mary Margaret, Emma, and Neal all drew their weapons on him. "What? It's a legitimate technique; I do it with all my students."

Emma cocked her pistol menacingly. "Not this time, old man."

Gold pouted. "Fine, then try letting your emotions guide you instead."

Emma holstered the gun and closed her eyes. "Whoa. I think I just took a level in wizard."

Cora attempted to glare a clump of errant straw into submission, but she just didn't have her daughter's talent. "This job isn't violent enough for me, either."

"I know the feeling. Just close your eyes and think about murder, dearie," Rumplestiltskin advised.

"You're a complete sicko." Cora fanned herself. "I love that in a man. Or whatever the hell you are."

"Thanks. Now, back to the straw. I'll show you how to do it, but you have to sit in my lap and let me grope you first."

"Ooh, okay!" Cora jumped into his lap, and plastered her lips against his.

The imp gaped at her. "Wow. That line doesn't usually work." He spun her back around to face the wheel. "Okay, you've got to survive now. You're the first hope I've had of scoring in two hundred years."

Cora placed her hands on the wheel and began to spin. "Let's see, murder…murder…well, I guess I could start by killing the brat who destroyed my dignity and set this whole terrible course of events in action. Or maybe I should give her the chance to reproduce first, so that I can have the sadistic pleasure of tormenting some innocent children."

"Your bloodlust is so sexy when it's directed at people who aren't me," the Dark One trilled happily. "Plus, it seems to be saving your life." He nodded at a length of gold thread hanging off of the spindle.

In front of a crowd the next day, Cora presented Xavier with a strand of gold. "You're welcome."

The king gaped at her in disbelief. "But you're a commoner. Commoners aren't supposed to know how to do anything except grovel."
"You're welcome." The king didn't take the hint. "Nice social skills your parents taught you, Your Majesty," Cora sneered, tapping her foot impatiently. "Can I have my sexy yes-man now?"

"Fine, whatever." Xavier shoved Henry the First at her. "I've never loved him—someone may as well give it a try."

Henry knelt. "Cora, will you do me the honor of accepting my hand in marriage?"

Cora glanced over at Rumplestiltskin, who was wearing his Clark Kent hood. "That depends. Do you understand the fundamentals of human genetics; namely the inheritance patterns of green skin?"

"No."

"Then what the hell, I guess it could work." Shrugging, Cora accepted the proffered ring.

Outside the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, David was studying his wife, looking worried. "What's wrong with you? Is Gold being his usual disturbing self?"

"Well, yeah, but I'm pretty sure it was unintentional this time."

David hugged her. "Comfort mode."

She melted like a witch under a bucketful of water. "Gods, I love this man." Then a tremor ran through the shop. "Aw, nuts, is Henry down in the mines again?"

Outside, Cora and Regina conjured up a fireball, blasted through Baby's First Protection Spell, and barged in, as usual. Inside the shop, they found Emma, David, and Neal armed with swords, because Regina had been smart enough to enact a set of very strict gun control laws before she came over. "Regina, you can't seriously be thinking of killing Gold, after all he's done for you? What about the time when he set you up for attempted murd…uh, or the time he talked you into murdering your… uh…" The savior sighed. "Okay, I've got nothing, but he's distantly related to me now, so I've still got to defend him."

"Shut up, Swan, I hate your guts!" Regina snarled, then turned to David. "Yours too!" Then she turned to Neal. "I have no idea who you are or what you're doing here, but yours too!"

"Times! I have to go to the bathroom!" Mary Margaret blurted, darting out the back door.

Cora glanced at her daughter. "Hey, do you think maybe one of us should go after her?"

"Nah, I'm sure she doesn't bear us any ill will," Regina replied dismissively, tossing a fireball at the remaining Charmingstiltskins.

David swatted it aside with his sword. "Why do you people keep using that trick on us? It never works."

"It's the only spell the special effects team knows how to animate," Regina explained sadly. Then she perked up. "Say, I know! I could do a push spell—those are nice and cheap." She magicked David out the front door and slammed it behind him.

Outside, David fiddled with the lock inexpertly. "Oh, if only she'd thrown Neal out here with me," the quasi-prince lamented.

Cora, who apparently wasn't as creative as they'd been led to believe, used the same spell on Emma.
"Hey!" Neal barked indignantly. "No one hurts Emma but me, and maybe August, if he feels like it!"

He ran at her with his sword, and Cora evaporated into a puff of dark smoke. Regina gaped at her mother. "Wow, Mom, is your biological mother the Smoke Monster or something?"

"Oh, probably," Cora replied. She lunged for the dagger she'd dropped, instead of just summoning it into her hand again, because she'd used up all her mana points on the smoke trick.

Emma suddenly remembered that she was in the evil lair of a supervillain, and decided to make use of one of the many dangerous objects in it, holding a knife to Regina's throat. Neal smirked victoriously at Cora. "So what's it gonna be? The all-powerful dagger, or your only child?" He crossed his fingers and started chanting under his breath, "Please be a better parent than mine, please be a better parent than mine, please be a better parent than mine…"

"Sorry to disappoint you," said Cora, gulping a mana potion and summoning the dagger.

Fed up, Emma decided to kick it old school. "Emma SMASH!" she roared, shoving Evil Queen #2 at Evil Queen #1 and whacking them both over the head with her chainsaw. "Quick, Neal, I've got the invisible chalk…I think. Let's get back to your dad!"

Neal folded his arms stubbornly, digging his heels in. "No, I'm still not speaking to him."

"Oh, for the love of Aslan!" Emma grabbed her alleged ex by the ear and dragged him to safety. "Men," she grumbled, scribbling another magic line in the doorway.

"Oh, brilliant strategy. It certainly worked well the first time," Cora sneered, pointing back at the front door. "Regina! Blast down this barrier so that I can smack some sense into their heads before I kill them!" The elder evil queen paused. "Dear gods, is something…tugging at my heartstrings?"

"No, that can't be," Regina scoffed. "Your heart is in a locked strongbox in a locked room in a locked vault."

"…Locked?"

"You forgot to lock all of them? And you have the nerve to call yourself an evil genius?" Regina facepalmed.

Cora smacked her. "Just go get my heart back. Without it, I'm just the 'The Queen', and that's your title." As Regina fled, Cora eyed the barrier in her path derisively. "Hiding's beneath you, Rumple."

"Just like you used to be, baby!" Gold wolf-whistled back at her.

"Oh, that does it! You're toast, old man!"

At King Xavier's castle, Cora was trying on her wedding gown. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the bitterest witch of all?"

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I am, of course, but you're a pretty close second, dearie." He smooched her, and to the relief of Rumbelle shippers everywhere, remained green.

"Mm, adultery is the best," Cora sighed happily. "You know, I've been thinking about my new trophy husband. I thought I wanted to be a princess, but princess have to sing and frolic all the time, which makes me violently ill. I think I'd rather be Mrs. Stiltskin."
"Are you blind or something? I'm green, and my teeth are covered in mold, and I can't seem to get rid of this stupid perm."

"I don't care. I love you for what's inside you."

Rumplestiltskin raised his eyebrows. "You should really leave that to Belle. It's not at all your style."

"Come on, Rumple!" Cora whined. "I don't want to spend the rest of my life with Henry—what if someday he spontaneously shrinks by over a foot, gains a hundred pounds, and loses all his hair?"

"I wouldn't wish such a fate on anyone," Rumplestiltskin admitted. "All right, how about a new deal?"

"The conservatives won't like it, but I'm listening."

"What if, instead of owing me some random firstborn child, you owe me my own child?"

Rumplestiltskin glanced around, puzzled. "What was that noise?"

"Just the Evil Regals and the Dearies simultaneously crying out in terror," Cora replied dismissively. "Pay them no mind. But don't you already have a child of your own?"

"Yeah, but by the time I find him, he probably won't be cute anymore."

"Fair enough. Count me in," Cora agreed. "There's just one thing."

"Fine, fine, I get it. If we have a boy, his name will be Cory," Rumplestiltskin conceded.

"No. Well, yes, but I also want you to teach me how to rip out King Xavier's heart and show it to him before I kill him."

Rumplestiltskin hesitated. "I'll make you a deal. I'll teach you the move, but only if you promise not to use it on me."

"Sure. Unless, of course, I decide I want to someday."

"Good enough. Now, how about a kiss?"

Cora handed him a toothbrush. "How about a dental check-up?"

Over at the graveyard, Mary Margaret got out a chainsaw she'd stolen from her daughter's closet and prepared to cut through the lock on the front door of Regina's vault. However, the only defense she found was a sign hung from the doorknob, which read, *Keep Out.* "I never thought I'd say this, but screw the honor system!" She took it off, flung it aside, and let herself in. She began rifling through her stepmom's possessions. "Let's see...pill stash...porno stash...cider stash...old paperwork..."

Examining an old birth certificate, Mary Margaret giggled. "Oh my gods, her real name is Grimhilde?! Heh, that could come in handy." She tucked the paper into her pocket for later, then continued her search.

In Gold's back room, Emma's phone began ringing, and she snatched it up irritably. "For the last time, Leroy, I don't want to buy any candles!

"No, Emma, it's me, Daddy," David explained, dragging his battered body out of a prince-shaped hole in the sidewalk. "Are you and Mommy kicking butt, as usual, or do I need to get in comfort mode?"
"Actually, Mary Margaret's not here."

"You're alone with Neal? Excellent. Tell him not to blow it. But where could your mother be?"

"How should I know? I thought finding her was your department?"

Back in the vault, Mary Margaret victoriously reached for an old shoebox containing Cora's heart. It was labeled Do Not Assassinate. "Weak, Grandma. Weak." She took the heart out. "Well, I guess I could just step on this thing, but it wouldn't be nearly as ironic." Having taken up smoking at some point, she took a cigarette lighter out of her pocket and lit the wick.

Cora found King Xavier going for a leisurely swim in his money bin. "Let me guess. You're a Republican, right?"

Xavier spat a stream of gold coins out of his mouth. "Cora? Are you in the mood to be degraded?"

"No."

"Then why the heck are you coming to me?"

"I have a confession to make. I don't love Henry."

"Good, because your love seems to have a really bad effect on people. No offense, but I've seen your boyfriend." The king shuddered. "Speaking of which, you should totally ditch that guy. Love is a terrible weakness, and nobody ships you two anyway."

Cora started running her hands over his chest, feeling around for his pulse. "Yep, you've got a heart, but it seems to be two sizes too small."

He glanced down at her hand quizzically. "Are you coming on to me? Not that I'm saying no or anything…"

Minutes later, Cora headed back to her room, heart in hand, and pulled the Dead Man's Chest out of her closet. "Who'd have thought I'd ever find a use for this thing?" she mused, tossing Davy Jones' heart aside and locking up the new one in its place.

In desperation, Cora picked up the chainsaw Emma had dropped outside the doorway and attacked the force field with it. "Cora SMASH!" The tool slammed back and hit her in the face. "Damn! Well, it was worth a try."

"It's getting weaker. She's going to get through," Neal lamented.

"Since when are you such a pessimist, Bae?" Gold groaned.

"Since puberty," his son replied.

"Well, get back in character! You're bringing me down!" Gold glanced sadly from Emma to Neal. "Dear gods, I seem to be the most optimistic person in this room right now. How sad is that?" He took a deep breath and tried to figure out what Henry would say in his place. "Well, maybe dying won't be so bad. This accursed power will finally pass from this world, and at least I'll never have to worry about running into my father again." The pawnbroker grimaced. "But this is getting rather dark. I think we're overdue for some fluff, here. Emma, hand me your phone. I need to talk to Belle."
"Who's Belle?" Neal asked her curiously.

"How the hell should I know? I've never even met her," said Emma, handing over her phone.

"She's my young, hot girlfriend," Gold explained as he dialed.

"Uh huh." Neal glanced around quizzically. "And, uh, is she here right now?"

"Shut up."

Belle, who was still hospitalized for acute nonconformity, picked up the phone. "Mr. Gold? As I screamed hysterically before, I don't remember you."

"I, and everyone within a ten-mile radius know, sweetheart," he gasped raggedly, "but I'm dying."

There was a long pause on the other end of the line. "If you're trying to get a pity date out of me, it's working."

"Don't interrupt me while I'm monologuing, dearie." He cleared his throat. "You are a hero, who saved your people, and some guy named Phil. Even more impressive, you somehow mustered enough courage to kiss me with those moldy black teeth of mine. That took some serious guts. You find the good in others, and when it's not there, you nag them until they learn to fake it. You make me want to go back to the best version of myself, and that's never happened before—"

"I love you, too, Papa," Neal interrupted sarcastically.

"I thought I told you to pipe down, boy," Gold snapped. "Anyway, Belle, when you look in the mirror, that's who you should see, unless that idiot Sidney gets himself cursed again." He made some kissing noises into the phone and hung it up.

"Wow," said Neal, taking his father's hand. "I think I just became a Rumbelle shipper."

Gold performed a feeble fist pump. "Aw, yeah. Another convert."

"But I'm still mad at you for throwing me down that portal."

"Would it help if I told you that I have a very well-justified phobia of magic beans and was probably not in my right mind at the time, and that I understand, firsthand, the pain of being abandoned by one's father?"

"Yes, it definitely would."

Gold coughed. "Well, I'm a little out of breath and I don't really feel like talking right now, so you're just going to have to suck it up."

Shoebox in hand, Mary Margaret was headed for the door, when Regina barged in, as usual. "Can't you read? That box says 'Do NOT Assassinate!'"

"I wasn't going to assassinate her," said Mary Margaret, who had been taking some lying classes from August, down at the Y. "I was going to give it to you."

"Why?"

"Because I have absolutely no sense of self-preservation."
Regina couldn't argue with that. "So what's the plan?"

"Well, if she had her heart back, she'd stop being so hung-up on marriages of alliance, and you could finally get a new boyfriend."

"Sold." Regina grabbed the heart and ran.

Rumplestiltskin was standing under a tree, trying to carve the words 'Rumple Luvs Cora' into its trunk. However, his mind was wandering, and he wound up writing 'pwns' in place of 'luvs'. He glanced over his shoulder. "There you are, baby! I was starting to worry you'd finally taken a good look at my face, and decided to run for the hills." He kissed her. "What's wrong? Did you forget something? Your shrunken head collection, maybe?"

"No, I'm dumping you."

"But why?" His eyes narrowed. "Did you meet a certain one-handed pirate recently?"

"No, it's quite simple. My power means more to me than you."

The Dark One pouted. "Reverse karma sucks." He made a feeble attempt at giggling evilly. "Well, you're not going to get away with this! I'm taking you to court! I demand the car, half the enchanted gold, and custody of your baby!"

"No dice, Rumple. That deal was for your own child, and any baby I have won't be yours. I'm on Ye Olde Pill," she informed him smugly, while Evil Regals and Dearies all over the world hugged each other in celebration.

David found his wife bawling on the steps of Regina's mausoleum, licking the frosting off a Zoloft cupcake in an attempt to dull her pain. "You found me," she sobbed.

"Did you ever doubt I would?"

"No, but I was kind of hoping I'd be wrong this once," she replied, unable to meet his eyes. "David, I've done something horrible! I tried to kill someone in self-preservation, and that's just not me!"

"You don't think so?" David raised an eyebrow. "But what about that time you flung me into a raging river full of jagged rocks?"

"Yeah, but that was killing to keep from being temporarily inconvenienced; not to save my life. It was a completely different situation."

Emma and Neal stood shoulder to shoulder in Cora's path, weapons raised. "Swanfire SMASH!" they roared.

"Not today, kids," said Cora, teleporting them over to Makeout Point. "There, that should keep them occupied for a good long while."

In a blatant attempt to win more fangirls, Gold lay sprawled on his bed, shirt agape, eyes lidded, panting heavily. Finally, he looked up at Cora. "I saw this meeting in a vision once."

Cora looked bored. "That cheesy old line didn't work on me when we were dating, and it's not going to work now."
"Fair enough," the pawnbroker coughed, checking his watch. "So, we've got about three minutes of airtime left. Plenty of time for you to tell me whether you ever really loved me or not."

"Of course I loved you. Have you even seen yourself in those leather pants?" She fanned herself weakly. "Now that you've got some decent teeth, I'd probably never be able to pry myself off you again, if I still had emotions." She started caressing him intimately. "Hey, this is where you're supposed to tell me you have a girlfriend."

"I'm a little out of breath, and don't really feel like talking right now, so she's just going to have to suck it up," said Gold, staring unsubtly down his ex's blouse.

"Stop flirting with me, it demeans us both." She raised the dagger to kill him, but was interrupted by Regina barging in, as usual.

"Catch!" the younger Evil Queen shouted, shoving the heart into her mother's chest.

Cora staggered back, gasping. "Gah! Compassion! It burns!"

Cora stood proudly before a crowd; her newborn daughter in one hand, and her husband's leash in the other. "Say hello to your future overlord, peasants!"

"She's pink!" Winging a quick prayer of thanks heavenward, Xavier addressed his daughter-in-law. "So, what's the kid's name? Grimhilde?"

"No, I'm not quite that heartless." She held the infant high, while in the background, the court bard broke into "Circle of Life." "Her name is Regina, for she shall one day be queen."

"Is that a threat?" asked the five people ahead of her in the line of succession.

"No, it's a promise. Bwa hah hah!"

Cora began giggling vapidly. "I wuv you, pumpkin!" She pinched her daughter's cheek. "Wanna go bake some cookies?"

Regina smiled tentatively. "I've got to say, Mom, I much prefer this brand of crazy to your usual homicidal rampages."

The elder evil queen looked down and found a red stain spreading across her chest. "Uh-oh, I think I'm dying of irony." She collapsed into her daughter's arms.

"Dude, what the hell?" Regina shook her gently. "Mommy?"

Gold rose, completely healed, except for the leg, for some reason. "Um…you do remember how she abused you, ruined your life, and murdered your fiancé in cold blood, right?"

"…No."

The pawnbroker sighed wistfully. "Why can't my kid be more like you?"

"Shut up!" she thundered, making a pitiful attempt to glare through her tears. "I'll get you for this, 'Stiltskin! Nobody kills my mother but me! And maybe Hook, if he feels like it!"

"I understand your confusion, dearie, but this, unlike everything else that has ever happened or ever will, is not my fault."
Mary Margaret ran into the room, her quasi-prince in tow. "Stop! Stop! Don't kill her! She's the best villain we've ever had!"

Regina stared from her mother's still-warm corpse to her stepdaughter's tearstained face, in utter shock. "Snow, you...lied?" The queen fainted dead away.
In 1984 (yes, really), two guys named Flynn (yes, really) were enjoying a camping trip among the redwoods of Maine (yes, really). The younger of the pair, a kid named Owen, proudly held up a hand-woven keychain. "Look, Dad! It's the same color scheme used in Star Wars, which Disney totally owns now."

"Stop shilling and take this thing," grumbled his father, Kurt, handing over a second keychain. Owen examined it quizzically. "Dad, you're as bad at arts and crafts as you are at sensing danger." He glanced upward. "Speaking of which, some sort of apocalypse appears to be hurtling toward us."

Kurt looked up and found the Smoke Monster looming on the horizon. "Relax, son. It's probably just a fast-moving, gargantuan, purple electrical storm." He shepherded the boy into their tent. "Not to worry. This metal frame will protect us."

When they emerged the next morning, they found their car crushed under a tree and covered in graffiti reading Evil Rulz! "I choose not to notice that," said Kurt stubbornly. "Come on, Owen. Time to find the highway and get hitchhiking."

"This is your idea of family fun? Riding out an electrical storm under a web of metal, then taking a small child hitchhiking? Jeez, no wonder Mom is dead." Then he spotted Storybrooke over a hillside. "Hey, look, a town. Maybe I'll get lucky and they'll have police I can report this borderline neglect to."

Walking down the only street in town, Kurt scanned the instant city for a psychiatrist's office. "Either we're both going through a complete psychotic breakdown, terrifying supernatural forces are at play in this town, or this will all blow over and I shouldn't worry myself about it."

"Let me guess," sighed Owen. "You're going to go with the third one?"

"Bingo."

The only squad car in town pulled up behind them. Graham stepped out, his face falling in dismay. "Aw, nuts. When I heard there was a stranger in town, I was hoping it would be a hot blond chick with magic lips." He sighed. "But I guess a guy can't have everything. So, who the hell are you, and why the hell aren't you miserable?"

Regina awoke in the Stepford House, blinking dazedly. "Did I just…win?" She frowned. "This seems wrong, somehow."

Walking down the only street in town, she passed under a ladder where Marco was working with a hammer, and he made no attempt to drop it on her head. "So far, so good…"

She moved on to Granny's Diner, where she found Ruby and her grandmother exchanging insults with one another. "You're a skank, Ruby!"

"How dare you?! I should move out of here…but since our little fights are just too entertaining to pass up, I'll compromise and stick around for half of each year."
Archie Hopper walked by, gnawing absently on a leaf. "Bleh, I don't know what I was thinking." He spat it out and waved to Regina. "Oh, good morning, Madam Mayor. You're looking smug today."

"Thanks for noticing."

At the only school in town, Mary Margaret Blanchard was frolicking happily with her bluebird friends. "Come, my little friends, as we all sing a happy little working song!" Luckily, her students were too mesmerized by her radiance to fling spitwads at the bluebirds like normal children. "Now, I want you all to go outside and frolic for the next three hours, and whatever you do, don't read anything."

Regina barged in, as usual. "An elementary school teacher with a classroom full of adorable, adoring children? This is my grand revenge? I was expecting you to be a mentally-ill prostitute, or a homeless drug addict, or at least a sewage disposal technician!"

"Sorry," Mary Margaret squeaked meekly. "If it makes you feel any better, my 401k is doing very poorly."

"I don't need your pity!" Regina slapped her. "Now shut up and come with me!"

"Um, I'm pretty sure that's illegal," said Mary Margaret, remembering the thirty kids she was supposed to be supervising.

Regina slapped her again. "I decide what's illegal now, you brat!"

"Mary Margaret Blanchard, meet John Doe," said Regina, guiding her stepdaughter over to a certain coma patient's bedside. "Does he look familiar, or heaven forbid, sexy?"

"Ew, no!" the schoolteacher balked. "And aren't there laws against necrophilia?"

The former queen smirked. "Yes, there most certainly are, and I intend to enforce them to the fullest extent of the law. Get the message?"

"For the last time, no!" Mary Margaret wailed helplessly.

"Perfect."

Regina went over to Granny's for some breakfast, because Rumplestiltskin had carelessly neglected to write a McDonald's into the curse. Graham approached her, his eyes unfocused, and his arms extended stiffly in front of him. "Evil is sexy," he droned mindlessly.

"And don't you forget it, hot stuff," Regina ordered, patting him on the backside.

Graham turned away from her, grumbling angrily under his breath. "Just wait. Someday I'll be the mentally-scarred bully coercing an innocent person into an abusive sexual relationship with me. My day will come!"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You won't get the reference for a couple of decades."

Owen peeked over her shoulder. "You like apple pancakes, too? Let's bond."
She shoved a can of mace in his face. "Ew, cuteness! Somebody get it away from me!"

Kurt placed himself between them. "I apologize for my son. He's kind of an idiot, but hopefully he'll grow out of it someday. Please don't melt him with the force of your mighty glare."

"Who are you?"

"Name's Flynn."

"Erroll?"

"No."

"Rider?"

"No, not an exciting Flynn of any kind."

"Then what the hell are you doing here?"

Kurt was getting a little weirded out. "From now on? Trying to avoid you."

"I strongly support you in that endeavor." She went back over to Graham. "Who are those people, and how dare they exist without my permission?"

Graham shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe you should check with Sidney."

"I'd like to, but he doesn't seem to exist right now, so you're going to have to pick up the slack." She held up a pair of fuzzy black handcuffs and a paddle. "Or else."

Regina laid a single red rose on a coffin reading "Cora Mills, Sporadically Beloved Mother." "I don't suppose there's any chance you're going to miraculously come back from the dead again, Mom?"

"I guess I could try curing her with True Love's Kiss," Gold offered, entering the mausoleum, "but I don't think we're cute enough for it to work. I guess you're just going to have to learn to live without her constant abuse. Tough, I know, but I think you're up to the challenge." He gave her a fatherly pat on the back.

Regina was unmoved. "I suppose you've come to gloat?"

"No, I'll leave that in task your capable hands," He placed a second rose on the casket. "I just dropped by to pay my respects to Cora and thank her for all the character development she gave me."

"You had my mother killed to save your own life, you pig!"

"Yeah, I'd feel worse about that if she hadn't been shoving a dagger through my heart at the time," said Gold impassively.

"Stop trying to make me see reason where my mother is concerned! It's only going to frustrate and exhaust us both!" She slapped him. "I'm not going to bother trying to kill you. We both know you're not going to die until you have a beautiful family and a lifetime of happiness ahead of you. But Mary Margaret doesn't have that excuse." She unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "I will wreak a terrible and brutal revenge for her unforgivable desire to not be murdered! On her, and her little prince, and her seldom-seen werewolf chum, and her preachy little cricket, and her oversized dwarves…"

Seven hours later...
"...And the village carpenter's estranged son, and your long-lost girlfriend, and that headless guy who's supposed to be trapped in another dimension..." she continued hoarsely.

"Regina," said Gold gently, "does that plan seem...familiar to you? At all?"

"...Shut up."

"Dearie, you know you're in trouble when Rumplestiltskin, of all people, thinks you've gone off the deep end."

"Can you blame me? How would you feel if Mary Margaret killed your only living parent?"

"I'd probably kiss her thoroughly and throw a luau in her honor."

"Well, not me. I still have a heart."

"Whose?"

"I dunno. Some jerk's."

"Dearie, if you persist in using dark magic to solve all your problems, you're going to end up driving away Henry just like I drove away Henry's father," Gold warned her.

"What the heck are you talking about?"

"Eh, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

Mary Margaret sat on her bed, staring vacantly out the window, surrounded by cupcake wrappers. Henry looked at her worriedly. "Mom, Gramps, why is Mary Margaret descending into a suicidal depression? Did she step on a bug or something?"

"No, she's just worried about the sudden bout of gigantism you seem to be going through, but she'll get over it," Emmafibbed.

"You're lying," said Henry, looking tired. "What, do I have yet another long-lost parent somewhere that you aren't telling me about?"

"Oh, probably," his mother replied, "but this particular lie relates to Mary Margaret." Taking a deep breath, she held her son's hand and looked into his eyes. "This isn't going to be easy for you to hear, but she saved us all from certain death at the hands of a psychotic mass murderer."

"NO!" Henry screamed, covering his ears. "No, I won't listen!"

Emma gently pried his hands away from his head. "I'm afraid it gets worse. She also gave your dying grandfather a second chance at life and rescued some kittens from a tree."

"NOOOOOOOO! No, no, no!" the boy wailed. "This can't be happening! Snow White would never hurt anyone! Unless, of course, they were really ugly and lived in a cave. Then they would deserve to die."

Mr. Gold knocked at the door. "Yo, open up. I've brought some harmless, non-toxic candy for my dear little grandson."

David opened the door, sword in hand. "You've got a lot of nerve, showing up here after you provided my wife with a way to protect her innocent family. This is even worse than all those times
you saved our relationship."

Gold heaved a longsuffering sigh. "I came to warn you about an imminent threat to your family's safety, but I don't know why I'm even bothering. You're probably just going to freak out and throw me in jail again if I do."

"Probably, but let's hear it anyway."

"Regina's plotting a terrible revenge against Snow White."

David blinked. "That's your big reveal? I could have told you that, and been a lot less cryptic about it!" He swatted Gold with the flat of his sword. "You're the worst puppetmaster ever!"

"What's she gonna do to her?" asked Henry. "I mean, hasn't she already tried pretty much everything?"

"I don't know and I don't care," said Gold. "I'm just putting in an appearance to keep the Dearies happy." His obligation fulfilled, Gold waved at the camera and turned to leave.

"I can't believe you're hanging Mary Margaret out to dry like this, after she saved your life," said David, disgusted.

"Yeah, well, you may not have noticed, but I'm an evil old bastard," Gold reminded him coldly.

"But Regina could end up hurting your grandson!" David protested.

"In that case, I'll have to kiss her thoroughly and throw her a luau."

"Don't make me turn on the Charming Family Charm, old man!" the quasi-prince threatened.

"No!" Gold screamed, shielding his eyes. "Anything but that!"

"You brought this on yourself." David struck a pose with his sword. "I will always nag you!"

At Granny's lunch counter, Kurt and Owen picked at their meatloaf uneasily. "Is this made of Alpo?" Kurt inquired uneasily.

"You bet." Granny smiled proudly. "Blue Ribbon blend, with liver."

Regina barged in, as usual, and unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on little Owen. "You're sitting in my seat."

Owen stuck his tongue out at her. "I don't see your name on it."

Regina took out a large rubber stamp reading, "Property of Regina Mills" and stamped the barstool. "This thing was the best purchase I ever made."

Kurt tried to intervene. "Sorry for the intrusion, Miss—"

"How do you know it's not 'Mrs.'?" Regina interrupted.

"Lucky guess."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on the Flynns, but they weren't smart enough to be frightened by it. "I just wanted to let you know, I took the liberty of threatening your mechanic with
a can of rat poison, and he agreed to have your car ready by the end of the week."

"Is that all it takes? Huh." Kurt rose. "Well, thanks for your help, but we really should get back to
avoiding you now. Come on, Owen."

"Wait." Owen took out the keychain he'd made earlier, stamping Regina's name on it, and handing it
to her. "Here, you may as well take this. It's not like I have any keys to put it on anyway."

The next day, Regina awoke in her bedroom. Graham was lying next to her, with the words
"Property of Regina Mills" stamped all over his naked body. The former queen rose and went to the
window. "Damn it, Blanchard, get away from that coma patient! You're not supposed to bond with
him until 'Snow Falls!'"

Walking down the only street in town, she tripped over a groundhog. "Ugh, as if the unbearable
monotony of life in this town wasn't bad enough, it's overrun with cute little animals." She brought
her stiletto heel down on the rodent's head and continued on her way.

"Blah blah blah skank," said Granny to Ruby.

"Blah blah blah, hag," said Ruby to her grandmother.

"Blah blah blah, adorkable," said Archie, waving obliviously at his overlord.

"Blah blah blah, spineless," said Mary Margaret, bumping into Regina.

The next day, Regina awoke in her bedroom. Graham was lying next to her, an empty bottle of
Viagra clutched in one hand and a can of Red Bull in the other. She snatched the latter item. "One of
these days, I'm going to have to try actually sleeping at night, for a change."

Walking down the only street in town, she tripped over a groundhog. "You again?" She brought her
stiletto heel down on the rodent's head and continued on her way.

"Blah blah blah skank," said Granny to Ruby.

"Blah blah blah, hag," said Ruby to her grandmother.

"Blah blah blah, adorkable," said Archie, waving obliviously at his overlord.

"Blah blah blah, spineless," said Mary Margaret, bumping into Regina.

The former queen hit her stepdaughter with the Glare of Evil. "Aren't you supposed to be defying
me? Or at least lecturing me?"

"Do you not understand English?" asked Mary Margaret. "I said 'blah blah blah spineless.'"

Regina made her way to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, where she barged in, as usual. "This is the
lamest curse ever! I want my money back!"

"I'm not sure what you're asking me, but as a crotchety old bastard, I'm obligated to answer 'no',
regardless," Gold replied indolently.

"Excuse me?"
"Blah blah blah clueless," said Gold.

"But…but…blah blah blah miserable!" Regina wailed pitifully. "This sucks! When Daddy told me that this curse wouldn't make me happy, I thought he was just trying to keep me from killing him, but he was right!"

"I don't see why you're so unhappy. You've got power, money, and better fashion sense than even I."

"Yeah, but power doesn't bring happiness, and even victory is made hollow by it."

"I choose not to notice that," said Gold.

"Wow. Rumplestiltskin has become useless. I never thought I'd see the day." She stormed out of the shop in disgust.

Regina called up Kurt on a land line, because it was the eighties, remember? "Hey, Kurt? This is Regina. I know your son and I did nothing but fight with each other in our two brief meetings, but sadly, he's still the closest thing to a friend that I've got. Can you bring him to visit me before you go, or have you finally developed the ability to recognize danger when you see it? …Didn't think so. See you both tonight, then."

Regina was trying to solve her problems by turning to her mother's dark magic, because she still hadn't learned her lesson about that. Rifling through Cora's cache in the mausoleum, she found an old locket with a badly photoshopped picture of her and Regina hugging. Regina squinted. "Is that Granny and Ruby she pasted our heads on? Ah well, it's still a lovely gesture. I think I'll smash things now."

Regina tore into her mother's formal wardrobe, which she'd brought with her in case hoop skirts came back into style, and ran across a tiny scroll. "A curse to force a child into loving its mother against its will?" She frowned. "Mom, what exactly were you planning on doing with this? Eh, screw it; it's mine now."

A few minutes later, Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere as usual, with David in tow, but Regina was already gone. "Damn it, this is the last time I let you tag along, slowpoke!" the pawnbroker snapped, whacking David with his cane.

The quasi-prince surveyed the latest mess Regina's grief had caused. "What's going on here? Did an organ bank explode or something?"

"No, these are Cora's spells. Looks like Regina's running low on creativity." He inspected his ex's spice rack. "Looks like she took viper's eye and chimera blood. Do you know what that means?"

"It means I'm never letting her cook for me again."

"A sound plan, but I was actually talking about the Curse of the Empty-Hearted."

"What the hell does that do?" asked Emma when she heard the news. "And why the hell did Cora have it? Wasn't her heart already pretty much as empty as humanly possible?"

"No, it's a spell for forcing someone to love you."
"And it works?"

"Kinda."

"Then why the hell didn't you use it on your wife?" Emma asked.

"Shut up."

Henry's head popped out of a heating vent in the ceiling. "Mom's going to use it on me, isn't she?"

"Go away, Henry. We're trying to decide your future," David ordered.

Henry jumped to the floor, landing at Emma's feet in a cloud of dust. "So help me, if you people don't stop walking all over me, I'm dumping you like I dumped my last family!"

"You sound just like your father," Gold griped. "Fine, kid, here's the scoop. Your mom's going to tear out Mary Margaret's heart, brainwash you with it, and possibly proceed to eat it, depending on which version we're following at the moment."

"Ew." Emma made a face. "I really don't want to see that. You've got to stop her!"

"I don't have to do anything. Freedom from moral obligation is kind of the point of being a villain."

"But your grandson is in danger!"

"What part of 'evil old bastard' are you not understanding?"

"Come on, there's got to be something we can do!" David prodded.

"Well, you could kill her, but it's obvious you don't have the guts." He nodded at Emma. "Except maybe Chainsaw Girl over there."

"What, do I have to do everything around here?" The savior sighed defeatedly. "Fine, fine. Hey Pops, go get me a can of gas!"

"Listen to yourselves!" Henry scolded. "How can you even entertain the idea of killing a crazed mass-murderer who is threatening innocent lives for the umpteenth time?"

"So what's your solution?" Emma challenged.

"Well, you could...or you could...uh..." Henry hemmed and hawed awkwardly for several minutes. "All right, I've got nothing, but my point is still valid!" he screamed, storming out of the room.

Emma sighed. "Well, this clinches it. Whatever we decide to do with Regina, we're going to have to make it look like an accident."

---

Kurt and Owen sat at Regina's table in the Stepford House, picking at their lasagna. "This tastes like viper's eye," Owen complained.

"Stop being truthful, Owen," his father scolded.

"It's okay, I know I'm not the greatest cook," said Regina. "I'm used to having slaves to cook for me. Maybe dessert will turn out better if I have some help. Owen, there's a bunch of apples in the kitchen sink. Why don't you go pick out the ones that aren't poisoned?"
"Um…okay." Owen stood up and backed out of the room nervously.

"I apologize for my son's honesty," Kurt apologized. "His mom was a Candor."

"Oh, is she back at the Merciless Mart, then?"

"Nah, she's dead. We were playing golf on our roof during a lightning storm six months ago, and by a crazy coincidence she got electrocuted."

"Um…imagine that," said Regina tactfully.

"That's why I brought Owen on this camping trip. I thought that being isolated in a remote wilderness with only his thoughts to keep him company might take his mind off his troubles, but for some reason, it isn't working."

"I know how he feels. I had a well-meaning but horribly inept father, too."

"Hey, lady, how about some help?" Owen yelled from the kitchen. "There are dead insects all over these apples!"

─

"So how come you're not a mom?" Owen asked as they put the turnovers in the oven to bake.

"Well, I had a kid, but she was kind of a blabbermouth, so I obliterated her."

The boy giggled. "You're funny."

"Heh heh…yeah." Regina chuckled nervously. "Funny."

"Well, speaking seriously, I think you'd make a really good mom, after a few cooking lessons."

Regina melted. "Oh Owen, that's the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me!"

"That's really pathetic. No offense intended. I've been kind of pathetic myself, ever since Mom died. Nobody understands what I'm going through."

"I do." She draped an arm around the boy's shoulders. "After I ki—uh, after I lost my parents, I felt like a piece of my heart was missing. I took it out and checked it for any signs of tampering, but it was still intact, so the problem must be an emotional one."

"Probably."

She smiled. "I like you, kid." Regina took out her stamp. "How would you like to be property of Regina Mills?"

"Sounds good to me!" He presented his forehead.

Kurt walked in on them just as the ink was starting to dry. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Putting myself up for adoption," Owen replied happily.

"Wanna make it a stepparent adoption?" Regina waggled her eyebrows suggestively.

Kurt hesitated. "Do I have to wear the stamp if I say yes?"

"I'm afraid so."
"Then no deal." He grabbed his son. "Come on, Owen. We've got to get some Goo-Gone for that head of yours."

Henry followed his birthmom into the only diner in town. "Why are you bringing me here? With the exception of this sentence, I'm not speaking to you."

"Actually, I'm abandoning you for your own good again." She shoved him unceremoniously at his father. "Good luck, Neal; you're gonna need it!"

"Good news; we have no family history of diabetes!" Neal, seated at booth, passed his son a towering sundae.

Henry was unimpressed. "I was raised by an emotionally-stunted millionaire. I'm immune to bribes."

"Actually, it's drugged," Neal informed him. "But if you're going to be difficult about this, I guess I'll just have to try reasoning with you. Your second-string mom told me that you're being hounded by an emotionally abusive parent who possesses dark magic. I'm one of the few people in the world who can empathize with you on that, so I was thinking maybe you'd like to come hang out at my place and compare notes for a while. And, as an added bonus, you'll be safe from Regina's magic in New York."

"Magic…" Henry looked pensive. "Dad, have you ever noticed that magic sucks?"

"Hell, I was doing that before it was cool," Neal scoffed. "But there's no point in dwelling on it. The likelihood of someone finding a way to get rid of magic is almost as low as the likelihood of someone coming back from the dead."

"Excellent." The boy smirked.

Emma slammed back a cinnamon cocoa and slid her mug back across the counter. "Make the next one a double, Ruby."

Greg sank into the seat next to her. "Can I get this sandwich wrapped up to go? I have places to go and mayors to slaughter."

Emma frowned. "Mr. Mendel, I think it's time you were leaving Storybrooke. You're…wait, did you say you have 'mayors to slaughter'?

"Yeah."

"In that case, carry on, citizen." She gave him a pat on the back and went over to Neal, who was now sitting alone. "So, where's Henry?" Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Did you send him to juvie? Damn it, I knew this was going to happen-!"

"Emma, relax!" Neal interrupted. "It all went as planned. He agreed to come with me, then he giggled evilly, which should be an oxymoron, and went to the bathroom with a chainsaw, for some reason."

Emma smacked him. "You idiot! He tricked you!" She smirked. "Well, at least you know how it feels."

"Aw, nuts, he's running?"

She shot her ex a death glare. "He gets it from your side of the family."
At this very moment, their son was racing through the woods with a smirk on his face. "Henry 3,279,346, parents zero!"

Regina went over to Mary Margaret's building and barged in, as usual. She blasted her way through the flimsy wooden bolt with a chuckle of "nice try, Pinocchio" and approached the bed where her nemesis lay alone, helpless, and clinging to a stuffed bluebird. "This seems a little too easy."

"Bingo," said Gold, popping out of nowhere, as usual.

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on both of them. "Snow, I could take on both of you if I wanted to, but I think being allied with Gold is punishment enough. For now."

Regina barged into Billy's garage, as usual. The mouse-turned-mechanic cringed. "Madam Mayor, I fixed the Flynns' car and gnawed holes in Miss Blanchard's tires just like you asked; what more do you want from me?"

"I want you to gnaw some more holes in Kurt Flynn's tires."

"Sorry, but my dentist says I can't do that again for a while, and besides, Kurt already picked up his car."

Regina raced back to the Mayoral Lair and took Graham's heart out of a lunch box labeled "Lasagna with extra viper eyes." "Heh, I knew nobody would dare to look in here." She put the dismembered organ to her lips. "Graham, go get Owen, dead or ali—um, just alive, that is. Bring him over here and stuff him in my wall safe, then strip down to your underwear and splay yourself on my desk. You know how victory makes me get frisky."

She looked up and found Kurt standing in her doorway, his face a mask of horror. "I'm not sure which part of that conversation to be more disturbed about." Then he remembered himself. "Uh, I mean, what conversation? I didn't hear any conversation."

"Relax, I'm not going to hurt Owen, unless he grows up and loses his cuteness," Regina assured him. "I simply want a child to love."

Kurt raised his eyebrows. "Have you ever heard of sex?"

Regina's brow furrowed. "Suh-ex?" she repeated, perplexed. "What the hell does that have to do with having children?"

Graham lumbered in, dead-eyed and drooling, and pounced on the stranger. "Kurt Flynn, you're under arrest for being a loving, present, emotionally healthy parent. That kind of behavior doesn't fly in Storybrooke, buster!"

"Hey man, you do realize she's using you as her slave, right?" Kurt choked out as he struggled against the sheriff's grip.

Graham looked Regina over calculatingly. "I can think of worse fates. The arrest stands."

Kurt smacked his heart off its place on Regina's desk. "I'll be damned if I'm going to let you shower my sad, lonely, motherless son with maternal love, lady! We're out of here!" The stranger fled.

"Ow, my heart!" Graham screamed, crumpling to the floor.
"Die on your own time, hot stuff!" Regina hollered, hauling him to his feet. "After them!"

Kurt dove into his incredibly eighties car and took off down the road. "Owen, you're not going to believe this! It turns out that there's something supernatural and malevolent about the town that appeared overnight in a roiling mass of purple lightning!"

"Imagine that," said little Owen dryly.

Running through the woods, Henry ran smack into Greg. "What are you doing in the woods, kid?"

"Well, I'm trying to prevent Regina Mills from forcing me into loving her as my mother."

"You too, huh?" Greg sat him back on his feet. "She still hasn't discovered sex, I take it?"

Henry grimaced. "I really prefer not knowing."

Greg released him. "Well, good luck with everything, homie, from one reluctant adoptee to another."

Down in the mines, David had Ruby wrapped in a mighty hug. "Ruby! You're still alive!"

She shoved him aside. "I'm flattered you noticed, now back off and let me use my superpower. It's so rare that having the ability to smell stuff actually comes in useful." She sniffed the air experimentally. "Let's see, sweaty dwarves, sweaty dwarves, sweaty dwarves, evil wizards…sweaty dwarves…ah, here we are! Plucky kid." They all followed the scent.

"Why the hell would he run away to an abandoned mineshaft?" Neal wondered. "Doesn't he have any friends?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Emma. "Besides, this is the only place in town where you can get free dynamite."

"We really ought to start locking this place one day," David lamented, peering into the half-empty chest of explosives.

"Like that would have stopped him," Emma snorted. "I wonder what he's going to use the dynamite for. It's kind of an odd choice of tool, given the strict pacifist philosophy he's adopted lately."

"He's going to use it to destroy magic," Neal revealed unhappily. "At the diner, he said someone should destroy magic, but I thought he was just ranting, like his adoptive mother before him." He frowned. "But where would he go to do that?"

"The same place everyone always goes to accomplish any task of importance," said Emma. "Thank heaven for series-wide themes!"

Panting, Henry collapsed beside the old well, dynamite in hand. "Man, I really need to invest in a bike or something one of these days," he gasped.

Greg dialed up Regina. "Is this Henry's mother?"

"One of 'em. How did you know?"

"He said something about his mom trying to force him into loving her, so I figured you were a pretty
"How the hell did you get this number?"

"I certainly didn't get it from any supervillains," Greg lied. "Now get down to the well and pick up your kid. I really don't want him to die before he has a chance to be kidnapped."

Owen giggled as his father led them on a wild car chase down Main Street. "Whee! This is just like the contemporary TV program Night Rider!"

"Owen!"

"Sorry." Owen cowered dutifully. "I am so very frightened and helpless, dear father. What does she want with us?"

"I don't want to scare you, but you deserve to know the truth. She wants to lavish you with motherly love and attention!" Kurt revealed. "But that's not the worst of it. She's wealthy and powerful, so she'll probably want to spoil you with a lot of extravagant gifts, too."

"Bye." Owen opened up the door and prepared to jump. "Say hello to your new son, Mommy!"

Kurt seized him by the collar. "Get back in here!"

They raced to the town line, where Graham circled around to cut off their escape. Regina beamed. "You drive pretty well, for a dog."

"Aw shucks, it was noth…huh?"

Meanwhile, in the other vehicle, Kurt was gathering his son into his arms for the last time. "Now Owen, stop smiling and waving at the kidnapper and listen to me. I want you to run into the woods and call your uncle."

"If she's really a kidnapper, shouldn't I be calling…you know…the cops?"

"Cops are clearly powerless against her sex appeal. There's no point in even trying. Now, be sure to hang onto that keychain I gave you so that everyone will know who you are later." He flung the door open. "Run for it, boy!"

Owen was confused. "You're not coming?"

"No, I'm going to stay here and pull a Lily Potter."

"Who's that?"

"You won't get the reference for another couple of decades." Kurt pushed his son out the door, then climbed out to take on the mayor's love zombie. Graham pounced, growling and biting. "Gah! What the hell did you do to this guy, Regina?" he screamed.

"That part actually isn't my fault," said the mayor, emerging from the squad car.

"Well, whatever he is, I'll be damned if I'm gonna let my son grow up with him for a stepdad!" Kurt grunted. "You can't have Owen! I've got dibs!"

As Graham slammed Kurt violently into the hood of the car, Owen hesitated. "Pop, are you sure you don't want me to try the cops? Or maybe some paramedics?"
"I said I don't need any help! I can handle this myse-AH!" he screamed as the sheriff clamped his jaw around his throat.

"All right, but remember, pride goeth before a fall," Owen sighed, retreating to the town line.

"Owen, wait!" Regina approached him tentatively. "Though I know I'll live to regret it, I'm not going to hurt you."

"Then why are you hunting me down like a mad dog?!"

"Because my social skills aren't what they used to be." She reached out and stamped his freshly-washed forehead. "But my capacity for love is holding together pretty well, if you still want to stick around and be my son." She smiled hopefully. "Say yes and I'll buy you a pony. And your own Slurpee machine!"

"Hm…tempting." Owen glanced over at his father, who was being dragged into Graham's car on a leash. "But nah, you people are a little too creepy for my tastes. I don't want to end up gaslit, or poisoned, or kidnapped by a tree."

Regina was offended. "I would never…well, almost never…hm, I see your point. Maybe you'd better go." She released him. "I'm sorry. Enjoy those words, because I'm probably never going to say them again."

Henry sat the dynamite on the well's edge and reached shakily for the fuse. "Okay, just remember Dr. Arzt's advice…"

"Henry, stop!" Regina cried, emerging from the trees. "If you're feeling suicidal, there are far less painful methods!

"No, I want to get rid of magic!"

"You can't kill magic with dynamite. It's like rock-paper-scissors. Magic disintegrates dynamite, and dynamite disintegrates Henry." She disintegrated the dynamite with a spell. "See?"

"Aw, nuts! Now there's nothing I can do to keep you from brainwashing me into loving you. Ugh, I'll be just like Graham, only without the sex." He buried his face in his hands. "This is by far the weirdest thing you've ever done, and that's saying something."

"I just don't want to lose you. I mean, I've already lost four children. It's a legitimate fear."

"Maybe we'd stop leaving you if you'd stop unleashing your black magic on us!" Henry fired back at her. "Plus there's the psychological aspects of this whole feud. I mean, my mom is trying to kill my grandma, for killing my other grandma, who was trying to kill my grandpa, who killed my other grandma, who was avenged by…oy, just thinking about it gives me a headache!" He rubbed his temples tiredly.

Regina was unmoved. "Hey, Mary Margaret caused the death of a raving megalomaniac who was in the process of murdering her whole family! She deserves to fry!"

"You know I don't believe in the death penalty, Mom."

"You will when I'm through with you. Bwa hah hah!"

"But we'll be living a lie!"
Regina shrugged. "It's not the first time, and I'm sure it won't be your last."

Henry stamped his foot petulantly. "Come on, Mom! I don't want to be gaslit or poisoned, or kidnapped by a tree. Again."

Regina reluctantly backed away. "Aw, hell. He said the magic words."

Emma, David, and Neal arrived on the scene. The savior revved up her chainsaw. "Get away from my son or I'll perpetuate our family's cycle of violence some more!"

"That goes double for me! I will destroy you!" Regina roared, brandishing a fireball at Emma. "You too!" she said to David. Then she glanced over at Neal. "All right, who the hell are you and why do you keep trying to foil me?"

Neal waved awkwardly. "I'm Baelfire. Henry's dad. Rumplestiltskin's son. Formerly of the Lost Boys."

Regina rolled her eyes. "You could at least bother to tell a plausible lie. No matter. Whoever you are, Henry's mine."

"Nuh uh!" Emma retorted.

"Yuh huh!"

"Nuh uh!"

"Yuh huh!"

Henry placed himself between them, holding a knife. "Do you guys just want to cut me in half and be done with it?" he sighed longsufferingly. The adults considered the suggestion thoughtfully. "Guys, that was a joke!" he cried indignantly. "Come on, someone has to help me destroy magic!"

Regina laughed. "Honey, if destroying magic was really possible, millions of disgruntled snails would have done it already."

"Son, I don't know if you've noticed, but your adoptive mother is a little bit insane," Emma pointed out gently. "Reasoning with her is just going to make you tired and hoarse."

"It's not just her! Magic is ruining all our lives! Everybody we know is on the verge of murder, suicide, or both! Except Ruby and Archie. They actually seem pretty well-adjusted." He turned to Regina. "I seem to be holding up okay for now, but it's not going to last if you keep traumatizing me like this!"

"Damn, I hate it when you're right." Regina dropped the Curse of the Empty-Hearted into the flames she'd conjured.

Owen, having possessed a brain as a child, went to the cops in spite of his father's idiotic instructions. "Here, this is where they took my dad," he cried, leading a pair of state troopers toward the town line. "It's easy to recognize on account of the uncanny resemblance to British Columbia."

"There's nothing here except a highway to nowhere, kid," one of the troopers observed.

"Maybe you'd see it if you actually bothered to go inside!" Owen snapped.

"Oh, fine, if it'll shut you u—" The trooper attempted to cross the town line and slammed into an
invisible barrier. "I choose not to notice that," he said, retreating to his squad car.

"Ditto!" his partner chirped obliviously.

"You guys are less help than Graham, and he was under a freaking curse," Owen grumbled, approaching the line himself and holding his father's keychain aloft. "Looks like it's up to me. I'll find you, Dad! I will always find you!" Standing on the other side of the line, Regina fought a sudden urge to poison the boy.

Back at the Princess Pad, Mary Margaret was still abed, wallowing in her misery, though she'd managed to find the strength to get up and fix her hair and make-up at some point. Her occasionally-loyal bodyguard Gold was on the phone with David. "You stopped Regina without my help? Seriously? Oh, Henry showed up? That explains it, then." He put his phone away. "Good news, our grandson still knows how to work the Charming Family Charm." He headed for the door. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to get home to Bel—uh, Bae—uh, my creepy puppets."

Mary Margaret's eyes came into focus for the first time in days. "Wait, Gold, can I ask you for some advice?"

"Oh, do me to teach you how to get more fans?" He giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Well, the first step is to act like you don't want them. The second—"

"No, not that! I killed an unrepentant mass-murderer in self-defense, and since that's exactly as evil as terrorizing multiple universes with black magic for three hundred years, I thought maybe you could give me some pointers on how to cope."

Gold rolled his eyes and walked off. "Dearie, if you really want to be a villain, you're going to have to do better than that."

The sobbing princess threw a pillow at his head. "Hey, I'm trying my best here! I'm new at this!"

Regina opened her front door and found Mary Margaret standing on the other side. She groaned. "Man, I really need to stop answering this door. It's never anybody good."

"Relax," said Mary Margaret. "I'm not here to fight. I'm here to commit suicide-by-Regina."

Regina was unimpressed. "I already killed you once. It didn't work then and I seriously doubt this is going to be any different. Besides, Henry's got this weird aversion to his relatives murdering each other."

"Daniel," Mary Margaret said simply.

Regina's face hardened. "All right, you've convinced me." She plunged her hand into her stepdaughter's chest and tore out her heart with ease. "Well, I guess your parents didn't love each other as much as they claimed."

"Ow! Dying hurts!" Mary Margaret whined.

Regina smugly pointed out a dark spot on the organ. "Hey, I think you have acute coronary syndrome. Oh, wait, that's just your soul. Bwa hah hah!"

"Huh?"
"It means you're evil."

Mary Margaret reached into her stepmom's chest and pulled out a shriveled black blob of slimy flesh. "Eh, I think I'm still winning."

Irritated, Regina put both hearts back where they belonged. "Just for that remark, I'm letting you live."

"Aw, but I don't wanna! Living's hard!"

"And how." Regina laughed evilly. "And the best part is, you're probably going to end up destroying your family just like all the other villains around here eventually do! That insipid prince, and that chainsaw-wielding nutjob Emma, and especially that little twerp Hen…" She frowned. "Oh, right. Can you do me a favor and refrain from destroying Henry?"

"I'll try," Mary Margaret sobbed.

"Much obliged." Regina slammed the door in her face.

Greg had been videotaping this scene with his cellphone, because his state-of-the-art office lacked the technology to provide him with an actual video camera, and ran to his miraculously-healed car. He then proceeded to take Kurt's keychain from his pocket and wave it around pointedly. "Aw, don't anybody look surprised. You knew this was coming."
Selfless, Brave and True

In a hotel room in Phuket, August's alarm clock displayed the numbers "8:15", like every other clock in the universe. He awoke with a scream. "Gah! I think I just got a splinter or two million!"

"What the heck are you yelling about?" his girlfriend mumbled sleepily. "Is it that nightmare about the whale again?"

He peeked under the covers, horrified. "No, I'm getting wood!"

"Again? Wow, you're a machine."

"You have no idea, baby." The off-and-on automaton shuddered.

David arranged Mary Margaret's breakfast into the shape of a smiley face and carried it toward their room. Emma rolled her eyes. "Breakfast in bed? Geez, man, how whipped are you?"

"Hey, your mother is going through a rough time right now. She just took a life."

Emma was confused. "Wasn't she a bandit in our land? And a general? What, did she descend into madness after every battle?"

"I guess she's having an out-of-character experience."

"Well, tell her to knock it off. It's getting on everyone's nerves; especially mine. She needs to move on with her life. I mean, does she even have a job anymore?"

"Actually, Merlin's teaching our class now," Henry informed them, skipping down the stairs. "Tomorrow he's going to turn us all into goldfish and dump us in the lake."

"Now that's what I call education." Emma put a can of brine shrimp in her son's lunchbox and sent him on his way. "Better get to it, kid." She followed him to the door. "Look David, I know you want to help Mary Margaret, but there are some things that even comfort mode can't fix. What she really needs is to find her freaking backbone. She had it at the beginning of the season, so it's got to be around here someplace."

"She's got a point," said Mary Margaret, walking into the kitchen and rifling through various knife blocks for something sharp enough to stab with. "It's time for me to kick it old school and go hit things in the forest."

"If you want a live target, you can use me again," her husband offered.

"No, you were going to go work in the bean fields today."

"I thought I was working as our daughter's deputy?"

"I guess you realized how weird that whole situation was and quit, at some point."

"Oh," David shrugged dismissively. "Well, the bean fields could be fun too, I guess. Anton says we should have a crop soon, provided that Hansel kid doesn't find it and eat them all. And then we can go home to our land."

"Why the hell would I want to go home to our land? Emma and I just spent weeks trying to get out"
of that dump!"

"For a fresh start?"

His sighed miserably. "Honey, I killed an innocent woman, okay, I killed the freaking bride of Satan," she amended, "but it's still kind of traumatizing, and moving isn't going to change that."

"Then maybe you should get some counseling," David suggested.

"I tried, but when I told Archie why I was upset, he just laughed at me."

Over at the only hotel in town, Henry dove into his father's arms. "Good news, Dad! In light of Regina's insanity and Emma's dishonesty, I've decided to give you a field promotion to favorite parent."

Neal squeezed him affectionately. "Thanks, son. I'll try not to abuse the trust you've placed in me, though considering our family's history, you probably shouldn't get your hopes up too much."

Henry handed him the Big Book of Deja-Vu. "Well, as Emma can tell you, the first step in forming any kind of relationship with me is reading this. We can look through it together and you can tell me what life back home was really like."

Emma raised her hand. "Um, hello? I was there two weeks ago, in case you've forgotten."

"Get lost, Mom Number Two," the boy snapped. "I'm over you, and I've got somebody new!" He patted his father on the shoulder.

"So what's the second step in forming a relationship with you, Henry?" Neal asked.

"Cinnamon cocoa." Emma and Henry answered in unison.

"Aw man, parenthood rocks!" He handed his son some money and sent him off to the diner.

Emma made a face. "Well, Neal, you two are so cute together it's starting to make me nauseous, so I'll just be leaving."

"Wait." Neal caught her by the arm. "I've got to talk to you about something. Which do you want to hear first: the bad news, or the really bad news?"

"Let me guess, the bad news is that you're framing me for a crime I didn't commit again, and the really bad news is, it's for murder this time," said Emma sarcastically.

"Psh, you're never gonna let that go, are you?" Neal scoffed. "Actually, the bad news is that Tamara's coming to Storybrooke, and the really bad news is that Hook seems to have resumed his murderous rampage."

"Actually, I think it goes the other way around," Emma corrected.

"Agreed," said Neal uncomfortably. "Do you want to stay and meet her?"

"Thanks, but I'd rather do something less awkward, like run through the convent naked."

"Sorry, I guess you've got a point."

"You don't have to apologize to me, I'm not the one you're lying to this time. Does she realize she's
“dancing the centuries-old son of a pirate and a magic crocodile?”

“In my defense, I tried telling her once, but she called 911 on me before I could finish.”

“Well, I'm 911 in this town, so if you want to try again, I promise I'll ignore her.”

“Thanks, my lov-, uh, I mean, homie,” Neal said. Then he glanced down at his phone. "She's ten minutes away, and she says we'll know her when we see her because she's driving a big, screaming box truck. Why don't you stay and get to know her? I've never been able to, myself, but maybe with that Charming Family Charm thing on your side, you can succeed where I've failed.”

“What part of 'hell no' are you not getting? The 'hell' or the 'no'?”

“Aw, come on! She's bringing bagels.”

“Meh.”

“Okay, what if I ask her to stop and pick up some hard liquor on her way over?” Neal tried.

“Eh, I still don't know…”

“What if I flash my patented Little Orphan Bae smile?”

“…Okay, you win this round,” she relented unhappily.

"Whistle while you work! Aa-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah!” trilled a voice on Mary Margaret's iPod. "Oh, wait, I'm supposed to be hardcore now," she remembered, flipping around until she found some heavy metal. "That's more like it.” She fired an arrow into a nearby tree.

"Cousin Woody! You monster, you've killed him!” a distant voice wailed.

She pulled out her earphones and followed the sound. "Hey, haven't you ever heard of the monarchial land system of enclosure? This is my forest—get out!"

She traced the interloper to a dilapidated trailer in the woods. "Somebody's been hiding in an abandoned camper in the woods, spying on people? Well, those sound like the actions of a friendly, harmless person, so I'll just leave my weapons out here." She tossed her bow and quiver aside and went in. "Hey whoever you are, if you're hiding from Cora, she's dead, and if you're hiding from those lame villains they got to replace her, you're pathetic."

"Please, Eminem, even I'm not that cowardly," scoffed August W. Booth, quite literally lumbering into the room.

"Ah! A sentient puppet! Please don't murder me!” she screamed.

"Damn Child's Play series.” August sighed tiredly. "It's given us all a bad name."

Apparently there weren't any hospitals in Thailand or anywhere else in Southeast Asia, so August was forced to spend several weeks riding an ambulance to Hong Kong for medical attention. He sat waiting for the doctor in an overcrowded hallway, with a multitude of locals screaming in his ear. "THIS IS CHINA AND CHINA IS CROWDED, YOU DIG?!"

"I get it, I get it, get off my lap,” he grunted, shoving a pair of women off his knees.
"August W. Booth?" an orderly addressed him.

"Who the hell is Aug—uh, I mean, yo." He raised a hand uncertainly.

Rolling up the leg of his pants, he smiled nervously and flashed his leg at the doctor. "Check it out."

The doctor recoiled. "If you're coming on to me, I'm married."

"No, I need you to help me get rid of this pesky wood in my pants!"

The doctor backed away, brandishing his scalpel like a sword. "Get out of my office before I sue you for sexual harassment!"

"You think I'm crazy? Well, a little self-mutilation ought to discredit that theory." He seized the scalpel and jammed it into his knee.

"Ah!" the doctor yelped. "Orderlies! I don't know what the proper legal protocol is for having a foreign citizen unwillingly committed to a psychiatric facility, so skip it!"

"In retrospect, maybe I should have gone somewhere a little more democratic for treatment," August muttered, bolting for the door.

The doctor and a security guard gave chase. "Wow, doctor, he sure is running with incredible speed and grace for a man who just got stabbed in the leg."

"I choose not to notice that!"

A pair of hands reached out and dragged the off-again, on-again puppet into a stairwell. "I'll teach you to assist me in my time of need!" August roared, rearing up into the crane-kick position.

"Relax, man, I'm not gonna hurt you. You're doing a bang-up job of that yourself," the young man assured him. "I couldn't help noticing that you're extremely cryptic and a little bit of a know-it-all."

"So?"

"Well, so am I, and out of solidarity, I thought I'd give you some advice. There's a guy here in town, a master of our art, who has the power to heal even the weirdest diseases."

"Really, right here in Hong Kong?" August frowned. "That's…convenient. So who is this guy?"

"They call him 'The Dragon'."

"Why?"

"Well, his real name is Mushu. Can you blame him for preferring a pseudonym?"

"Geez, another curse?" Mary Margaret groaned. "I'm getting really sick of those things."

"It's not technically a curse," August corrected. "It's the natural result of being a jerk and letting the Blue Fairy find out about it."

"Oh, August, by that woman's standards, everyone is evil. She'd probably turn the whole town into wood if she could afford the fairy dust. Quit beating yourself up and go tell your dad you're alive."
"No, I don't want him to know I'm not perfect."

"I'm pretty sure he knows. Remember that time you ran off to Pleasure Island and smoked all those cigars? And then you turned yourself into a donkey? And the time you ran away with the circus? And the time you lied so much it made your nose turn into a tree? And the time—"

August covered his ears, humming loudly. "Shut up, shut up, shut up!"

"Fine, then come back to see Emma instead. I mean, haven't you considered the strain your absence has been putting on the Wooden Swan shippers?"

"Wooden Swan is doomed," said August glumly. "Swanfire is the wave of the future."

"Actually, it seems you successfully sunk the SS Swanfire," she informed him.

The puppet broke down in tears. "I know I'm repeating myself a lot today, but I suck!"

"Yeah, but don't worry, we all love you anyway."

"That's easy for you to say! Aside from that haircut, you've never done anything wrong."

"Hey, I can be just as dark and edgy as you can!" she protested. "Just last week, I killed a woman!"

"Who?"

"Cora."

"Bah! That doesn't count!" the puppet scoffed. "Now get out of my hovel, and promise you'll keep my whereabouts secret."

"You're entrusting me with a secret?" She stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Has your brain turned to wood, too?"

---

Inside the only hotel in town, Henry's latest collection of parents squirmed awkwardly. "So…" said Emma.

"So…this is awkward," said Tamara

"Incredibly," Emma agreed.

"Let's cut to the chase. Are you here to steal my man?"

"No thanks, he's elderly and gullible. You haven't noticed?"

Tamara hid a smirk. "Of course not. I wuv my darling Ba—Neal. Wuv him with a capital W!" She smooched him theatrically.

Henry finally took pity on the adults and steered the conversation elsewhere. "So, Mother Number Three, how did you and my pop meet? Was there singing?"

"Never mind that. Was there grand theft auto?" asked Emma.

"No, I spilled coffee on my clothes and Neal gallantly offered his scarf to the damsel in distress."

Tamara's eyes narrowed. "If I didn't know any better, I'd swear he was raised in some sort of old-school patriarchal culture."
"That's sweet, but if you'll excuse me, I have to go anywhere but here. Now." Emma grabbed her son by the arm. "Come on, Henry. Mommy needs a Zoloft cupcake."

Henry waved. "Nice meeting you, Tamara. I recently broke up with the rest of my moms, so if you're ever in the mood for some stepmother-stepson bonding, my schedule is clear."

"Thanks, Motherlode. Uh, I mean, Harry."

Neal held out the Big Book of Deja-Vu. "Don't forget your wiki."

"No, you keep it. I'll be administering a test on Friday, so you'll need to study. I'm a tough grader, as Emma can tell you."

"I scored in the ninety-seventh percentile," Emma bragged. "Top that, old man!"

Once they were gone, Tamara and Neal exchanged nervous smiles. "Your son seems like a wonderful kid. Tell me, does he have any weaknesses that may not be immediately obvious?"

"Beats me, I just met him." Neal glanced down at the Big Book of Deja-Vu, then grabbed his fiancee's cellphone and tossed it out the window. "Tamara, I need to tell you something that may shock you."

"If this is about you being in love with Emma, I don't care."

"No, actually I was talking about me being the ancient offspring of a pirate and a magic crocodile—wait, what?"

Tamara panicked. "Uh—uh…I don't care to talk to you anymore, you cheating pig!" She slapped him and ran out of the room.

The stranger led August down an alley that was crowded, because it was China, and into a waiting room that was crowded, because it was China. "He's ready to see you," he informed a woman wearing a mask with a big question mark stamped on it.

"Dude, what's with the mask?" August asked her as she passed him.

She pulled it aside, revealing Tamara's face underneath. "I like to make a big entrance, okay?"

Greg jammed his fork into a slice of peach pie, not realizing there was a much better target standing behind him. "I hope you enjoy your last slice of pie. It's poisoned," Regina informed him smugly, sitting down across from him. "I'm Regina Mills, mayor of Storybrooke until somebody dredges up the initiative to hold a recall election. I'm also Henry's mother."

"So, you finally succeeded in capturing a child to raise? Kudos." Greg attempted to look nonchalant.

"You look familiar," Regina noted. "Do you spend a lot of time in front of the mirror, perchance?"

"Uh…yeah, that must be it."

"Well, if there's anything you need during your stay here, don't hesitate to ask. Someone else." She got up and headed for the door, bumping right into Mary Margaret. "Oh, hey, Eminem. I suppose you're here for the blackened sole? Bwa hah hah!"

The princess tried to hide her fear. "I may be descending into villainy, but at least I'm not laughing
evilly or cracking bad puns yet. Then I would truly be a lost cause.” She ran to her daughter, who was at the counter chowing down on a big box of Zoloft cupcakes, for a dose of comfort mode. "Give me one of those!" She snatched a cupcake for herself.

"What's the big emergency?" Emma sighed wearily. "Did you hang up on a telemarketer, and now you want me to flagellate you as penance?"

"No, it's August. Being a Charming, naturally I found him," Mary Margaret bragged.

"My boy's alive?" Marco, who was sitting behind Emma, cried. "And the writers finally remembered?" He broke down in tears. "This is the happiest day of my life!"

"Don't celebrate yet. He's completely wooden, and looking creepier than Peter Pan himself!" She shuddered. "He's been crashing in an abandoned trailer down by the Troll Bridge. He told me to keep it a secret, but if you ask me, anyone stupid enough to do that deserves what they get."

"Can we help him?" Emma wondered.

"No."

"Then why the hell did you call me here?"

"We need to convince the Blue Fairy to fix him, and I could use some backup Charming Family Charm."

"The Blue Fairy?" Emma groaned. "But she sucks!"

"I know, but Gold seems to be on vacation, so I'm afraid it's her or nobody."


Ruby tapped him on the shoulder. "Hey guys, I don't mean to meddle, but you might want to keep your voices down. Neal's fiancée is sitting right next to you."

---

Tamara emerged from behind the curtain in the Dragon's office. "He said to send in the guy with the wood in his pants. I don't even want to know which of you that is."

August raised his hand. "Yo."

"Ew. Well, good luck with that." She backed away uneasily.

August crept into the Dragon's lair. "Did someone ask for a miracle?!!" the old man inside hollered. "Lemme hear you say 'ah'!"

"Uh…okay. Ah." August sat down in front of him and flashed his wooden leg.

The Dragon frowned at the fresh gouge in the wood. "Have you been self-mutilating, Pinocchio?"

"For the last time, that was supposed to be a gesture of fai—wait, how the hell do you know my real name?"

"The same way you know Baelfire's."

"…Okay, fair enough. Can you help me?"
"Yeah, but it's gonna cost you. I want you to get me a job in your ancestral tomb."

"I don't have an ancestral tomb," August protested.

"Then how about that string around your neck?" The Dragon pointed. "That was the string your father used to give you life. I guess that technically makes it your mama."

August clutched the string protectively. "Look, I know I like to brag about having no strings to hold me down, but I've made an exception for this one because it's got sentimental value. Are you sure this is going to be worth my while?"

The Dragon shrugged, looking bored. "I dunno. You got a better idea?"

"No," August admitted, handing it over. "Sorry Mom, but it's you or me."

"Good man." He pocketed the string. "I also need ten thousand dollars."

"Dollars? Don't you mean yuan?"

"No, damn it! Why does everyone keep asking me that?"

"All right, fine, but I'll need some time to get a job and save up."

"You have twenty-four hours."

"But that's insane!"

"So is going to a dragon for medical care."

"I already know about August," the Mother Superior revealed.

"Then why the hell didn't you say something?" Marco demanded, shaking her furiously. "I was checking the morgues, for Pete's sake!"

"Because I only help people who are perfect. Everybody knows that," she replied haughtily, turning to Mary Margaret. "Speaking of which, get out of my sight, you filthy sinner."

Mary Margaret raised her eyebrows. "Aren't you supposed to be a devout Christian? Whatever happened to letting he who is without sin cast the first stone?" Mother Superior responded by flinging a rock at her. "Ow! But what about the healing power of redemption?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid Regina's made a mockery of that theme these last few episodes. Pinocchio's on his own."

But Mary Margaret could not be dissuaded. "Don't worry, Marco. I know there's still hope for your monarch. Uh, I mean son."

In some Chinese bar filled with English signage, August leafed glumly through his empty wallet. "Rats, I must have left Baelfire's money in my other pants."

Tamara waved at him from the bar. "Hey, want to get drunk and loose-tongued?"

"The moisture might warp me, but I'm past caring," he lamented, collapsing onto the stool beside her.
She reached into a briefcase full of small, unmarked bills. "Do you take American money?" she asked the bartender.

"Ni hau ma," the bartender replied uncomprehendingly.

"I'll take that as a yes." She shoved the cash at him and raised her drink at August. "Here's to our great and terrible lord Pan. Long and glorious be his reign."

"Uh…okay, whatever. So, what drove you to seek advice from a magic dragon? Are you desperate, crazy, or both, like me?"

"I have terminal cancer."

He studied her thoughtfully. "You don't look like a terminal cancer patient. Shouldn't you be all pale and thin and bald?"

"Ew, how the heck am I supposed to seduce innocent men looking like that?" she balked. "So, did he ask you for a picture of your grandmother too?"

"No, the sight of my grandparents tends to traumatize people for life."

The conversation was interrupted by the ringing of Tamara's phone. "'The eagle flies at midnight?'" she repeated dubiously. "Greg, what the hell is that supposed to mean?" She glanced over her shoulder at August. "Excuse me, I have to go grab my code book. I'm sure I can trust you with the briefcase full of cash, my trusted friend of five minutes."

He looked from Tamara to the money in agony, finally snatching it up. "Screw it, someone this stupid doesn't deserve to live."

There was a knock at August's door, and he groaned. "For the last time, Mary Margaret, you suck at comfort mode! Just stop trying! You're embarrassing yourself!" He flung it open, and found Tamara waiting for him on the other side. "Ah, crap. Just when I thought there was nobody I could possibly want to see less than her."

August ran into the Dragon's lair, and the wizard himself Apparated in with a loud pop. "For a man who's spent his entire life running, it's kind of ironic that your legs were the first thing to go," the Dragon observed.

"Put up or shut up, old man," August snapped. The Dragon held up a sparkling red vial. August looked at it skeptically. "Hey, I thought magic was purple?"

"Do you want this thing or not? I've got places to go and gongs to bang on," the Dragon growled impatiently.

August prepared to hand him the money, but was halted by a searing pain in his leg. "Ah! My conscience hurts! And it's in my foot! Who knew?"

The Dragon flashed Tamara's picture. "August, up until now, you've been a lovable anti-hero, but stealing a dying woman's medicine is crossing over into straight-up villain territory. Are you sure you want to go through with it?"

"Better a villain than a crash test dummy." August grabbed the vial and left.
"Wait, aren't you going to drink that now so you can walk home without searing pain?" the Dragon yelled after him.

August stared thoughtfully at the potion. "Well, when you put it like that…nah." He limped down several flights of stairs, whimpering in agony. "Okay, now I'm ready," he finally decided when he reached the bottom, raising the vial to his lips.

"You lying, thieving bastard!" Tamara yelled, rounding the corner.

"I'm not going to insult you by denying that accusation," August conceded sadly, "but I am going to run from you like I do everyone else."

"Hey, somebody stop him!" Tamara cried in English. But for some reason, the Chinese-speakers surrounding her made no move to do as she had asked. "Geez, do I have to do everything around here?" she grumbled, chasing after him.

"Gah!" August screamed. "This crippled leg of mine is really slowing me down! If only I had some sort of magic potion that would cure it in my hand right now!" Unfortunately, the leg gave out before he had the chance to figure it out, and he fell to the ground like a pile of tinker toys.

Tamara snatched up the fallen vial. "How dare you attempt to hinder my research for the sake of your measly life?!" She kicked him while he was down, just for good measure. "Ow! Splinters!" she yelped, limping away.

August curled up in the gutter, sobbing. "Damn it all, I was heartwarming once!"

Tamara stared into August's painted eyes. "So, all that talk about wood in your pants was literal. That's a relief."

"You mean you believe in magic without anybody having to die first?" he marveled. "Wow, you sure aren't like the girls I normally hang out with. Did you come to Storybrooke to look for a boyfriend, perchance?"

"No, I've already got more than my share of those. I came to ask you for a favor, and you owe it to me to say yes after what you did to me in Hong Kong."

"Come on, you left ten thousand dollars cash in the hands of a stranger who would die without money!" August pointed out. "What the hell did you think was going to happen?"

"I choose not to notice that."

"On second thought, you're exactly like the girls I normally hang out with. So what do you want? Custody of your long-lost son?"

"No, I want you to run away, as usual."

"Why do you even care? Are you magical, or just incredibly meddlesome?"

"If I were magical, I would have burned myself at the stake long ago. The important thing is that I was allegedly afflicted with cancer the last time we met—"

"Again, are you sure? You looked awfully healthy for a walking dead woman."

"For the last time, yes, now shut up and listen! I'm still alive, so in theory, that should mean that the Dragon's potion worked, right? I still have some of it at my apartment, along with a number of dead
bodies. Get out of Storybrooke now and I'll let you have what's left, and as an added bonus, you won't have to be here when I blow up the place."

August's eyes flicked down to her engagement ring. "Wait a minute. I've heard about you. You're Neal's fiancée."

"What do you care?"

"I'm a Swanfire shipper!"

"Damn it!" Tamara cursed.

"Did Neal know you were a villain when he asked you to marry him? Because I think he's already got enough of those in his family."

"Neal doesn't know anything."

August frowned. "If he doesn't know anything, what's the point of seducing him?"

"Greg is lousy in the sack," she replied, as though it should be obvious. "Now, do we have a deal with the devil?"

"No."

"Come on, who do you think you're kidding?" She shoved her keys into his hand.

Greg walked into his room and discovered that Regina had barged in, as usual. "You again? Jeez, lady, don't you have any hobbies?"

"Yes, my favorite is killing people who challenge my authority, Owen." She held up the keychain he'd given her. "You were so charming and intelligent when you gave this to me. What happened?"

"Hey, we're talking about your crimes right now," Greg snapped. "I can't help but notice that you're awfully hot, for a septuagenarian. What's up with that?"

"I'll have you know I'm actually the youngest villain in this town."

"Not anymore!" Greg proclaimed boldly, pointing at himself.

Regina started cracking up. "Yeah, right, sure, I'll start making out a will. So, what's your motivation?"

"The tragic loss of my father."

The former queen looked bored. "It's been done."

"I know you've been keeping him prisoner!"

She was genuinely puzzled. "Why would I want to do that? He was too old for adoption, and I already had a love slave."

"Then where is he?"

"Maybe he somehow foresaw that you were going to grow into a bigoted moron, and decided to abandon you in advance," she sneered. "Now beat it, little boy, or I'll kill you, have Dr. Whale
"This is all my fault," Marco lamented, following the Charming women through the woods. "I'm a horrible parent, just like everyone else in this town!"

"I'm sure you programmed him to the best of your ability, Marco," Mary Margaret consoled him. "It's not your fault he went and pulled a Lore Soong."

"Yeah, actually, it kind of is. I told a horrible lie that ripped apart two families and could have doomed our world, right in front of my son, and then had the nerve to expect honesty from him."

"Huh?"

"Don't you get it? I sent Pinocchio through the wardrobe with Emma in your place."

"Eminem SMASH!" Mary Margaret roared, decking him.

"Mary Margaret! What the hell is wrong with you?!" Emma pried her mother off the kindly old man. "I mean, sure, he's a jerk, but at least he recognizes it, unlike most people in this town."

Mary Margaret stared down at her hand in shock. "I'm sorry, Marco, I don't know what came over me. Violence has never been in my nature."

Marco frowned. "But what about that time you beat your husband unconscious with a rock? And shot him in the arm? And hurled him into those rapids? And all those mooks you slaughtered—"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm a devout pacifist and always have been."

"And then there was Jefferson," Emma reminded her. "You roundhouse-kicked him out of a third-story window without batting an—"

Mary Margaret covered her ears. "La la la la la la! Sorry, Marco, but I can't hear you over the sound of me graciously forgiving you!"

"I don't deserve forgiveness!" Marco cried in despair. "I put a seven-year-old boy in charge of raising a hero and saving an entire dimension! I mean, come on! Most seven-year-olds can't even operate a microwave on their own!" He ran toward his son's camper, on the verge of tears. "Oh, Pinocchio, if you want to sue me for abuse, I'll understand!" He opened the door. "Pinocchio?" No answer. "He's run off again? Man, we really need to break his legs one of these days."

Tamara walked into the Dragon's pad, and the sorcerer rolled his eyes. "Jeez, woman, you've already stolen a dying man's last hope of survival, left him broken and weeping in a gutter, and somehow managed to make him feel like the bad guy. Isn't that enough villainy for one day?"

"I lied to you about being sick, too," she reminded him.

"Yes, that was so obvious I didn't think it needed to be pointed out."

Tamara glared. "Let's just stick to business, shall we? I represent a group of people who think the Salem Witch Trials ended way too soon. I've spent years searching the world for wizards, but all I found were a bunch of stupid Magic: The Gathering tournaments and Harry Potter fan sites. Until I met you." She reached into her pocket for the vial she'd taken from August. "I analyzed this bottle with my L'il Templar's First Chemistry Set, and according to the results, it came from another world.
Care to tell me which one?"

The Dragon shook his head. "Sorry, but with Gold on vacation, somebody's got to fill in as the cryptic old wizard. By the way, you really suck for dooming August like that."

"If he wants to live, he should be richer," she replied unapologetically, drawing a gun. "And if you wanted to live, you should have stayed the hell away from me."

"Okay, you're asking for it! Time to kick some hunny buns!" the Dragon roared, red mist spewing from his nose.

Tamara grimaced. "Ew, are you having some kind of nosebleed? My mom always said the best thing for those is to tilt your head back and—"

"No, it's supposed to be scary!" the sorcerer snapped, flinging his arms wide. "Dragon prism power!"

But about thirty seconds into his transformation montage, Tamara started to get bored. "Screw this." She pulled out her taser and zapped him. "Eat Applied Phlebtonium, sucker!"

The dragon crumpled to the floor. "Brought down by science geeks…oh, the indignity," he gasped with his final breath.

Tamara grabbed her photo and stepped over the old man's corpse. "Two innocent lives down, several million to go."

As August less-than-merrily rolled along in Tamara's car, a Witchfinder Army ID card bearing the woman's picture suddenly fell into his lap. "'Her real name is 'Witchfinder-Private Saucepan?' Ah, damn, it all makes sense now." He spun the car around and raced back to Storybrooke. "Time to rediscover my conscience...yet again."

The puppet ran into Mayberry Jail and found it empty and unlocked. "Emma? Emma! Eh, screw it. I don't know why I was even expecting you to be here." He picked up the phone. "Hey, Emma, I have several things to tell you. The first is that you're a freaking cheapskate. Hire some more cops, I'm begging you!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll get to that when I get to it," the savior snapped. "What the second thing?"

"I need to warn you about an impending threat to the safety of us and everything we hold dear. We don't have much time, so I'll try to be succinct. Our story begins on the lovely island of Phuket in the autumn of 2011. The Occupy Wall Street movement was in full swing, the national debt-ceiling was on the rise, the royal wedding was still fresh in our memories—"

"August, can you cut to the chase, already?"

"Sorry. I was sleeping peacefully under a three-hundred thread count sheet, little realizing that a course of events would soon be set in motion that would lead me to my first confrontation with…"

"Yoink!" Tamara yanked the phone cord from the wall. "Good thing you're such a windbag." She advanced on him angrily. "Of all the times to grow a spine, you just had to pick now?"

"Save it, Tamara." He held up her ID card. "I just solved the case!"
"Huh?"

"I know you killed the Dragon."

"Yeah, so what? So did Emma."

"I don't think that defense is going to fly in court. And rest assured, I'm going to be testifying against you. I've been descending into villainy for a while now, but meeting you has taught me that not all villains are as cool as Regina and Gold, so I think I'm going to reform." He dropped into a karate stance. "You shall not pass!"

She looked him over appraisingly. "You're so brave, loyal, selfless and honest. Perhaps this means I'm wrong about all magical creatures being evil?" She laughed the thought away. "Nah." She whipped out her taser and jammed it into the puppet's chest.

"Ugh, I'm bad at this," August groaned, collapsing to the floor.

Marco and the Charming family ran toward the sheriff's station, a first aid kit full of varnish and sandpaper at the ready. August staggered out the front door and fell on his face for the umpteenth time. "This is really getting painful. Have I atoned enough yet?" he mumbled.

"My boy!" Geppetto cried, gathering his son in his arms. "What the hell did you do to your eyes? Eh, I guess it doesn't matter. Everything's going to be all right. We'll just wish upon another star. That should fix it."

Refusing to dignify that with a response, August turned to Emma. "So, Emma, about that person threatening the safety of everything we hold dear?"

"Yes?"

"I met her in Hong Kong during the autumn of 2011. The Occupy Wall Street movement was in full swing, the national debt-ceiling was on the rise—" He coughed weakly. "Sorry, can't talk right now. Dying."

Emma facepalmed.

With Gold on vacation, Neal decided to take up his father's mantle and pop out of nowhere, as usual. "August is dead? Heh heh." Then he noticed Marco was there. "I mean, how tragic."

Mary Margaret was inconsolable. "Do the words 'happily ever after' mean nothing anymore? This genre sucks!"

Omniscience skips a generation, so Neal wasn't sure what exactly was going on. "What happened here? Termite plague?"

"No, some villain killed him."

"Who?"

"Beats me. You know how August is. Cryptic, right to the grave." "Brave, truthful, and unselfish," Henry mumbled. "Brave, truthful, and unselfish!"

"Henry, if you keep rambling, I'm gonna put you back in psychotherapy!" his mother threatened.
"Don't you get it? August is now perfect, and therefore, worthy of life!"

Mother Superior suddenly and for no reason showed up. "Hey, I'm the one who decides who's worthy of life around here."

"Well, is he?" Marco sniffled hopefully.

She shrugged. "Eh, sure, why the hell not?" She waved her wand and August was replaced by a little redheaded boy in a hideous hat. He blinked his bleary eyes open. "Father? Did I just pull a Pan?"

"Pinocchio! You're alive, and your eyes are the right color again!" The old carpenter hugged his son blissfully. "Look, everyone! No splinters!"

As everyone smiled and applauded, Gold walked by, dressed in flip-flops and Hawaiian shorts. "So let me get this straight," he said to his son. "When I try to magically restore a troubled man's lost childhood, I'm a pathetic old nutcase, but when the Blue Fairy does it, it's beautiful and heartwarming?"

"That is correct," said Neal.

"Pfft. Hypocrites." He stormed off.

Tamara conveniently happened by a few seconds later. "Gasp. It's all true. I am shocked," she droned mechanically.

Mother Superior bopped Pinocchio playfully on the nose. "Be less of a jerk this time, Pinocchio. Or else."

Now that Pinocchio was underaged, Emma could be nice to him without fear of shippers, so she flashed him a gentle smile. "Pinocchio, I have to ask you a question. Before your little reboot, you were going to reveal the villain. Do you remember who it was?"

Pinocchio thought hard. "No, all I can remember is that I met her in the fair city of Hong Kong during the autumn of 2011, when the Occupy Wall Street movement was in full swing, the national debt-ceiling was on the rise, and the royal wedding—"

"Marco, take him home before I strangle him!"

Marco, Pinocchio, and the Mother Superior suddenly remembered that Archie existed, and ran off to fill him in. The Charmings, for lack of anything better to do, started randomly hugging each other. Neal was left to face Tamara alone. "So…weird, right?"

She shrugged. "Meh. I've seen weirder." Then she remembered herself. "Uh, I mean, yes, weird, but I love you and stuff."

In the fall of 2011, Neal was deep in hiding from Emma, Rumplestiltskin, and the FBI. However, since he didn't realize that hiding usually involved a name change, he wasn't difficult for August to track down. "You look like hell," the former thief observed.

"I know, and it's only going to get worse," said August darkly. "Emma's in Storybrooke, and as much as I loathe helping people, I'm going to have to make an exception in her case. I've got to make her believe in the curse."
Neal raised his eyebrows. "Then why did you go to all that trouble to turn her into a jaded, mistrustful cynic?"

"I was recovering from a severe head injury at the time, okay?!" August defended. "My judgment was impaired—you don't have to rub it in!"

"I don't know about this, August. If you guys succeed in breaking the curse, my father's going to try and repair our relationship, and I rather enjoy hating him. It gives me that dark, troubled air that drives the ladies crazy." He tossed his scarf suavely.

"But you'll get to see Emma again."

"I don't want to see Emma again. She'll hit me with her chainsaw." Neal looked genuinely terrified.

"Suit yourself, bro, but I'll keep the Swanfires burning just in case." He hopped on his bike and rode away.

During this exchange, Tamara had been standing nearby, leafing through a book called *How to Catch a Gold in Ten Days*. "Step One. Act adorably clumsy, preferably destroying some sort of cup in the process.' On it!" She charged into Neal and threw a cup of coffee over her head. "Whoops, how adorably clumsy of me," she apologized with a giggle.

"And how," Neal breathed with a besotted smile.

Triumphantly, she glanced at her book. "'Step Two: Dispense undeserved forgiveness.'" She smiled gently at him."No need to apologize, handsome, it was my fault. And you're definitely not a monster."

Neal sighed dreamily. "I've been waiting so long for a woman to tell me that!" He unwrapped his scarf and draped it over her shoulders. "Here, let me give you this in gratitude."

She glanced at her book again. "'Step Three: pretend to be thrilled with cheap, corny gifts.'" She curtsied playfully at Neal. "Why, thank you."

At the Princess Pad, Emma gently drew her son aside. "Henry, you're freezing me to death, and I can't take it anymore! I'll buy you a motorcycle, I'll let you play with my gun…hell, I'll even stop lying to you if that's what it takes to keep you from arranging my downfall like you did to your last mom!" Henry still looked a little hesitant. "Hey Henry? Comfort mode."

"Ah, the Charming Family Charm. I had such fun teaching you that. All is forgiven!" Henry melted into her arms.

In the next room, David looked at his wife gravely. "Twelve hours is the longest you've ever kept a secret. You must be going nuts. Why don't you tell me before you explode or something?"

Mary Margaret tried to hide her relief. "Okay, but you have to promise you won't get mad."

"When have I ever gotten mad about anything? If I was any calmer, I'd be dead."

"Hm, good point. All right, here's the scoop. I went to visit Regina the other day."

"…Was it part of a plan to plant a bomb in her house?"

"No."
"Then I don't get it."

"I wanted her to kill me."

Her husband looked at her like she'd grown a second head. "...I know this is where I'm supposed to slip into comfort mode, but I think I'm out of my league this time. Let me call Dr. Hopper."

"Wait, that's not the worst part."

"I don't know, I'm pretty sure it has to be."

Mary Margaret ignored him. "She pulled my heart out of my chest, and it was glowing! That can't be healthy, right? Oh, and there was a black spot on it, too, as punishment for my unforgivable desire not to be slaughtered."

"Aw, honey, don't worry. The whole mess with August proves that redemption is still a thing."

"Yeah, but he had to get turned into a kid to be forgiven, and I don't want that to happen to me! There are enough weird inconsistencies with age in this family as it is!"

Finally recovering from his earlier shock, David slipped into comfort mode. "Look, it's about freaking time somebody said this. Killing a homicidal maniac to protect your family does not make you the female equivalent of Satan."

"Do you mean that, or is that the Charming Family Charm talking?" she sniffled hopefully.

"A little of both, but my point is still valid." He enfolded her lovingly in his arms. "Now come here. You and I are long overdue for some fluff."

Greg's phone lit up with a call from his friend "None of Your Business." He picked it up. "Hey, where have you been? Have you been screwing Neal again? You promised me you'd try not to enjoy it!"

Tamara appeared at his door. "Yeah, yeah, I'm working on it."

"Fine, fine, I guess we shouldn't fight when we could be making out instead." He puckered up his lips expectantly.

Tamara heaved a longsuffering sigh. "Do I have to?"

"Yes, deceit and infidelity are all part of being a femme fatale."

She shuffled into his outstretched arms inside reluctantly. "All right, let's get this over with."
Henry was having his birthday party in the Little Pawnshop of Horrors in hopes that the creepy puppets would frighten away any revenge-crazed fairies thinking about crashing. Gold smiled proudly as he blew out his candles. "Congratulations, my boy, you just turned…" he paused to count the candles on the cake. "…eleven again. In celebration of this twice-in-a-lifetime milestone, you can choose any item in this shop for yourself. Except the diamond necklace in the display case. I need that for picking up babes."

The boy selected a magic wand. "Hey, I thought you hated magic and wanted to see it all destroyed," said Neal, confused.

"I'm having an out of character experience," said Henry, waving the wand at his family. "Die, all of you."

"You're a chip off the old block, boy," said Gold proudly, snatching the wand from his grandson's grasp. "It's a shame I have to kill you now." He flicked the wand at Henry, and the boy turned into some kind of reverse-Pinocchio.

"Ah!" David screamed. "The Dark One did something evil! No one could have possibly foreseen that!"

Gold grabbed Emma's chainsaw and held it over the helpless child's head. "Hey, it's him or me. A very reliable source said so."

"What source?"

"The…the one responsible for me becoming a crippled pariah and losing my family," he admitted sheepishly.

"Really, Gold? Really?"

Gold glared. "And as a plus, once the child linking our families together is dead, I won't have to talk to you people anymore. Gold SMASH!"

As the saw sliced through Henry's suddenly creepy face, Gold awoke in his bed. "That's right, it's the same bed Belle was sleeping in. Start your engines, Rumbelle authors!"

Gold, who had been spending way too much time around the Charmings lately, was stalking his family members as they played in the park. "Damn it, they're so sweet together I think they just gave me a cavity."

Regina appeared behind him. "Why is my son bonding with your son? I've made it clear how I feel about him bonding with people who aren't me!"

The pawnbroker giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Oh, that's right. You missed Dramatic Reveal #20193 while you were having your little tantrum. Well, news flash, the world's most epic custody battle just got another contender." He pointed at his son.

"What are you talking about?"
"Well, when a Lost Boy and a magic princess love each other very much…"

Regina hit him with her mighty Glare of Evil. "You're really enjoying this, aren't you?"

"Hee hee, yeah!"

"You're related to Henry? Well, I guess it explains why everyone has suddenly started caring about you."

"Aw, come on!" Gold scoffed. "The kid's a scrawny little genius who spends all his time plotting, usually in order to reunite his family. How could you not have guessed he was my blood?"

Regina raised her eyebrows quizzically. "So you're telling me that your son just happened to meet the savior, and they just happened to procreate, and of all the babies in the world you could have picked out for me, you just happened to choose your long-lost grandson, who just happened to be the key to ending the curse and reuniting you with your son?"

"Er…it was fate?" Gold offered lamely.

"Seriously? That's the explanation you're going with?" She smacked him. "This is ridiculous! And even if it turns out to be true, they won't accept you."

Gold looked bored. "The difference between you and me is that I'm not dumb enough to expect them to."

She fired one last glare at him. "Just for that, I'm going to go screw with your girl again."

Belle was in her hospital room, studying a book on hypochondria, when Mr. Gold knocked at the door. "Hey, baby, I suddenly remembered you exist."

Her eyes widened. "You're alive!"

"I'm flattered you noticed."

She slapped him. "I knew it! That whole deathbed speech was a scam to get a pity date!"

"Actually, it was a scam to impress my son with my sensitivity…but if you liked it too, so much the better." He grinned hopefully. "You want another one?"

"Hell yeah, baby!"

"I know you have no memory of me, but considering what I jerk I was to you sometimes, maybe that's for the best. I love you, and I wanted you to know that just in case Dr. Whale started hitting on you like he does with everyone else."

She smiled warmly. "Well, I'm glad you're still alive. That last episode was seriously boring without you, and besides, I know you love me, because I have a superpower where judging a person's sincerity is concerned."

Gold frowned suspiciously. "Did Sheriff Swan teach you this trick?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

Gold was about to tell her not to put much stock in it, but realized that would only hurt his case. "Does this mean you believe we were knockin' boots?"
"Not exactly, but I'm now willing to stop screaming bloody murder every time you come within a five meter radius of me."

"I'll take it!" Gold said eagerly.

"Great. So, now that we have an understanding, are you going to stop gaslighting me?"

"No, sorry, I don't love you that much."

Belle facepalmed. "Can you at least help me ditch the amnesia?"

"I'll make you a deal. I'll help you ditch your amnesia if you'll help me stop being an evil bastard."

Belle thought it over. "I should probably be put off by that request, but what woman could resist a guy who begs for the chance to change himself for her?"

"I'm also a millionaire," he added helpfully.

She bolted to her feet. "Say no more, I'm in! Let's blow this joint, baby."

He picked up his cane. "I'll just go beat on your doctor until he makes with the release forms, then."

In the dungeons of the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Belle lay weeping in her bed. "A lifetime in bondage to a violent psycho isn't nearly as fun as the Fifty Shades series made it sound," she sobbed in despair.

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "What's with all the crying? You on the rag or something?"

"No, I miss my family. All one of them."

"Well, learn to cope with separation better," he ordered her. "Or else."

She rolled her eyes. "Says the guy who's trying to cause an apocalypse because he wants to hug his kid."

"What have I told you about reading my diary?!" he roared. Taking a deep breath, he tried to compose himself. "Look, the point is, your incessant crying is giving me an inexplicable urge to cuddle you, and my reputation would never recover from that." He conjured a pillow and handed it to her.

She eyed it warily. "What's the gag, is it full of scorpions or something?"

"No, it's to muffle your cries, because I'm not intelligent enough to simply soundproof your cell."

Hearing a loud crash in the man cave, the pair ran to investigate, and found a guy in a fox mask pilfering one of Rumplestiltskin's wands. "You're stealing from me? What, are you suicidal, or just plain stupid?"

"I'm not stupid, I'm confident, thank you very much!" the rogue corrected, peeking out from under his mask and pointing his magic bow at the imp's chest.

The Dark One sighed wearily. "Look, I'm gonna tell you the same thing I'll tell that bimbo Cinderella. Magic users are losers, and magic users who cross the Dark One are dead losers." With that, he magicked himself across the room.
"You can't escape me! I stole this bow from a guy named Cupid, to get back at him for trying to pair me up with some evil queen. It never misses its target." He fired an arrow squarely into Rumplestiltskin's heart.

Rumplestiltskin yanked it out and tossed it aside. "Dearie, I've been around for three hundred years. Did it seriously never occur to you that I might be immortal?"

"Eep."

Belle was rifling through the large suitcase that had materialized in her room at some point, when Regina barged in, as usual. "Hi, I'm Regina, still the mayor of this town for some unfathomable reason."

Belle smiled obliviously. "Well, I'm not sensing any insincerity from you with my superpower, so come on in."

Regina studied her curiously. "Did you learn this superpower from Emma?"

"Yes."

The former queen smirked. "Excellent. So, how have you been?"

"Drugged and imprisoned against my will. And I'm not even hurt. What kind of freaky hospital is this, anyway?"

"The kind that's run by Dr. Frankenstein."

Confused, the amnesiac beauty shook her head, as though trying to clear it. "I guess it doesn't matter. Mr. Gold and his cane are getting me discharged."

"I'll just bet they are." Regina pulled a matchbook out of her sleeve. "Did you drop this?"

Belle glanced at it briefly. "No, I only drop teacups."

"Look harder or I'll shove a poisoned apple down your throat!"

Petrified, Belle did as she was told. "Wait, a minute, I get it now. Fugly windmill!"

Regina left, cackling. "Bwa hah hah! Time for Gold to learn what I do to people who make the mistake of being related to my kid."

Tamara and Greg were poring over a badly-drawn map of Storybrooke that they'd stolen from Jefferson's house. Tamara pointed. "This is where you saw it?"

"Saw what?"

"Take your pick. It's a safe bet that no matter where I point on a map of this town, I'm going to hit something weird."

"Good point. Well, you'd better get back to Neal before he comes to his senses and dumps you."

"Don't worry, the man's more gullible than Belle and Sidney put together. Worry about this idiotic quest to find your dad instead. I mean, even if the supervillain did spare his insignificant life for some reason, it's been three decades, and he's probably died of old age by now—"
"I choose not to notice that!" Greg roared. "Did you bring the package?"

"You mean Hook?"

He covered her mouth with his hand. "Shh! Our cool habit of talking in code is the only thing that keeps us from being hopelessly, irredeemably lame!"

David and Mary Margaret pulled over to the side of a dirt road in the middle of nowhere and forced their daughter out of their car. "What gives, are you guys gonna waste me or something?" Emma asked uneasily.

"No, we're determined to break the cycle of attempted filicide that has plagued our family for so many generations," her father assured her.

"Then why are you being so cryptic about where you're taking me? Are you trying to fill the hole left by August's demi-death?" She glanced at her watch. "Speaking of which, his last words gave me the perfect excuse to take Neal's fiancée out of the picture, and I'd really like to get to work on that."

"Eh, you don't need Neal anymore," scoffed Mary Margaret, leading her into the magically-cloaked bean field. "When these babies take us home, you'll have plenty of eligible princes to choose from."

"Then why are you being so cryptic about where you're taking me? Are you trying to fill the hole left by August's demi-death?" She glanced at her watch. "Speaking of which, his last words gave me the perfect excuse to take Neal's fiancée out of the picture, and I'd really like to get to work on that."

"Eh, you don't need Neal anymore," scoffed Mary Margaret, leading her into the magically-cloaked bean field. "When these babies take us home, you'll have plenty of eligible princes to choose from."

Anton waved. "Hi, Emma! Remember that time we didn't kill each other?"

"With great fondness, old friend." She hugged him cheerfully. "So, why are you so small?"

"Cora shrunk me because the special effects team got tired of animating me," the former giant replied.

"Hey, you're a dwarf now!" Leroy barked at him. "Your days of taking an occasional thirty-second break are over."

"Slavery blows," Anton grumbled, returning to his post.

David gestured proudly at the field. "Mother Superior decided to make herself useful for a change, and cloaked the field."

"Whoa, hold the phone," Emma interrupted, turning to her mother. "You want to go home? We just spent weeks risking our lives to get out of that dump! Explain, damn it!"

"You know how I said last week that taking a life caused me serious psychological trauma and the simple act of relocating wasn't going to cure it?"

"Yeah?"

"I changed my mind. It totally will."

"But I don't want to go back to your world. Your world sucks," Emma protested.

"So does yours," her father retorted.

"...Touché."

Wiping the last of the blood off his cane, Gold returned to Belle's room, but found it empty. "Damn, I should have known that was too easy. Hey, Ratched!" he bellowed. "Who abducted Belle this
time?"

Nurse Ratched glanced at a clipboard. "Sorry, I don't have any abductions scheduled for that patient today."

Gold conjured an escargot fork. "Don't make me use this!" As the woman ran off screaming, he noticed a matchbook on the floor by the bed. "The Rabbit Hole. Yes, I get it."

Gold stormed into the only bar in town. "I think it only fair to warn you, people who mess my girl end up..." His face fell. "Okay, Belle usually cuddles my rage away and I let them off scot-free, but I'm still scary, damn it!"

"Sure you are, bro," the bartender snickered. "So, what does this Belle look like?"

"Emile de Ravin."

The bartender pointed at Belle, who was sprawled half-naked on a pool table with a funnel in her mouth. "That's her, unless she has an evil twin. Which, considering where we live, is probably the case."

"Dude, what the hell?" Gold muttered, approaching his girlfriend tentatively. "Belle, darling, I think you're a little mixed up. I'm the evil half of this couple."

"I don't know what you're talking about. My name is Lacey."

"Lacey what?" he challenged.

"I... don't know." She looked troubled for a minute, then shrugged lazily. "I choose not to notice that."

As the thief screamed bloody murder in the dungeons, Belle was forlornly sweeping the floor upstairs. "There is a castle on a cloud. I like to go there when I dream. Aren't any jerks for me to redeem. Not in my castle on a cloud."

Rumplestiltskin emerged from the dungeon and peeled off his bloodstained apron. "Ugh, nothing stains worse than the blood of the damned."

"Then maybe you should stop damning people," Belle suggested queasily.

The Dark One giggled, pinching her cheek good-naturedly. "If that was a joke, it was freaking hilarious. If you were serious, it's still pretty darn funny." He headed for the door, camera in hand. "I'm going to go post his dying screams on YouTube. Since you've displayed such deep respect for me and my rules so far, I think I can trust you not to tamper with the prisoner while I'm gone. In fact, I don't think I even need to bother asking you."

Rolling her eyes, Belle headed straight for the dungeon. "Why am I supposed to be intimidated by this bumbling idiot, again?" She found the thief dangling from the ceiling over a pool of his own blood. "Oh, now I remember." She smiled tremulously at the prisoner. "Hey, homie."

"Are you evil too?" the thief slurred.

"No, I'm cute," she pointed out. "So, how's your day been?"

"It was awful! He made me watch his exotic dancing routine!" the prisoner moaned deliriously.
"Please, just kill me now. I don't want to live another minute with those images in my head."

Belle gasped. "That's what Rumplestiltskin does to people who cross him, huh?" Hiding a smile, she undid his bonds. "In that case, I'm going to defy his will and heroically stay behind to face the consequences of my actions. Because my conscience tells me to, of course."

The thief shot a worried look at her as he left. "It's your funeral, sister."

As Regina sat in her office waiting for someone to finally fire her, Gold turned the tables on her and barged in. "What have you done to Belle?" he roared.

"I turned her into a sex maniac with a fetish for bad boys. You're welcome."

"I don't want to be in a romantic relationship with a cruel, drunken, bar-hopping slut! I already did that once, and it ended horribly!" He slammed his fist down on her desk. "Come on, woman, hasn't Rumbelle been through enough lately?"

"Nope," she replied smugly. The Dark One pouted. "You're really enjoying this, aren't you?"

She giggled. "Hee hee, yeah!"

"Well, I'll show you! I'll simply turn a few guys into flowers and win her love all over again!"

Regina just laughed harder, tears streaming down her face. "Oh please, she's a cold-hearted, vindictive, self-absorbed sicko! And it's not like you've ever been able to win the love of one of those before—" Her eyes suddenly fell on a photo of her mother, and her smile faded. "Uh oh."

Granny handed a tray off to Leroy and David. "Ten bowls of chili. Whatever you guys are doing, I hope you aren't doing it near any open flames."

Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Granny, Leroy, go away. The regulars need to talk."

"You heard the man," said the quasi-prince, shooing them along. "What do you want, Gold? If you're looking to commission another magic baby, I'm sorry, but it's going to be at least another year."

"No, I need some more love advice."

"What do I look like, Dear Abby?"

"But this is serious! Regina has turned my girlfriend into a scantily-clad sex maniac with a fetish for bad boys!"

David raised an eyebrow quizzically. "So…what's the problem, exactly?"

"I ship Rumbelle, damn it, not Rumpled Lace!" The Dark One stamped his foot petulantly. "They're totally different things!"

"So what do you want from me?"

"Well, Regina turned you into a lying, two-timing pig, and Mary Margaret into an absolute doormat, yet you two still somehow managed to be cute together. What's your secret?"
"Henry hooked us up. Maybe you should try enlisting his help."

"No, Henry's only got a few days to live, and I don't want to make him spend them working. What kind of grandfather do you think I am? Any other suggestions?"

The quasi-prince thought long and hard. "Well, you could not kill some people. That always seemed to be one of Belle's turn-ons."

Rumplestiltskin took out some handcuffs and a riding crop and headed down to the basement, while Belle resisted the urge to follow him. "Belle!" he roared. "Have you been seeing the best in jerks who don't deserve it again?"

"Yup."

"Why?"

She shrugged. "I'm a beauty but a funny girl."

"But he's a thief! He's evil!"

"Could be worse. He could be a murdering, manipulating, baby-selling hypocrite."

"Shut up." His eyes fell on the book she was reading. "And where the hell did you get that? I didn't give it to you and you didn't have it when you came here." He evaporated it before further continuity problems could arise.

"Hey, cut me some slack! I just don't think the guy deserved to die, and he certainly didn't deserve to be subjected to your exotic dancing routine. All he wanted was to escape with his life. I should know, I was his friend for many, many seconds."

"Rebuttal." Rumplestiltskin pointed at the wand's empty pedestal. "Allow me to present Exhibit A. Are you ready to admit you're wrong?"

Belle laughed. "Once you get to know me a little better, you're going to laugh at yourself for even thinking about asking me that. I'm sure the guy stole the wand for some noble cause. Maybe it's one of the Deathly Hallows or something."

"For someone known for being the smartest of the Disney Princesses, I've got to say, I'm not impressed so far. People who steal magic never have good intentions." He indicated himself. "I give you Exhibit B. So, are you ready to stop being such an insufferable optimist?"

"I can't. That's pretty much my whole character," she apologized.

He buried his face in his hands. "I'm really starting to regret this purchase." Grabbing the thief's bow, he dragged her to the door. "Come on, let's go murdering. Maybe that will lift my spirits."

Over at the only bar in town, the Sheriff of Nottingham was apparently suffering from amnesia of his own, because he was going after Rumplestiltskin's girl again. "Hey, baby. I find severe alcoholism incredibly sexy. Wanna hook up?"

Taking one last swig, she gave him a sideways glance. "Sorry, but even I have higher standards than that."

Gold and his trusty wingman David sauntered in. "Hey, check out the two blondes in the corner,"
David whispered. "You wanna go in first, or should I?"

"Hey, we're just here for Belle, remember?" Gold whispered back.

The quasi-prince blushed. "Right, right, sorry. I got so used to committing adultery during the curse, it's going to take me a while to kick the habit."

Gold dragged him over to the bar, where Lacey was sitting. "Hey baby. What are you still doing here?"

"Well, where else am I gonna go? I'm pretty sure I don't have a job. Or a house." She glanced down at her skimpy blue cocktail dress. "And I'm not sure where this came from either." Lacey took another gulp of her drink. "Ah, sweet alcohol. It's the only thing that eases my confusion."

Meanwhile, David had managed to sneak over to the jukebox and put on "Beauty and the Beast." Lacey pulled a face. "Yuck, that movie was unrealistic and promoted Stockholm Syndrome." She went over to change it to something generically hardcore.

Gold was utterly scandalized. "She listens to rock music? Truly, this woman is more wicked than even I!"

David smacked him upside the head. "Will you just get over yourself and go ask her out? I only have a thirty minute lunch hour."

The pawnbroker reluctantly shuffled over to his girl. "Hey, Lacey? You don't seem like the picky type, so why not go out with me?"

She looked him over appraisingly. "Hm, you've got me there. But you do know I'm not this 'Belle' you're always going on about?"

Several of the dwarves were sitting at a table nearby, and looked up when they heard the familiar name. "Oh, is that Belle? Hey, Belle!"

She pointedly ignored them. "I choose not to notice that."

"But Belle—" Leroy protested.

She flung a stiletto heel at his head. "I said my name is Lacey, damn it!"

Moe French suddenly burst through the front door. "Belle, I've been looking all over for you! Belle, are you ready to ditch this clown and come home? Belle?"

She heaved a longsuffering sigh. "Everyone is delusional but me."

Gold resisted the urge to knock some sense into her head with his cane. "Fine, whatever, there's no such thing as Belle. The only woman I'm interested in is Lacey Nolastname."

Lacey smirked lasciviously for the sake of anyone who hadn't yet noticed she was sleazy. "I've heard about you. The people in town say you're a cold-blooded monster who steals babies for a living."

"Yeah, but at least I don't listen to rock music."

She couldn't argue with that. "Fair enough. I guess you'll have to take me to dinner at Granny's, since that's pretty much all there is to do in this town." She turned to leave. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go check the yellow pages and see if I have an address."

David came over and gave him a congratulatory slap on the back. "Nice work. Now all you have to
do is put her in a coma somehow, and your romance will be complete."

Gold gave him a funny look. "You can go now, David. I think I've had enough of your 'help'."

Emma was at the docks, checking the Big Book of Deja-Vu for some help with her love triangle problem, when she ran across Captain Hook's origin story. "Kill and maim the cheating bastards. Hm, there's an idea." She added it to her 'maybe' list.

Regina barged in, as usual. "Henry has a father? How very shocking and unnatural!"

Emma looked bored. "I suppose I should know better by now than to expect an apology from you for trying to murder me."

"That's right, now shut up and tell me where he gets off thinking he has a right to love my child. You know the drill, here. Nurture over nature; mine, mine, mine, etcetera."

"Will you please just stop slaughtering people?" the savior pleaded. "If you keep it up, I'm going to be forced to take permanent custody of Henry, and that kid still kind of gives me the creeps."

Regina frowned suspiciously. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Do you really expect me to go blabbing my secrets to you?"

"No, but I bet your mother will." Regina rose, heading straight for Mary Margaret's place.

Emma facepalmed. "We're doomed."

At the only diner in town, Lacey watched with amusement as Gold cowered behind a menu. "Are you nervous?"

"That depends. Do you still find that attractive?"

"Hell no."

"In that case, no, cowering is simply an old hobby of mine."

Granny walked over. "Hey Belle."

Lacey covered her ears. "La la la la, can't hear you! My name is Lacey, it says so right here on my driver's license..." She took the card out of her wallet and frowned. "Okay, fine, it doesn't, but you're all still delusional."

Her ramblings were becoming painful to watch, so Gold took over the conversation. "I'd like a double order of escargot, please." He looked at his date expectantly. "Well?"

Lacey blinked. "Well what?"

"Aren't you going to cancel my escargot and make me order something less sinister?"

"No." Gold's face fell in dismay. Disturbed, Lacey turned to Granny. "Bring me the largest bottle of booze you have. It looks like I'm going to need it."

"You're going to mess Belle's liver up something awful," Gold cautioned, "but I guess I can always buy her a new one."
"That's very gracious of you. What's up with that? Aren't you supposed to be an evil old bastard?"

"Only when you're not looking, dearie."

Granny returned with an eighty-four ounce Big Gulp full of McCutcheon's, which Lacey promptly guzzled. Gold shuddered. "Great, not only is my girlfriend a sex maniac; she also likes to get herself drunk! How the hell am I ever supposed to score with a chick like this?"

Lacey gave him a weird look. "Are you sure you're a man?"

"I already told you, no!" Exasperated, her buried his face in his hands. "Can you please be a little less bitchy?"

"I can't. That's pretty much my whole character," she apologized.

Gold stared at her in awe. "Recurring lines! Yes, this is what amnesiac romances are all about. Quick, now tell me you'll always find me!" He shook her fiercely.

Lacey cringed. "Er, don't take this the wrong way, but you're freaking me out, and that's hard to do."

"Sorry, baby." He released her, knocking over her glass in the process. When he bent over to retrieve it, he started beaming. "It's chipped! Score!"

Lacey stood up. "Well, I think I've seen enough. I have to go, uh, away from you now."

"Kay," said Gold obliviously, taking out his phone and snapping a picture of the cup for his wallet.

As the Budweiser Clydesdales hauled Belle and Rumplestiltskin through the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, she eyed her master calculatingly. "You know, if you spared the thief's life, it would really improve your reputation."

"And that would be dreadful. I'm so glad you agree," the Dark One trilled.

"Oh yeah?" she challenged. "Well, if you're so evil, then why didn't you kill me when I freed the prisoner?"

"Because Team Rumbelle threatened to stab me to death if I did."

"Rumbelle? What's that?"

He laughed darkly. "You don't want to know, dearie."

"Well, I think there's good in you," Belle persisted. "And I'm not going to be shy about saying so, either."

"Aw, damn," grumbled Rumplestiltskin. "I'm going to have to eat some kittens in front of you and nip that in the bud."

"You're disgusting!"

Rumplestiltskin preened. "Now that's more like it!"

Some drunk wearing a lot of medieval hair gel rode up and pulled them over. "Do you know how fast you were going?"
"Ugh, I hate it when cops ask you that," the Dark One grumbled. "Who are you, and why are you getting in my way? Did your mom drop you on the head as a baby or something?"

"Oh, probably. I don't have a name to give you, but I'm the Sheriff of Nottingham. So, what brings you to my neck of the woods?"

"I'm trying to find a thief. At times he looked like Sean McGuire, but at other times he looked like Tom Ellis.

Nottingham nodded. "Ah, yes, I know the guy well. Let me rape your slave and I'll tell you his name." Rumplestiltskin's only response was to giggle evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "What are you so happy about?" the Sheriff asked.

"You just gave me moral justification to indulge in some violence!" the Dark One replied with glee, magicking Nottingham's tongue from his mouth. "Now talk, or I'll rip out your heart, give it to Regina, and let her give you a taste of your own medicine. Do we understand each other?"

Nottingham, who had never learned how to nod, grunted unintelligibly and shoved a finger up his nose. "Don't be too hard on him, boss," Belle urged. "I think nature has already punished him enough."

"Agreed." Rumplestiltskin put the sheriff's tongue back.

"I just had my first thought. Maybe apprehending the Dark One and demanding favors from him was a bad idea." Nottingham shuddered. "Okay, here's a clue. The guy you're after is the Sheriff of Nottingham's enemy."

"Oh, Robin Hood. I guess he'll be in Sherwood Forest, then. Thanks."

---

After careful consideration of the Snowing formula, Gold deduced that it was probably time for him to embark on a search for his beloved. He started at the ladies' room. "Lacey, I'm coming in after you. It's not weird." But Lacey was not hunched over the toilet, vomiting from alcohol poisoning, as one would expect.

Belle was following her master through the woods, smacking a rolling pin menacingly against her palm. "If you kill that poor man, I'm going to spend the rest of our lives nagging you like I've never nagged before," she threatened.

Rumplestiltskin paled. "You mean…worse than you have already?"

"Yep."

The Dark One choked back a terrified sob. "As horrific as that prospect is, to protect my evil rep, I'm willing to make any sacrifice. After all, killing him was the whole point of this little expedition."

Belle looked puzzled. "I thought the point of this little expedition was to develop our relationship and provide a backstory on Snow White's bow?"

"You thought wrong, dearie." Rumplestiltskin pointed over a gentle slope. "Now be quiet, for once in your life. I've finally found him."

"Not that it's any of my business, but why didn't you just use that tracking spell of yours?" She indicated Hood's bow. "You have an object owned by him, and it would have made this quest a
whole lot shorter."

"Okay, fine, maybe developing our relationship was part of the equation," he admitted, "but keep it to yourself."

A wagon rolled to a stop near Robin Hood. It bore a sickly woman who really must have wanted people to see her condition, because she had removed the sides and cover from the vehicle. "She's sick," Belle observed.

"And milking it for all the attention it's worth, it seems," said Rumplestiltskin, raising Hood's bow.

Belled swatted his arm. "Knock that off, we both know you're not going to go through with it." Robin Hood, who had apparently taken wizard levels at some point, waved the wand and cured her. "Aw, that desperate soul risked everything to steal magic from the Dark One in order to save the life of a loved one! That's so cute!"

"Cute, you say?" Rumplestiltskin perked up. "Tell me, Belle, would you be open to listening to my backstory one of these days?"

"Maybe, if you stop killing innocent people."

"Screw it, then," he said dismissively, trapping her in a hole.

"This had better be the last time I get restrained against my will!" she shouted, struggling indignantly. "Don't do it, boss. She's pregnant," Belle pleaded. "You wouldn't really leave a child fatherless, would you?"

"Actually, leaving a child fatherless is pretty much my whole character," Rumplestiltskin replied, "but killing him is starting to feel a little too much like suicide, and I wanted to save that for Season Three." He fired the arrow into his foot instead of the thief. "GAAAAAAAH!"

"A banshee! Run!" Robin Hood cried, hauling his girl onto a horse and fleeing.

"Why the hell did you do that?!" Belle screamed.

"Force of habit," the Dark One replied through clenched teeth, healing the wound and magicking her out of her pit.

"Liar," she said knowingly. "Someone's got a cuddly side!" She glomped him to sample it for herself.

"Shut up, I do not!" Blushing furiously, he stormed back to the carriage.

Belle ran after him, singing triumphantly. "There's something sweet—"

"Stop that."

"And almost kind—"

"Geez, woman, leave me my dignity!"

"But he was mean and he was coarse and unrefined. And now he's dear."

"I still know that tongue trick!"
Gold found Nottingham 2.0 mauling Lacey behind a dumpster. "Still dumb enough to mess with my girl, I see!" he snarled, hauling the hoodlum off her.

The guy backed away nervously. "Sorry babe, but I'm gonna have to sit this one out. I can't lose my tongue again; I need it for licking envelopes."

Gold looked Lacey over carefully. "Why aren't you screaming and fainting?"

"Do I have to spell it out for you?" she snapped. "You're so lame that you actually made him look good to me!"

"But…but I was cute and charming and didn't kill people," he protested in a small voice.

"Ugh. Belle may have liked your half-assed attempts at compassion, but I am not her!"

Archie, who was passing by on the street, stopped to wave at them. "Good evening, Belle."

"I CHOOSE NOT TO NOTICE THAT!" Lacey roared, storming off.

Heartbroken, Gold slumped against a wall. "She lied, she belittled me, and she cheated on me publicly. So why do I have a sudden urge to marry her?"

The dwarves were avoiding the bar for fear they'd run into Lacey again, so they had to go drinking at Granny's instead. "Sure you don't want to come with?" Leroy asked the Charmings as everyone piled out of David's truck. "Tiny's probably not going to have much more screen time, so you should try to cherish every moment you have with him."

"No, we want to squeeze in a few makeout sessions before the next big catastrophe befalls our relationship," Mary Margaret declined politely. "Drive on, Honeymuffin!"

Nearby, Regina, for the sake of anyone who hadn't yet realized she was a villain, was standing in the shadows and glaring. "I guess that's my cue." She went over to where the truck had been parked and lit up a pair of glowing trails where the wheels had been.

A teenaged boy in a leather jacket came running up to them. "Doc? Doc! I'm back from the future!"

"Get lost, McFly! This plot is complicated enough without adding time travel into the mix!" She threw a couple of fireballs to scare him off, got in her obligatory black luxury car, and followed the trail to the bean field. "Ah, crap, not these things again."

Gold was shuffling dejectedly to his own obligatory black luxury car when Nottingham 2.0 ran up to him. "Hey, Mr. Gold. I notice that you're furious with me, but I'm not smart enough to go far away from you."

"You know," the pawnbroker seethed, "I normally cope with emotional distress by smashing all my possessions with a stick, but your face is closer than they are at the moment." He slammed his cane into the former sheriff's face.

As Belle and Rumplestiltskin walked back into the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, she sniggered at him. "Well, I guess you may as well get rid of that weapon. You're clearly too whipped to use it anymore."

"Actually, I think I'll hold on to it. Some princess might need it to defy gender stereotypes someday."
He placed it in a box with a tag reading, "Do not open till Season One."

"Well, if you've had your fill of fluff for the day, I'll just be going," she said, heading off to the dungeons to write about their little jaunt in her diary.

"I will never have my fill of fluff, dearie. Never!" He seized her by the hand and hauled her up to the library. "I expect you to keep this place clean, but I don't hold out a lot of hope that you actually will. Come to think of it, I don't think I've ever seen you do any actual cleaning in all the time you've been here."

Belle picked up one of his books and broke into peals of laughter. "You own a copy of The Very Hungry Caterpillar?"

Face flaming, he snatched the book away from her. "Uh…it's not mine, it's Bae's," he lied.

"Wow, you're such a geek." She giggled. "It's freaking adorable."

Meanwhile, Gold was whacking on poor Nottingham for the third consecutive hour. "I bet it won't surprise you to learn that my favorite party game is the piñata."

"What a coincidence, so is mine," Lacey revealed, coming around the corner and taking in the carnage. "Wow, you're such a sicko." She giggled. "It's freaking adorable."

A light bulb seemed to go off in Gold's head. "Wait a minute. I just bumped. My girlfriend has become a sex maniac with a fetish for bad boys!" He giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "This is the happiest moment of my life!"

"Yeah, yeah. Less yakkin', more whackin'," snapped Lacey, pointing at Nottingham's battered carcass.

"Yes, dear." He raised his cane happily. "Rumple SMASH!"

Neal appeared at Emma's front door, carrying an unconscious Henry over his shoulder. "Uh oh, did he eat another of Regina's apples?"

"No, I knocked him out. For some reason, I have the strangest feeling that I need to get used to carrying the kid unconscious on my back." Neal dumped his son on the couch. "We spent the day banging practice swords together in order to make cool clanging noises. I'm not sure how helpful that skill will be in an actual swordfight, but I bet it will get him all kinds of girls."

"Yeah, it seemed to work for Hook," Emma agreed. "So tell me, Neal, have you ever thought about going home to beautiful British Columbia?"

"No, I had a fight with my father while I was there, and that makes the whole dimension irredeemably horrible."

"Uh…okay," said Emma uncertainly. "I'm not sure how to respond to that kind of logic, so can we change the subject?"

"Okay. The newly-renovated August came to the park today. He seems to be enjoying his curse of amnesia a lot more than the rest of Storybrooke enjoyed theirs."

"That whole situation is incredibly messed up, but I don't have time to worry about it right now,"
Emma sighed. "I'm too busy worrying about that mole he mentioned before he got heartwarmingly mind-raped."

Neal looked unworried. "You're Emma Swan. You'll figure it out, probably in under forty-three minutes."

On the outskirts of town, Greg ran to greet Tamara. "Ah, me and my girl orchestrating genocide together on a moonlit night," he sighed contentedly, smooching her. "Now that's what I call quality time."

"Are you ready to go talk to Hook?" Tamara asked.

"Ahem."

She rolled her eyes. "Fine, fine, are you ready to 'unwrap the package'?"

"Much better." He followed her around to the back of her box trailer. "But do you really think teaming up with a guy who loses so often that he actually gets shipped with the floor is going to help our cause?"

"Who knows? At the very least, he could stun a few of our enemies with his sex appeal."

She lowered the door, revealing a tightly-bound Hook. "Ugh, beaten by Greg and Tamara," he mumbled through his gag. "Can there be any greater humiliation?"
The Evil Queen

Up in the Hill Valley Clock Tower, Tamara pulled a heavy sack off Hook's head. "Exposing yourself to my smoldering gaze? Not smart," the pirate sneered. "So, I assume you've brought me here to reunite me with my one true love?"

"We're not going to kill you."

"I know. I was referring to the floor." Hook smiled tenderly at the planks under his feet. "We'll be together again soon, my sweet."

"Actually, we want to offer you a job."

"Another one?" Hook rolled his eyes. "Can't you morons do anything for yourselves?"

"Nope," said Greg. "And while we're on the subject, would you mind tying my shoes for me after you finish the job?"

"You're on your own, kiddies. I'm busy." said Hook. "Now that I've avenged my beloved Milah, it's time for me to forget she ever existed and concentrate on my relationship with Emma."

Tamara and Greg burst out laughing. "You really think it would be that easy? Even we're smart enough to know Rumplestiltskin's too popular to die."

They dragged him to the transparent clock face. On the street below, Gold was limping down the street with Lacey on his arm. "Okay, I stole the gift of speech from a harmless man and then beat him half to death for your amusement. Can we have sex now?"

"No, you promised to take me to the park so that I could watch you steal candy from some babies," she reminded him.

Gold pouted. "This pairing sucks."

"No!" Hook screamed. "He's alive and suffering the same torment of lost love that he inflicted on me!" The pirate buried his face in his hands. "What kind of revenge is that?"

Greg and Tamara exchanged worried glances. "Well, he's still a way better villain than we are," she admitted. "He'll have to do."

"Do what?"

"I need your help," said Greg. "I seem to have misplaced my father."

"You and everybody else. Is that the phrase of the day around here or something?" The pirate groaned. "Look, despite what my fangirls may think, I'm not the type of guy who works to reunite families out of the goodness of his heart. Check back with me next season, though."

"But we can help you kill Rumplestiltskin."

"What? Why do you want him dead?"

"Because we do."

Hook sighed. "Well, I guess it's a good a motivation as any. What do you need me to do?"
"Hit on Regina."

"I get to kill Rumplestiltskin and hit on a beautiful lady?" The pirate grinned. "Christmas has come early this year!"

At Snow White's secret cottage in the woods, Regina barged in, as usual. "Snow, stop hiding and face me! I know you're in here—who else would own a five hundred pound seed bell?"


"Damn it, one of the peasants must have tipped her off. One of these days, I should try and remember they exist."

"I'll make a note of it for later," said Royal Henchman #47,598, taking a legal pad out of his pocket.

"Good. And when you're done, go round up the villagers. Maybe we'll get lucky and they'll be as bad at keeping secrets as their princess."


The villagers averted their eyes. "Don't look at her cleavage," one of them whispered to his compatriots. "I hear it has magical powers of hypnotism."

"Aw, come on!" Regina persisted. "She totally deserves to die. After all, she killed my beloved Dan—uh, Leonard."

"His name was Leopold," a villager corrected.

"Whatevs, man. The point is, the sweet little girl who had nothing to gain by killing him is obviously the prime suspect."

The villagers looked confused. "I thought you were blaming his death on the genie?"

"Uh...the genie turned out to be Snow White in a genie mask," Regina saved.

"Do you really think we're dumb enough to buy this, you crazy witch?"

The evil queen decided it was time to switch tactics. "Tell me her whereabouts and I'll give you a cookie."

"Apple flavored?"

"Yes."

"No deal!"

"You're taking her side?" Regina was outraged. "How can you possibly like her better than me? I'm so much better-dressed!" She stomped over to her guards. "My approval rating seems to be dropping. Kill everyone. That should fix it."

"Have you been reading Machiavelli's The Prince again?" Royal Henchman 47,598 raised his
"You are aware that was written as a satire, right?"

"Just do it!"

"Okay, but just out of curiosity, why don't you do it yourself? Seems like one of your fireballs would be much quicker and easier, and a more impressive show of power, too."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on him. "I really should have conquered a less mouthy kingdom. After you're done here, buy me some dragon eggs and book me a flight to Westeros."

David and Mary Margaret cuddled intimately on a bench by the pier, while an elderly fisherman watched intently. "Are you some kind of voyeur?" Mary Margaret asked.

"No, just eavesdropping."

"Carry on, then." She turned her attention back to her man. "David, are we really going to leave Regina behind in this dump of a dimension?"

"It's starting to look like our only option. She's got that pesky habit of murdering everybody, and try as we may, we just don't have the guts to kill her."

"But she's Henry's mother."

"She was your mother, too. Remember how well that worked out?"

"Okay, she's made a few mistakes," Mary Margaret conceded, "but doesn't everybody deserve a fifth chance?"

"Eminem, I'm through being an enabler! If you insist on putting yourself at her mercy again, I'm not coming to the rescue when she inevitably kills you!"

Mary Margaret pouted. "Well, what's your suggestion, then?"

"We should give her a choice between staying here or life imprisonment in Rumplestiltskin's cell. I know she has a proven ability to teleport in and out of the place at will, but if we put her on the honor system, I'm sure she'd refrain."

"Now who's being naïve?"

The old voyeur excused himself to go transform back into Regina. "A life sentence? For a petty crime like murdering a few peasants? This is ridiculous! King George did it and they never punished him!"

Over at the Haunted Mansion, Regina barged in, as usual. "Yo Rumplestiltskin! I have a problem, and I'm smart enough to realize that problems never get solved without your help."

Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I'm kind of busy, er, not falling in love with Belle, but I guess I can spare a few minutes for my favorite enemy. What's up, dearie?"

"My subjects hate me, just because I keep slaughtering them!" She stamped her foot petulantly. "It's not fair, damn it! To quote our mutual friend Scar, I'm the queen-I can do whatever I want."

The Dark One raised his eyebrows. "What's with the elitism, all of a sudden? Wasn't your True Love a peasant? And haven't you always hated being royalty?"
"I choose not to notice that!"

Rumplestiltskin shook his head. "You seem to be having an out-of-character experience, but I'll play along, for now. If you want everyone to stop calling you evil, you need to stop butchering innocent people, quit hounding the protagonist, and most importantly, wear less black."

"I'm not evil!" Regina protested. "I'll prove it." She waved one of her Royal Henchmen over. "Am I evil?"

"Ye-no, ma'am. Please don't kill me." The armored figure cringed.

"There, you see?" She smiled smugly, shooing the man away.

Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Stop fighting it, dearie. After all, someone's got to be the bad guy around here, or we've got no story."

"Shut up! I'll find a way to make everyone love me, or kill them all trying!"

"Or you could just find a boyfriend."

Regina grabbed him by the lapels and shook him furiously. "Has that damn Tinkerbell been talking to you?!"

"Of course not, you know I'm a filthy racist when it comes to fairies."

"Good man." She dropped him. "Say, I've got an idea! Since killing the rightful monarch didn't make me popular, maybe killing his rightful heir will do the trick."

Rumplestiltskin looked bewildered. "Regina, if you're being sarcastic, I don't get it."

She hit him with her mighty Glare of Evil. "I'm going to find her. I know! I'll put a tracking device on Prince Charming. He'll lead me straight to her."

"I don't think they've met yet," the Dark One informed her. "You're going to have to think of something else."

"Okay. Why don't you teach me that tracking spell you're always throwing around? That would probably do the trick."

"That spell is my gimmick, dearie. Find your own."

"All right, how about teaching me my mom's shapeshifting spell, so I can morph into an ugly old lady and offer her a poisoned apple?"

"I'm sorry, but that's a ninth-level spell, and you're only a seventh-level caster at present."

"Well, what level are you?"

"Level infinity," he bragged.

"Then you could cast the spell on me, right?"

"I could, but if I did, you'd be powerless and miserable."

Regina gave him a funny look. "Since when do you care?"
"You make a persuasive case." He gathered his mana and prepared to cast. "When you're ready for me to change you back, just call 1-800-2-EASY. That's 1-800-2-EASY."

The queen frowned. "1-800-2-EASY? I don't know, that seems too easy. What do you want in exchange?"

"I need you to cut off all trade with the proud nation of Zamibigurastan."

"Where?"

"You know, that country George rules."

"Oh, it has a name? How unusual." She shrugged dismissively. "Fine, deal—now make me get ugly!"

"Brilliant. Glad you thought of that." He dumped a flask of Polyjuice Potion over her head.

Regina still looked like herself, only without the killer fashion sense. "What gives? I don't look any less hot."

"Of course not. If this episode didn't have the acting talent of Lana Parilla to keep it afloat, we'd all be screwed." He pointed her to the nearest mirror. "You've still got Sidney duped, though."

"So what else is new?" Regina admired her new reflection for a moment. "Ah, this is perfect. Neither evil nor regal."

"You know, if you really want to be loved, divesting yourself of your legendary sex appeal seems like an odd way to go about it."

Regina hit him with another Glare of Evil. "If I wanted unsolicited advice, I'd have called the cricket."

---

For the sake of anyone who hadn't yet realized that Henry was growing closer to his biological family, the boy was out in his yard frolicking with bluebirds. "Hey Henry," Regina greeted, barging in, as usual. "How's my latest lost loved one?"

"Aw, nuts, it's Mom. Have you come to murder my family again?" the boy asked, looking tired.

"No! Well, yeah, but hear me out. Emma's been hiding something from you."

"Is it the state of my mental health and the truth of my existence?"

"No."

"Then she's still got one up on you," he reminded her.

"You've got a smart mouth on you, kid." She took a packet of magic beans from her pocket. "They're going to take you back to the Enchanted Forest without me. Can you believe that? I mean, even discounting the fact that they're not your legal family and this is technically kidnapping, what kind of idiot takes an eleven-year-old kid into a post-apocalyptic warzone?"

Try as he might, Henry couldn't think of any excuse for such reckless parenting. "Maybe it's all an elaborate April Fool's joke, and they're going to jump out and yell 'psych!' at any moment." He looked around the yard expectantly. "Nice one, guys."
"No, they're really going to take you from me. For some reason, they can't see the good in the woman who tried to slaughter them last week." The former queen sulked. "Everyone thinks I'm evil, just because it's in my name. But I have a great way to prove them wrong."

"How?"

"Killing absolutely everyone."

Henry looked bewildered. "Mom, if you're being sarcastic, I don't get it."

"Hey, they totally have it coming!" Regina defended. "I've told them time and again to stop loving you, and they've ignored me!"

The boy facepalmed. "Mom, giving a villain's exposition detailing all your evil plans is stupid enough, but giving one to a heroic little genius like me is just plain suicidal. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Well, I don't have anyone else to talk to about these things."

Henry frowned. "Then why don't you just get a boyfriend?"

"All right, that does it!" Regina fumed. "I'm cursing you with amnesia just like I do to everyone else who gives me lip!"

A wave of color-coded evil magic slapped Henry in the face, and he blinked dazedly. "Mom? Have you come to murder my family again?"

"Ye—no. I, uh, just saw you feeding the birds, and I wanted to give you this." She slipped him tuppence.

Regina strolled into the marketplace. "Ah, a busy public space, crawling with guards. If I were an infamous fugitive, this is definitely where I'd go to hide." She ran across a hawker displaying a hideous mannequin hanging from a gallows. "Hey man, I think you need to find a new career. Your dolls are even scarier than Rumplestiltskin's."

"It's not a doll—it's a piñata version of the Evil Queen." He started passing bats around the crowd. "Aim for the kidneys, people—they're full of gummi bears!"

Regina glowered at him. "How dare you speak out against the Queen? She usurped the throne, fair and square!"

But everyone was ignoring her in favor of marching around the effigy with a red flag. "Do you hear the people sing, singing the song of angry men? It is the music of a people who will not be snails again! When the beating of your heart, stops 'cause it's been snatched from your chest—"

Regina snatched the flag irritably. "Stop standing up for yourselves, damn it!"

A pair of guards arrived on the scene. "Yo, did we just hear someone singing the song of angry men?" They glanced from the dummy to the flag in Regina's hands. "Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but under the Queen's law, sedition is punishable by execution without trial, just like every other offense." They seized her by the arms. "It's the guillotine for you."

Regina tried to blast them away with magic, but only succeeded in making some awesome jazz hands. "My magic is gone. Oh my gods, Rumplestiltskin actually told the truth?" She was too
shocked to even put up a fight as the guards dragged her away.

Back at the Mayoral Lair, Regina was tending to her latest artifact of power. "I can't believe there was actually a web page out there on how to grow magical beanstalks."

"There's a web page for everything." Hook strolled into her office, his face covered in scuff marks, as usual.

"Captain, what are you doing here? If you're looking for some action, I already told you I'm not interested."

"No, I'm here because the Dark One is alive, and I've finally realized that trying to take on the most powerful sorcerer of all time armed with nothing but hatred and a prosthesis is foolhardy." He draped an arm around her shoulders. "And I'm afraid he's not our only competition for the coveted Best Villain award. You know Greg, the guy who ran me over that night I was a total jerk?"

"Ugh, better than I care to," she grumbled.

"Well, he's in league with some loser who fancies herself a femme fatale. They want me to double cross you and ally with them, but frankly, I know better than to get my fingerprints on that train wreck. You and your mother may have betrayed me for no reason but the evulz, but you're still the closest thing I have to friends, so why don't we resurrect our alliance? As a gesture of good faith, I made us a team flag." He held up a banner reading "Hooked on Evil Queens!"

"Actually, my mother is dead, and I think it's going to stick this time," Regina informed him sullenly.

"Score! Then this plan might have a prayer in hell of working!" Hook did a little fist pump. "Regina, I knew your mother well enough to know that what she wanted most in life was to screw you over and become the Dark One." He swatted her upside the head. "So stop mourning the crazy old hag and go get your son back, already!"

"I'm working on it, I'm working on it!" she snapped, leading him over to the little beanstalk.

"Ah, yes. Cora brought that giant for the beans so she could drag you off to live with her in a post-apocalyptic hellhole full of flesh-eating monsters" Hook looked worried. "Please tell me you're not crazy enough to do the same thing to Henry. I feel a bit responsible for him, since he's kind of my grandson."

"Holy crap, how many grandfathers does that kid have?" Regina groaned. "Well, no matter. He'll have two less after you and I blow up Storybrooke."

Tamara was at Granny's picking up three dozen Zoloft cupcakes. She'd been using them to drug Neal into submission, since of course, nobody would be dumb enough to buy her lies without some sort of chemical interference. As she turned to leave, Emma whacked her over the head with her chainsaw, spilling cupcakes all over the floor. "Whoops, sorry," the savior said insincerely. "So, how have you been coping with the knowledge that you're about to marry a two-hundred-year-old jungle boy?"

"What are you talking about? Greg's only thirty-eight...I mean, fine, thank you."

In order to better cope with the confusion and awkwardness of this conversation, Emma bent over to help herself to one of the fallen Zoloft cupcakes. However, the one she picked up had a piece of paper stuck to it. "Snow White = Mary Margaret. Neal = Nealfire. Regina = Regina. David = James
"Actually, the home office's preferred method of study is vivisection." Then she remembered herself. "But don't worry, if they try anything, I'll bravely fly you all to safety on my bicycle."

Emma ran home to the Princess Pad. "Eminem, I have amazing news! My superpower actually worked, for once! Tamara's the traitor who August tried, in his long-winded fashion, to warn us about."

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. "Emma, this is obviously just jealousy talking. Everyone except you, apparently, knows you're still hot for Nealfire." She patted her daughter consolingly on the arm. "I can't blame you. He is rather yummy."

"I am not hot for Nealfire! I—" But she couldn't even bring herself to complete such a flagrant lie. "Okay, maybe I am, but she's still evil!"

"Emma and Nealfire, sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes another little genius in the baby carriage!" Mary Margaret chanted mockingly.

"Eminem, she had a list of all our names and personas! She's stalking us! Doesn't that concern you?"

"As Charming's wife and Henry's grandmother, no." Mary Margaret grabbed her coat and headed for the door. "You know, if you and Tamara want to decide once and for all who gets the guy, you should go to her place of business and have a public fistfight. It worked for Kathryn and me."

"For the last time, this is not about Neal! It's about Tamara being the worst liar since…well, you."

"Worse than me? I find that hard to believe." She turned to leave. "And whatever you do, don't mention this to Henry. He's already got one evil mom to scheme against—the poor kid has enough on his plate right now."

Henry popped out of nowhere like a true Gold. "Hey, Mom, I couldn't help overhearing. Well, I could, but I didn't want to." The boy grinned from ear to ear. "This is going to be fabulous! Me and my mom planning a secret conspiracy against the wicked stepmother! Finally, a return to the themes that made Season One great!"

Emma opened her mouth to protest, then abandoned the effort. "Eh, screw it. We both know that forbidding you to get involved in this is a waste of precious airtime. Get your grappling hook and your wire cutters, while I go fuel up the old chainsaw."

Hook followed Regina into the library. "Wait a minute, who the hell cleaned up all those books Belle knocked on me?"

"I'm afraid we've got bigger continuity errors to worry about, like Maleficent still being alive." Regina magicked the elevator open and led the pirate inside.

"I am the Queen!" Regina cried in desperation, as her guards dragged her through the square. "I'll prove it. Check out this glare." She unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on the guard at her left, and his hair burst into flame.

"Gah!" he yelped, dumping a bucket of water over his head and then slamming her onto a chopping
"That does it! Off with your head!"

"Has my mother gotten to you?" Regina cried in horror. "I'm in over my head. 1-800-2-EASY!"

A hooded figure burst onto the scene and shot both guards in the face. "Viva la revolution!"

Regina staggered to her feet. "Rumplestiltskin! I'm glad you came. Your spell worked exactly the way you said it would, so I demand a refund!"

"I'm not Rumplestiltskin. I have boobs and a soul." Snow White threw off her hood and the crowd gasped. "Oh, don't act so shocked! Everyone knows I'm the only hero around here who fights with a bow."

"Ugh, just when I thought this day couldn't get any worse," the queen groaned, grabbing a hammer from a nearby stall and banging herself on the head with it. "I don't want to be conscious anymore!"

The elevator came to a halt in the bowels of the library. "Hey, Regina," said Hook, following her out, "have you ever noticed how we're always getting clobbered and shunned and then clobbered again?"

"Yes. It's everybody else's fault, just like my unhappy marriage, my troubled childhood, and this mosquito bite on my arm." She scratched it angrily.

"I don't know, I'm starting to think revenge is kind of overrated. Sure, the stabbing part is lots of fun, but the insanity and alienation are kind of a big drawback. Besides, now that I have Emma to compare her to, I'm starting to see that Milah really wasn't worth all this trouble."

Regina eyed him warily. "Are you going anti-hero on me, Hook?"

"Look, I'm just saying that your convoluted plot to kill Snow has already cost you your mother, your father, two boyfriends, and your son. Maybe you should quit while you're ahead."

"When I want your opinion, I'll extract it through torture," Regina growled. Her eyes fell on his arm, which was sporting a brand new armband. "That's my mother's bling."

"You finally noticed! I was starting to worry." Hook grinned.

"Give it to me. You won't live long enough for anybody to see it anyway."

"No way. It's a cherished memento of the first time I double-crossed Cora."

"I don't care. Hand it over or I'm not playing with you anymore."

"Brilliant. Glad you thought of that." Smirking victoriously, Hook handed her the bracelet.

The former queen fastened it around her wrist. "Stay close behind me, and no pinching."

Hook followed her into what looked suspiciously like the Cave of Wonders. "You couldn't have just hidden the trigger in the back of your wardrobe?"

"No, there are Narnians in there. Plus, here, I can use Maleficent to scare off trespassers."

"Who's Maleficent?"

"You're about to find out." She shoved him into a massive pit.
"AH! What is this, National Betray Hook Week?" he screamed.

"Sorry, Hook, but now that I know you're sort of related to Henry, I can't possibly let you live."

Hook landed on the rocky floor with a mighty bounce. "Man, my spine must be made of freaking mithril," he groaned, rolling over on his side.

A breeze full of shimmery things gusted through the cave. "Pocahontas? Is that you?" the pirate ventured.

But alas, it was someone much less alive. "WHY THE HELL DOES REGINA KEEP SENDING HER GOONS AFTER ME? I THOUGHT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE FRIENDS!" Zombie Maleficent roared.

"I thought the same thing," said Hook politely. "Looks like we're in the same boat. Perhaps you and I should form an alliance against her?"

"MY BRAIN MAY BE A ROTTEN HEAP OF DUST, BUT I'M STILL NOT DUMB ENOUGH TO TRUST CAPTAIN HOOK!"

"Well, you can't blame a guy for trying."

As they struggled below, Regina went over to Snow's coffin, which she'd acquired at some point, for some reason, and took an incredibly gaudy chocolate diamond out of it. "This is going to be my best apocalypse yet!"

In a lean-to deep in the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Regina awoke to find Snow White tenderly nursing her back to health. "Where did you learn to nurture? I sure as hell didn't teach you."

"You must be delirious from your fever," Snow deduced. "Can you tell me your name? Is it an adjective? If so, I bet we'll be fast friends."

That was the last thing Regina wanted. "No, I have an actual name. It's Wilma."

"Oh. Well, I know you're probably anxious to get home to Fred and Pebbles, but you really did a number on yourself with that hammer, so we're going to have to hang out here for a while." Snow passed her a plate. "Here, have some bear meat. I strangled it myself."

Regina looked at her quizzically. "Since when do you know how to do anything but frolic?"

Snow laughed. "Oh, I see. You're probably familiar with the Disney version of Snow White." She jerked a thumb at her chest. "Well, this one's a bit different. She hangs with bloodthirsty werewolves, kills cute, fuzzy animals for meat, and beats up innocent shepherd boys."

"Wow," Regina breathed. "I'm seeing a whole new side of you, and I like it. But why are you wasting your time helping me? Shouldn't you be fleeing or cowering or something?"

"What do I look like, Rumplestiltskin?" She grabbed a bowl of something painful and began to anoint the queen's wound. "Now then, how about a bedtime story?"

"As long as it's not written by those Grimm charlatans."

"Excellent. Once upon a time, I was out riding my horse, when some lady who looked a lot like Princess Cora jumped out of the bushes and yelled 'Boo!' Poor Fluffy got spooked and took off with me. Having foolishly foregone a helmet, I was about to be thrown to my death. Then this woman
who had no idea who I was rode up on a white horse and pulled me to safety, while the William Tell
overture played loudly in the background. The experience taught me that there can be a genuine,
selfless connection between strangers, until one of them opens her big mouth and ruins the other's
life.”

”Did-did someone just say something nice about me?” Regina blinked uncomprehendingly. ”I'm not
sure how to respond to this.” She wiped away her tears, not wanting to lose her edge. ”So, what
happened to her? Did she die of awesomeness?”

”Nah, she went nuttier than a million chipmunks. But with counseling and a whole lot of medication,
I'm confident she can recover.”

Emma and Henry didn't have a lot of experience with camouflage, so they were spying on Neal and
Tamara from a neon yellow car given to them by Neal. ”We need a new name. Operation Cobra was
for Season One. How about Operation Fiery Swan?”

”I already told you, Swanfire's over! Stop laughing, damn it!” Emma grated. ”How about Operation
Shere Khan?”

”Nah, that guy scares the hell out of me. How about Operation Praying Mantis, after something that's
way better at hiding than Tamara?”

Granny's front door opened, and Emma panicked. ”We don't want to look suspicious. Let's stick our
heads under the dashboard!”

Henry giggled. ”Now this is what I call parenting! It's the next best thing to going home and poking
monsters with swords.”

Emma gave him a sideways glance. ”You enjoy sword-and-sorcery settings?”

”Have we met? Hi, I'm Henry.” He held out his hand sarcastically.

”So, if there was a way to go home—”

”There's a way to go home?!”

”What part of 'if' did you not understand?”

”Oh, please, you can't dupe a Gold. Except, of course, for Neal.” He grinned knowingly. ”Speaking
of which, when are you two going to stop playing games and get to work on my new baby brother?”

”Never! We're over!”

Henry pointed at himself. ”Gold.”

Emma hung her head in defeat. ”Okay, fine, after we kill Tamara. Provided that dreamboat Hook
doesn't show up again, of course.”

”Naturally.” He pointed out the window. ”Parents Three and Four at ten o'clock.”

”Excellent.” She grabbed her chainsaw and her lockpicks. ”Come on, kid. Mommy's gonna take you
on your very first burglary.

Inside the only hotel in town, the young captain of the SS Swanfire persevered. ”You know, I did
manage to introduce my own grandparents, which should be temporally impossible. You and Neal should show more respect for my awesome talents as a matchmaker."

"Henry, this is no time for shipping!" Emma grated, attacking Neal's door with a set of massive bolt cutters.

"There's always time for shipping," her son replied cheerfully.

"Stop shipping us or I'll send you home to your mom!"

Henry paled. "I think I just became a Captain Swan fan."

"Atta boy." She kicked the door open. "All right, I'm going to go look for some evidence to implicate Tamara and maybe grab one of your dad's shirts to keep under my pillow. You stand watch, and if anyone shows up, just pretend to go into labor."

She opened the wardrobe, and was hit by a blast of snow. "Lucy?" a voice inside called from inside. "Is that you?"

"No, this is Emma, sorry to bother you." Shutting the doors, she decided to go jiggle the knobs on the bed and see if it started flying.

Out in the hall, Neal popped out of nowhere like a true Gold. "Hey, Henry. What are you doing here? Stalking me?" He smiled warmly. "Thanks, son. I really feel like part of the family now."

Panicking, Henry bent over double. "Ah, help! My water just broke!"

Neal shoved him aside and barged through the door. "I'm Henry's dad and Rumplestiltskin's son, Emma. Did you really think I'd be dumb enough to fall for that?"

"Well, you were dumb enough to fall for Tamara's cheesy attempts at romance," said Emma. "Personally, I think pregnant Henry is a lot more believable."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying Tamara's a liar, and not a very good one."

Neal looked from Emma to Henry, aghast. "Emma, how could you use our son as a tool against his own stepmother?"

"Actually, it's the other way around," the mighty Henry corrected serenely.

"And it happens to be the foundation of our entire relationship." She draped an arm around her son's shoulders and squeezed him affectionately. "Look, Neal, Tamara is bad news. If her shifty eyes won't convince you, maybe my superpower will!"

"Ah yes, your superpower. The one that told you I was lying when I said I wasn't a two-hundred-year-old jungle boy."

"Yeah, that one, now shut up and listen. She had a list of fairy tale characters which she's probably planning to mail to TMZ or something!"

"I don't care, nobody takes that stupid show seriously. Anyway, I made that list for her, because she was way too lazy to simply read the book Henry lent us."

"I'm not in love with you!" Emma suddenly screamed.
Neal tossed his scarf, smirking haughtily. "Sure you aren't, baby."

"I can prove it. There's a loose board in this room, which is probably being used to conceal a murder weapon like every other loose board in town."

Neal sighed. "If I let you look, will you quit stalking me?"

"I'm a Charming, so I can't make promises, but I'll try."

Neal knew that was the best he could hope for, so he motioned for her to proceed. Lifting the board, she reached down into the gap below and pulled out..."A fish?"

"A herring, to be precise," Henry observed. "And someone has dyed it red."

"Well, I guess that settles it." Neal sniggered. "I suppose I can't blame you, Emma. I am rather yummy."

"Dream on, you pig! I'd rather hook up with Regina!" A mighty cheer rose up outside the window. "Shut up, Team Swan Queen!" She revved up her chainsaw. "Come on, Henry. Let's go see if Tamara has a yard somewhere that we can take our frustrations out on."

Regina awoke in a strange bed. "Aw no, not again."

Snow ducked into the tent. "Hey, Wilma, I brought you some brontosaurus ribs for breakfast. Eat 'em quick—we've got to get moving before All the Queen's Horses and All the Queen's Men remember we're outlaws and come after us." She handed the other woman a sword. "Just remember our national motto: 'Pointy End Goes In the Other Guy'. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to turn my unarmored back to you for a few hours."

"Snow, you're taking all the fun out of this." As they took off down the trail, Regina tried to draw the blade and slay her archenemy once and for all. Then she remembered that Snow now beat up shepherd boys and strangled cute little animals, and decided to give her another chance. "If the gossip around Ye Olde Water Cooler is correct, the Queen sent her Huntsman to steal your heart."

Snow shrugged. "Eh, the Huntsman steals everyone's heart. I don't hold it against him—he can't help being adorable."

"And what about her? If you had her in front of you right now, would you kill her?"

"No, I know she's a murderer, but I think she's easily messed-up enough to successfully plead insanity. Besides, I'm the original Evil Regal." Snow proudly unbuttoned her coat, revealing a t-shirt with a poisoned apple logo underneath.

"You mean you really think she's redeemable?"

"Everyone's redeemable, except for that sicko Peter Pan."

Regina brightened. "So, if she wanted to adopt you like she does every other minor, you'd be cool with that?"

"Are you kidding? I'd probably squee right out loud." Snow sighed. "But this discussion is pointless. She's not going to redeem herself now. It's only the second season." As they reached the top of a ridge and found themselves overlooking a ditch crammed with mangled corpses, Snow paled. "See? Told ya."
"Oh, right. All those people I slaughtered." Regina smacked her forehead absently, taking a day planner from her pocket. "I've really got to start writing these things down."

"Ah, hell!" Snow tore off her t-shirt, threw it on the ground, and stomped on it vigorously. "I never thought I'd say this, but there are some things that even being raised by Cora can't excuse!"

Regina shuddered. "If you'd ever lived with her, you wouldn't say that."

"The queen is evil!" Snow studied the corpses for a second. "And stupid. Why the hell did waste time making her soldiers round up and shoot them, when she could have simply blasted them with her trademark fireball?"

Regina was feeling uncharacteristically charitable, so she decided to let the dig slide. "But about that time she saved you from your own lack of safety gear?"

"I never said that woman was Regina. I just said she was nuttier than a million chipmunks."

"It wasn't hard to put two and two together."

"Aw, hell, Mom?" Snow raised her bow and nocked an arrow, aiming squarely at Regina's uncharacteristically ugly face. "You are one bad mother, and I don't mean that in a good way! Although I suppose part of the blame rests with me. Given my stepmother's talent for magic and your obsessive barrage of questions about her, I really should have seen this coming." She cursed under her breath. "That does it! I'm making a New Years' Resolution to become more paranoid. From now on, everybody I meet is getting hit in the face with a rock before they get the chance to betray me!"

Regina looked hurt. "I'm not bad. I'm badass. There's a big difference."

Snow was unmoved. "The mountain of dead children under our feet really isn't helping your case."

"Hey, what else was I supposed to do? They neglected to worship me! And since it looks like you're slipping into the same pattern, and becoming slightly hotter than me, I'd better waste you too. " She raised a hand to vaporize the girl, then remembered herself. "Wait, what am I thinking? I almost tried to solve a problem without Rumplestiltskin's help!" She whistled. "Yo, Rumple! Get over here in thirty seconds or less, or I'm keeping your tip!" She tapped her foot impatiently. "Rumple? Rumple! That's it—I'm reporting him to the Better Beasts Bureau!" Regina stomped off to find herself a bureaucrat. "And don't bother trying to shoot me, Snow—we both know you don't have the guts."

"Damn, I hate it when she's right," Snow griped, dropping her bow.

Regina bumped into Hook on her way out of the elevator. "You again?" she groaned. "How many more times do you have to be killed before you finally die?"

"You're not the first person to ask me that and I'm sure you won't be the last," said the pirate serenely. "You know, when we were having that lovely heart-to-heart about the purpose of life, I almost thought there might be hope for us to become a couple someday. But now things are different, of course. I could never love a woman who arbitrarily double-crossed me and left me to die, unless her name was Emma."

But Regina refused to change the subject. "No, seriously, I'm not just going to shrug it off and move on to the next mystery like everyone else always does. How the hell did you survive that?"

"My anger kept me alive. What? It worked for Jafar." Seeing that she wasn't buying it, Hook broke down and confessed. "Okay, fine. Greg and Tamara rescued me."
"You mean you actually sank so low you were reduced to asking those losers for help?" The former queen burst out laughing. "Hook, man, I thought you were cool!"

Tamara stormed into the library, Greg in tow. "Hey, I'll have you know we're the baddest supervillains since Megamind!"

Regina just laughed harder. "Man, you're not even worth torturing—I'm just going to vaporize you and be done with it." She waved her hand at them, but only succeeded in giving herself a wrist cramp. "Ow. What gives?"

"Aw, don't feel bad. It happens to lots of wizards," Greg reassured her sarcastically.

---

Emma and Henry were out of cupcakes, so they sprinkled Zoloft on some ice cream and dove in. "Hey Mom, remember how when you first came to town, I insisted that there was a supervillain hiding in plain sight and you refused to listen to me, and it almost doomed us all?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, I'm going to prove I'm a better person than you are and not do the same thing with Tamara." He gave her a fist bump. "And once she's out of the picture, we can all go home and enjoy the crushing tyranny of the feudal system together."

---

David, Mary Margaret and Leroy had just arrived at the bean field, armed with AK-47s to keep that glutton Hansel at bay. "So Leroy?" said Mary Margaret conversationally. "Once we're back home, enjoying the crushing tyranny of the feudal system together, I'm going to need you and your brothers for slave labor. My mansion's a mess, and I'm way too important to clean it up myself."

"I'm starting to rethink this venture," the dwarf sighed. As they snuck past the cloaking device and entered the field, they found their plants charred to a crisp. "Yes!" he cheered. His monarchs gave him a dirty look. "I mean, what an outrage."

"Who would do something like this?" Mary Margaret cried in disbelief.

"Oh, clearly it was the work of that villainous wretch Archie." Her husband rolled his eyes. "Who the hell do you think?"

---

At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Regina barged in, as usual. "Why didn't you come when I called you?"

"Because Belle was dusting the ceiling in a miniskirt this morning, and I didn't want to miss a moment of it," Rumplestiltskin replied matter-of-factly.

"I trusted you to protect me!"

"Then you're a moron." Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron, and pointed at himself. "Evil bastard, remember?"

Glowering, she held up a bundle of paperwork. "Before I came here, I stopped by the Better Beasts Bureau and obtained the necessary paperwork to launch an investigation into your business practices. Stop screwing with me and take this spell off, or so help me, I'm getting it notarized."

"Aw, that's Rumple's little villain!" He pinched her cheek affectionately and steered her over to one
of the mirrors he inexplicably kept in his house. "Just say the magic words, dearie."

"Rumplestiltskin is right, has always been right, and always will be right," Regina grated.

"And he's irresistibly sexy," Rumplestiltskin added. "And Mom totally should have shacked up with him when she had the chance."

"Ugh, and he's irresistibly sexy, and Mom totally should have shacked up with him when she had the chance." She shuddered with every awful word.

"And everyone hates me, and I have a better chance of destroying the planet than I do of ever being loved again."

"And everyone hates me, and I have a better chance of…" Regina broke down sobbing. "Damn, you're mean!"

"That I am. It's lots of fun." He waved a hand, giving her back her magic, and more importantly, her sex appeal. "Care to join in?"

"Can I say no?"

"No."

"Just checking."

As Regina clawed helplessly at the magic-suppression cuff she'd haplessly snatched from Hook, he grinned evilly. "You know, there's a lesson about sharing in here somewhere."

"You'll never get it off!" Greg bragged. "It's rigged with SCIENCE!"

"Science?"

"No, not science. SCIENCE!" Greg corrected. "It's sort of like science, but it works exactly like magic and doesn't ever have to be explained."

Tamara took her checklist out of an envelope addressed to TMZ. "Which one was she?"

"Uh, Granny from Little Red Riding Hood, I think," said Greg.

"Excuse me?" Regina balked.

"Well, you are over sixty years old," he reminded her.

"This is an outrage! I'm not Granny, I'm the Evil Queen. I mean, the Queen, who acts in an evil manner through no fault of her own," she saved.

"Well, brace yourself, because your new name is gonna be Lightning Rodgina," Greg informed her smugly, brandishing a cattle prod.

She rolled her eyes. "If this is about your father, you're wasting your time. He's not here, and even if he was, he'd probably put you up for adoption if he could see how you turned out.

Greg frowned. "My father? Oh, I don't care about him anymore. I only brought him up in a vain attempt to gain the sympathies of the audience."
"So what *are* you doing here?"

"I don't know, Pan doesn't share his plans with lowly drones like m—uh, I mean, that's classified."
Baelfire fell out of the portal he'd conjured with a mighty thump. "Papa?" He started at the sound of his own voice. "Gah! Did that bean just send me through puberty?!"

A carriage zoomed by. "Quit hogging the road, you damned teenager!" the driver yelled.

"You'd better watch it! If you run me over, my dad will turn you into a snai—" Bae's face fell. "Oh, right. The abandonment thing." He picked himself up and dusted himself off. "Well, what's done is done—I guess since I'm here, I may as well go check out the ladies."

Six months later

Being far too lazy to take advantage of the unprecedented demand for young, unskilled laborers in Industrial Age Britain, Bae had been reduced to digging through garbage cans for a living. "Orphanhood blows. I don't know why the Pirates of Penzance are always glorifying it." He tossed a handful of refuse aside. "Screw this! Time to descend into a life of crime like the rest of the cast."

He climbed through a window into the nearest mansion and spotted a loaf of bread on the table. Checking over his shoulder for Inspector Javert, he snatched one up and took a bite. "Yuck! Needs more lint." He tore a chunk off, squished it flat, and stuffed it in his pocket. "Much better." Then Beethoven's larger cousin jumped out at him, and he screamed. "Ah! Somebody's house pet! This is much scarier than the talking mosquitoes and murderous reptile people I've faced in the past!"

A young girl ran in brandishing a hack saw. "Wendy smash!" she cried meekly.

"I think I love you," said a dazzled Bae. Wendy glared at him, and he decided to humor her. "Fine, fine, please don't hurt me, sheltered little girl. I was just hungry."

She raised her eyebrows. "Then why don't you take advantage of the unprecedented demand for young, unskilled laborers in Industrial Age Britain and get a job?"

"Because…shut up."

"Well, when you put it that way, it makes perfect sense." She tossed the hacksaw aside and offered him her hand. "Name's Wendy."

"Cool name."

"Thanks, it was randomly invented by J.M. Barrie."

Bae bowed. "My name's Baelfire. It was randomly invented by Neil Gaiman."

"I think we're gonna get along just fine." Wendy draped an arm around her new BFF's shoulders.

At the only hotel in town, Neal was doing his best Snow White impression, while Tamara laced up her sneakers and crammed her pockets with garlic and wolfsbane. The stench was so bad it woke him up. "Tamara, why are you not in bed stoking the Nealfires?"

"Well, I know that in the past few days, my perception of the cosmos has been completely blown to smithereens, I've discovered that my future husband has the weirdest secret identity imaginable, and I'm about to become a stepmother to a magical prince, but I can't let all of that distract me from my
true priority: amateur track and field. Besides, Greg says if I don’t cut down on the infidelity, he’s going to beat me to death with a plastic lightsaber.”

Yawning, Neal buried his face in his pillow. "I choose not to notice that."

"Naturally." She gave him a pat on the head, grabbed her taser and ran off laughing.

Neal hid his head under a pillow for the sake of anyone who hadn’t yet realized he was trying to shut out reality. However, his efforts were soon interrupted by the unmistakable sound of Mr. Gold giggling evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Oh, right. I have a father."

He found the Dark One menacing Dr. Whale with an escargot fork, while Lacey looked on, fanning herself with a copy of some Anne Rice book. "Whale, I know you’ve never done anything to deserve this and probably never will, but Lacey says I’m not scoring until someone gets maimed. I’m sure you understand."

Whale prostrated himself with a sigh. "Consider this a favor from one ladies’ man to another."

Gold raised his Cane of Doom, but before he could swing it, the one person who realized that he was tiny, crippled, and easily restrained came and easily restrained him. "Papa, will you make up your mind, already? Either redeem yourself or descend into villainy, but stop trying to do both at once!"

Gold shoved his son aside. "Sorry son, but the fact that you’ve been the pinnacle of my hopes and dreams for three hundred years means nothing next to the fact that my sleazy girlfriend likes to watch me smack people."

"I don’t suppose you guys are going to tell me what’s going on here? No one ever does," Lacey grumbled bitterly.

"Shut up and go lock yourself in my makeout closet," Gold snarled, tossing her a key.

Neal shot his father a look of disgust. "You’re the worst dad ever! You cause apocalypses, murder innocent people, and worst of all, you don’t visit me often enough!"

Gold blinked. "What do you care? I thought you said you hated my guts and never wanted to see me again."

"I don’t, but Tamara’s really anxious to meet you. Even bought you a gift to get on your good side—some kind of ominously-humming bracelet."

"She's wasting her time. I ship Swanfire," Gold replied impassively. "So do you, for that matter."

Neal glared. "I really hate you, old man."

"Sorry, son, but apparently I've stopped caring."

Emma hacked down the door of the Mayoral Lair with her chainsaw. "Regina, a hot stable boy has just arrived in town and I thought you'd like first dibs on him." Her announcement was met with silence. "Okay, she's definitely not here."

The rest of the Charming clan followed her inside, David and Mary Margaret both wearing Henry masks as a precaution. "When you find her, you're not going to kill her, are you?" Henry asked tremulously.
"No, we're not smart enough to do that. We just want the beans she stole," his mother replied.

"Why would Regina leave her office unlocked when she's keeping the beans here?" Mary Margaret wondered.

"Because a lock has never stopped Emma and she damn well knows it." David indicated the empty vines of the beanstalk. "Besides, it looks like she has either harvested the beans or been best by a plague of corn earworms."

"Or maybe our lazy new villains have finally gotten off their butts and done something, for once," Henry hypothesized.

Emma examined Regina's alarm system. "I know this goes without saying, but it looks like Henry is right."

"Well, there are only two people in town who are mighty enough to best Regina, and Henry's been with us all night, so this has to be Gold's doing," Mary Margaret deduced.

"No, for some reason his having an evil girlfriend who encourages him to harm people rules him out as a suspect," said Emma dismissively. "This is clearly the work of that man-stealing...uh, mayor-stealing jerk Tamara."

Mary Margaret groaned. "Emma, you're a strong female character. Wasting time on a catfight over some guy when you're supposed to be saving the day is seriously OOC."

"Accuse me of anti-feminism again, and you'll have bigger problems on your hands than a couple of villain wannabes." Emma brandished her chainsaw menacingly. "It's all so obvious! Tamara came to town on the day August was attacked, she carries around a list of our secret identities, and, oh yeah, SHE CAME TO TOWN ON THE DAY AUGUST WAS ATTACKED."

"We choose not to notice that," said her parents in unison.

"RRRRRRGH!"

"Look, honey, we appreciate how you feel, but having faith in your loved ones isn't what the Charmings are all about," said Mary Margaret. "What if you're wrong? This is our archenemy's safety we're dealing with here—she's too critical to the plot to risk losing."

"Well, if you don't trust my judgment, I guess you should go to Gold for help. That never backfires, right?"

______________________________

Tamara found her boyfriend tying another woman to a bed and suppressed a spark of jealousy. "Yo Boris, Natasha's home."

"Hey baby. Did you succeed, or are you following our usual pattern?"

"I'll pretend you didn't say that." Tamara held up a pod full of beans. "My second-string boy-toy told me all about these. They ruin lives, tear apart families, instigate horrific wars, and more importantly, open portals."

At her mention of Neal, Greg drew a plastic lightsaber and flipped its sound effects switch menacingly. "Don't make me go all Revenge of the Sith on you, baby," he threatened.

"Greg, there's no need for you to feel threatened by Neal, just because he's better looking than you,
more heroic than you, more intelligent than you, and has a full head of hair. You're the one I love for some reason," she reassured him. "Although I've got to admit, his past as a bad-boy jewel thief almost made me rethink my position."

"No worries, I'm a jewel thief now, too." He handed her Regina's chocolate diamond. "Tacky, ain't it? I'm surprised and disappointed. Regina has her sins, but bad taste in accessories has never been one of them."

Tamara dropped the gem into an envelope addressed to *Home Office, some number, some street, some city, some universe.* "Well, if you're still doing the Inigo Montoya thing, you'd better get on with it. We've got places to go and atrocities to commit."

Meanwhile, Hook had noticed that there was a beautiful woman on her back in the room, and been helplessly drawn to her side. The queen glared up at him. "What did they offer you, a gift certificate to Hell's Angels?"

"Tempting, but no. They're going to help me kill Rumplestiltskin."

Regina started cracking up. "Rumplestiltskin's not going to die. He's too popular, and anyway, he could eat these clowns for dinner with garlic and butter."

"Hey, we defeated you. Kinda. Eventually. With help." Greg defended. "So pipe down and tell me where my father is."

"Beats me. He probably abandoned you. You know, like Emma's father, Baelfire's father, Henry's father..." 

*Seven hours later*

...Rumplestiltskin's father, Hook's father, and probably Pongo's father," Regina finished hoarsely.

"That's impossible, my father loved me. Enough to sell his soul to the forces of darkness, or fight off a royal army with one hand."

"Pfft. You think that matters in Storybrooke?"

"Shut up." He turned to Hook. "Can you please just tear out her tongue or something before she makes me look any worse?"

"Sorry mate," Hook apologized, retreating, "but she's hot and I might want to hook up with her someday, so I'm going to have to say no."

"Suit yourself." Greg wired her to a machine and started flipping switches. "Beautiful isn't it? It took me half a lifetime to invent it," he bragged. "I'm sure you've discovered my deep and abiding interest in pain. Presently I'm writing the definitive work on the subject, so I want you to be totally honest with me on how the machine makes you feel."

"Is this supposed to scare me? You stole that speech from *Princess Bride,* along with your stupid motivation!" Regina scoffed. "You probably didn't even invent this thing."

"Oh, that does it!" He pulled a lever. "Time to feel the awesome power of SCIENCE!, jerkwad!"

---

In Industrial Age Britain, factory owners usually provided company housing for their younger employees. But working was for chumps, so Bae had elected to move into one of Wendy's
cupboards instead. "Here's some food and here's a yo-yo so you don't get bored in there," the girl whispered, passing him a doggy bag.

He took it gratefully. "Thanks, babe. Another few months, and counting the planks in the floor all day, every day might have started to get tedious." He looked over her shoulder. "So, I notice your parents are standing right in front of my face. Do you think they might be on to us?"

"Let me think…no."

Her father tapped her on the shoulder. "Stop defying me, Wendy, or at least do a better job of it." He glowered at Bae. "How long have you been hiding in my house?"

Bae cringed. "Please, sir, I don't want to be a mollusk!"

Wendy rushed to his defense. "Have a heart, Father! He was starving on the street, and working is for chumps, so what else was he supposed to do?"

Her father ignored her, as usual. "Where's your family?"

"They all kind of suck." Bae hung his head sadly. "I'll just be going, before you set another adorable house pet on me."

"You're not going anywhere," Mrs. Darling interjected.

"You're not going to make me get a job, are you?" Bae paled. "Please, anything but that!"

"Perish the thought, dear boy." She hugged him. "No, you'll stay here with us. It's long past time adoption was portrayed positively on this show, and we're the perfect characters to do it."

"I'm not!" Mr. Darling protested, but nobody was listening.

"Middle class at last!" Bae cheered. "Things are looking up!"

Emma chainsawed through Neal's door, not realizing it was unlocked, and shoved her way in. "Hey Neal, you know how I said I'd try to quit stalking you? I lied."

Neal just chuckled. "Emma, if this is about Tamara, you have no reason to be jealous of her. It was Morraine who was your real competition, and I'm pretty sure she's dead by now."

Emma refused to back down. "Neal, the woman is your future wife, and therefore a member of your family. What further proof do you need that she's evil?"

"You're wasting your time. The only way I'll buy that she doesn't love me is if she pulls out a gun and threatens to murder me. In fact, even then I'll probably give her a pass."

"Damn it Neal! I know you have a brain—did you lend it to someone today?" Emma smacked him over the head. "Please don't let Henry hear you talking like this. I want him to grow up respecting his father." Seeing that trying to reason with him was a lost cause, she shoved past him and started digging through the closet. "Where's Her Shiftiness right now?"

"Running. It's what Golds do, and she really wants to fit in."

"Where?"

"Into the woods. I remember that because it's the name of the album she was listening to when I
asked her where she was going."

Emma noticed a scattering of sand on the floor. "That's funny, because it looks like Tamara's been hanging out on the beach, and deliberately stuffing her pockets and shoes with large quantities of sand."

"Maybe with all this exercise, she's lost so much weight she's afraid she'll float away?" Neal theorized lamely.

His baby mama seized him by the collar. "Get a grip and follow me!"

Because the Darlings' Victorian sensibilities were in no way offended by having some punk boy share a bedroom with their beautiful teenaged daughter, Wendy stepped over Baelfire on her way to her window. "Bae, come over here, and leave your grip on reality where it is!"

Bae rubbed his eyes, clambering to his feet. "Have you ever heard of sleep? It's this thing some of us like to do at night."

Little Michael and John followed them to the windowsill. "What are you looking at? Is it that nice shadow who offers us candy and drives the windowless van?"

Bae froze. "Hold up. Does this shadow have tights, a flute, and a pervy grin?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"AH! AH! AAAAAAAAAAH!" Bae screamed, running in circles like a maniac.

Wendy looked a little disturbed. "I guess this is what happens when you go around picking up random hoboes."

"Actually, in context, my reaction was rather subdued," said Bae. "You guys have to promise me you won't go near that thing again. Apart from saving my life and the lives of most of my generation, nothing good has ever come from magic."

"Ingrate," said Wendy.

"Perhaps I should make things clearer for you. I'm the son of a magical imp named Rumplestiltskin, yeah that one, who stole his powers from some guy in order to blow up monsters and save me from the clutches of the evil Duke Joseph Kony, but it turned him into a sparkly green jerk, so I went to this talking blue mosquito chick for help and she gave me some psychedelic legumes that turned into an interdimensional gateway…" The Darling children stared at him vacantly. "Let me put this in layman's terms. Magic = bad."

Wendy was rubbing her head, her eyes glazed. "Wait, go back to that part about Rumplestiltskin having a kid. What the hell?"

"Do yourself a favor and don't ask. The point is, magic = bad, and even if it weren't, taking off with some perv who likes to peek through little girls' windows would be idiotic."

Wendy pouted. "Killjoy."

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Lacey had run out of booze and was chugging a bottle of Windex, while Gold stood around trying to figure out what the hell his motivation was these days.
The bell rang and in strutted the Charmings. "Hey Gold. Hey Belle."

Lacey shoved her fingers in her ears. "LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA! I choose not to notice that!"

"Go away, you two. I just spent three hours throwing eggs at sweet old ladies in the hope of scoring with this crazy bimbo, and score I shall!" Gold proclaimed stubbornly.

"But you still owe me one for playing wingman for you," David protested.

"He doesn't owe you anything," Lacey scoffed. "You didn't get him that date—my raging case of antisocial personality disorder did."

"You should really see Archie about that, by the way," Mary Margaret interjected.

"Enough of this," Gold snarled. "Lacey, shut up and get lost—you're cluttering up my lair."

Lacey stormed into the back room, grumbling. "Lucky for you I'm not Belle. She'd probably knock your teeth out for talking to her like that."

Gold turned to the Charmings. "What's the big emergency? Did you suddenly remember that David's still technically married to Kathryn and decided to take me on as a divorce attorney?"

"No, although we should probably pencil that in for later," said Mary Margaret. "Regina's gone missing."

"So?"

"So I owe her one after the unforgivable act of self-defense I committed against her mother."

Gold facepalmed. "If I help you find Regina, will you promise to quit whining about that once and for all and go back to being a badass?"

"You've got yourself a deal."

The pawnbroker rummaged through his enchanted chemistry set and came up with a vial. "This potion is made of Regina's Emmy-winning tears."

"Why do you have Regina's tears?"

He grinned evilly. "I told her there was a chance I could be her biological father, and a very ample supply ensued. All I need to complete the potion is one of your tears." He held the vial out to Mary Margaret. "Just close your eyes and think of episode 1x16, dearie." Mary Margaret shed a tear into the bottle, then slapped David. "Atta girl. Now, all you have to do is put a drop of this in your eyes, and you'll have a warg connection with your intermittently-dear stepmom, which will provide clues about her location."

Mary Margaret eyed the bottle suspiciously. "But... why don't we just use your tracking spell and find her without all the guesswork and mind-rape?"

"This makes for a better bonding experience. Now shoo."

As the disgruntled couple departed, Lacey emerged from the doorway where she'd been lurking. "So magic is real?"

"You mean you'll believe me without question when you overhear me mentioning magic to an
acquaintance, but when I attempt to calmly and honestly explain the situation to your face, you scream at me and break my stuff?” Gold asked incredulously. “I really hate women!”

Over at the Princess Pad, David had fallen into comfort mode. "You don't have to do this. We still have the option of hitting Gold until he coughs up the tracking spell."

"No, my heart has been inexplicably blackened by what I did to Cora, and our insurance won't cover a transplant, so I'm afraid redemption through suffering is the only way to go," his wife sighed, tilting her head back. David dripped the potion into her eyes, and she started screaming. "AAAAHH! MY SOUL HURTS!"

"Comfort mode?” Her husband shook her gently. "Comfort mode! COMFORT MODE!” No response. "I'm in over my head, here."

Bae's latest nightmare was interrupted by Wendy skulking around the window with some demon. "Wendy, remember our talk? What does magic equal?"

"Awesome?” she guessed cheerfully.

Bae buried his face in his hands. "You're not even trying!"

"Oh, don't be such a worrywart," she scoffed. "You may be the child of the most powerful sorcerer of all time, raised in a land dominated and defined by enchantment, but I once waved at a magical dude from my window. I think I know a little more about the nature of magic than you do." She took the demon's hand and jumped out the window. "This guy comes from a place called Neverland, where there are no grownups, lots of candy, and this cool monkey named Bubbles!"

"You're running away?” Bae tossed a lasso over her. "You have a bestie who adores you, a family straight out of a Toll House commercial, and you live in a freaking mansion. What the hell do you have to run away from?"

"My daddy gets mildly upset when I sneak strange hoboes into my bedroom, and I'm not going to stand around and take it anymore." She took out a penknife and hacked herself free of Bae's clutches. "Later, homie. I'll send you a postcard from Skull Rock!"

"Wendy, no!” The boy flopped back on his bed miserably. "That does it. I'm changing my name to Cassandra."

Neal, nee Cassandra, nee Baelfire was making a pathetic attempt at walking on a deserted beach with the woman he loved in a platonic fashion. "Emma, you're letting your emotions cloud your judgment, and that's certainly not a flaw you've ever had before. What's next, are you going to start putting Zoloft on cupcakes?"

Emma just laughed. "It's becoming obvious that you never really knew me at all, if you honestly think I'd spend eleven years pining for a lost love. I'll have you know I forgot about Graham before his corpse was even cold!"

Neal's eyes narrowed. "Who exactly is Graham?"

"Don't change the subject,” said Emma nervously. "We're talking about my relationship with you right now. What do you want to hear, that I tried to hang myself with my own shoelaces when I realized you weren't even going to try to bust me out of that cell? That the loneliness was so crushing
I actually taped your picture to an old laundry bag just so I'd have something to cuddle with? That Henry's original name was Nealfire Junior?"

Neal pulled a face. "Dude, seriously?"

But Emma wasn't finished. "That I spent two years camped out at the city limits of Tallahassee wearing a sandwich board that said 'Come back, baby'? That I still break down in tears every time I see a crowbar? That every glimpse of you with another woman is like a dull icepick through my heart?" Tamara came jogging up to them. "Because that's completely absurd."

"You don't need to lie for my sake, Emma. You're more than welcome to take whatever's left when I'm done with him," said Tamara politely. "So what are you guys doing here? More denial?"

"Yep," said Neal.

"What a coincidence, me too! I am not torturing your child's mother to death mere meters from here."

Tamara took off running once her lie was complete, as usual.

"You heard the lady," said Neal haughtily. "Are you satisfied now, Emma?"

"You can go now, Neal. This situation is becoming awkward even for us, and you're not really a lot of help today anyway." Emma shoved him aside and soldiered onward.

Neal ran after her. "Emma, I know abandoned you to a horrible fate that you didn't deserve, and it destroyed me emotionally. Not a day has gone by since that I haven't regretted leaving you. I apologize with all my heart, and the only excuse I can offer is that I was afraid."

Gold appeared behind him. "Seriously, son? Seriously?"

"I thought I told you to drop dead and go to hell, scumbag!" Neal punched him in the face and turned back to Emma. "Anyway, I just wanted to let you know I'm sorry."

"Sorry enough to dump Tamara?"

"No can do, babe. She's hot. I'm sure you understand."

Apparently, Neal and Emma actually bought into my pathetic excuse for a lie," Tamara informed a stunned Greg. "I know, I was just as surprised as you are. So how is Count Rugen's machine working on the Queen?"

"I'm starting to think that torturing a woman who was raised by an evil sadist is a less than productive tactic." He flipped another switch, and Regina convulsed. "I don't care how many lightning bolts you fire at me, Mommy! I'm still marrying my snugglebear!" she drooled deliriously. As the pain subsided, she hit him with her Glare of Evil. "Send me into a flashback, will ya?" she snarled. "When I get out of here, I'm gonna lock you in a room with Henry, Hopper, and Belle! By the time they're done nagging you, you'll be begging me for death!"

"Pfft, we're not scared of you," Greg sneered.

"Then you're an even bigger numbskull than I thought. You know, you may not be aware of this, but people who steal magic tend to turn green or get tortured to death."

"We're not here to steal magic. We're here to destroy it."

Regina cracked up. "You sound just like my other reluctant son. If the mighty Henry couldn't do it,
what the hell makes you think you can?"

"We've got help. We're with the Spanish Inquisition, you see." Regina looked startled, and Greg grinned. "Heh heh, that's right, nobody ever expects the Spanish Inquisition! We've committed genocide before, and we can do it again. Did you really think that Storybrooke was the first time that magic has crossed over?"

"Oh gods, are you setting up another spin-off?" Regina screamed. "NOOOOOOOO!"

---

"Eminem, baby, are you dead again?" David shook his wife, but she didn't respond. "Time to do what I do best." He kissed her, and of course, she awakened.

The princess clung to her husband. "Oh gods, it was horrible! They were torturing me with electroshock and talk of another spinoff!"

"Did you learn anything useful?"

"Insanity smells like sardines."

---

David relayed her words to Emma. "Sardines, what the hell is that supposed to prove? It's not as if we have an abandoned sardine cannery on the outskirts of town that would serve as the perfect base for a conspiracy." Then she looked up. "Oops, my bad." She grabbed Neal's arm and hauled him inside. "Boy, am I sick of being right all the time! It's exhausting—I don't know how Henry does it."

---

Bae awoke to find Wendy standing over him. "So, are we screwed?"

"Yup," his foster sister replied.

"Boy, am I sick of being right all the time. It's exhausting," he lamented. "So how screwed are we, exactly?"

"Neverland is a nightmare! It was nothing like the brochure!" Wendy sobbed. "It's an island, and there are no grownups, but there are mermaids, polar bears, and some kind of weird smoke monster."

"Sounds like four-star family fun," said Bae.

"Did I mention the mental anguish, crushing loneliness, and the dress code of ugly green tights?"

Bae shuddered and hugged her close. "It sounds horrible. Do you need a dose of comfort mode? Shall I send for a prince?"

"Oh, I haven't even told you the worst part! The shadow isn't just evil—he's a freaking chauvinist! He says he only kidnaps boys, and the only reason he took me was that it's difficult to tell who's male and who's not when the contemporary dress code for both sexes consists of lacy nightgowns."

Bae examined his sleeping attire. "Understandable, I suppose."

"And tonight he's coming back to take one of my brothers in my place! Bae, call me crazy, but I'm starting to think that running off with a demonic pedophile is the worst decision I've made since I let that juvenile delinquent move in with me."

"Ya think?" Bae rolled his eyes. "Idiots like you don't deserve to be saved. But I'm awesome, so I'll do it anyway."
Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Lacey was leering lasciviously at Gold, as usual. "So why didn't you tell me you had magical powers?"

"Um, hello? Do the words 'hospital', 'teacup', and 'hissy fit' mean anything to you?"

"No. So can you make the Statue of Liberty disappear?"

"I prefer to show off in a more productive manner." He conjured up a diamond necklace and fastened it around her neck. "Just don't let Neal or Mary Margaret see it, or you won't have it for long."

"Vodka is a girl's best friend, but diamonds come a close second," breathed Lacey, fingering the gems appreciatively. "Can you give me eternal youth and beauty, too?"

"You'd damn well better hope so, because youth and beauty are about the only positive qualities you have left," he reminded her grimly.

Lacey gave him a dirty look, but couldn't deny it. "Excellent. That means we can be together forever, or at least until one of us inevitably gives into our violent impulses and kills the other."

"Promising forever to some creepy old bastard you just met?" Gold looked her over calculatingly. "Maybe there's more of Belle in you than I thought. But unfortunately, it's not that easy. There's a prophecy that someone may be my undoing."

"Undoing? What the hell does that mean? Are they going to kill you, break your curse, or just undo your pants?" She raised her hand. "Because if it's the third one, I volunteer."

Gold took his trusty vial of baby poison out of his pocket. "Okay, that settles it. I want to be alive for that, by any means necessary!"

Neal and Emma went into the darkened factory and wove their way past oversized cogs, steaming pipes, and a T-800 with no legs. "Emma, this place is dark, silent, and ominous. No good will come of entering it."

Emma switched on her chainsaw. "On the contrary, defeating one evil stepmother and rescuing another is the greatest good I could ever hope to achieve. Are you with me?"

Neal groaned. "Why can't I ever meet any normal chicks? Oh wait, I finally did, and you're trying to ruin it for me."

A shadowy figure leapt out at them with a gun. "I will always find you, dirtbag!" he and Emma screamed in unison. The sheriff lowered her weapon. "Pops? Eminem? What are you doing here?"

"We're going to help you hunt down Tamara."

She eyed their guns skeptically. "But what if you have to shoot her? You'll descend into madness and attempt suicide again."

"Actually, I can't. In exchange for the potion, Gold made me promise to quit whining and go back to being a badass," Mary Margaret explained.

"I never thought I'd say this, but God bless that man." Emma revved up her chainsaw. "The Charmings are on the prowl again, at long last!"
Meanwhile, Tamara had taken over Regina's citywide network of spy cameras. "Oh crap. The Charming women have both stopped moping and returned to their gutsy feminist origins." Screaming at the top of her lungs, she ran to her man. "It's all over, Greg! We don't have a prayer!"

Greg didn't bother to look up from his torturing. "I choose not to notice that."

"Ugh, I don't know why I even try." Tamara threw up her hands and left. "It was nice knowing you, baby."

"Ditto," chirped Greg obliviously, fiddling with his pillered machine. "All right, Regina. I'm going to give you one last chance. Hand over my keychain!"

"Sorry homie, but I hocked it to Gold for a new apple peeler."

"Crap! Well, how about my father? Got any info on him?"

"Well, let's look at the facts here," she sneered. "I'm a convicted mass murderer with a WMD for a brain, and he's an unarmed peasant who stood in my way."

Greg squinted uncomprehendingly. "Are you saying you sent him to live on a farm upstate?"

"He's dead, Sherlock. Kaputt. Muerto. A badly-dressed corpse. He took a dirt nap. He slept the eternal sleep. He bought the farm. He assumed room temperature. He went to that big Death Star in the sky."

"I don't get it."

She rolled her eyes. "Let me put this in terms your tiny little brain can process. I made Da-Da go bye-bye forever."

"NOOOOOOOO!" wailed Greg.

"If you don't believe me, check your campsite. I buried him there for the sake of irony," she sneered. "Now go ahead and try to kill me. We both know I'm not gonna die any more than Rumpstiltsk-AAAAAAAAAAH!" she screamed. "In retrospect, maybe taunting the torturer was foolhardy."

Mrs. Darling smiled tenderly at her children. "Anything I can get you kids before I leave? A glass of water? Another story, maybe?"

"No, but if you're feeling helpful, you could stay to defend us from the monster that clearly has us terrified," Wendy whimpered.

"Sorry, but Dad and I have plans tonight." She shut off the light and left. "I'll see you in the morning, God willing."

As soon as she was gone, Bae jumped out of bed and locked the window. "Okay, so, a band of plucky kids fighting off a household intruder, standard nineties film procedure. I've been brushing up on my martial arts and I already made contact with Old Man Marley. All you guys have to do is not hug the enemy. Think you can manage that?" The Darling kids nodded uncertainly. "Try harder, and get to bed."

The Shadow suddenly charged through the window. "I am the one hiding under your bed, teeth ground sharp and eyes glowing red. I am the one hiding under your stairs, fingers like snakes and spiders in my hair!"
"Yeah, I'm definitely starting to think this guy isn't as kid-friendly as he made himself out to be," Wendy mused, shepherding her brothers to the closet.

"I won't say I told you so, but I totally did," said Bae.

The Shadow made a beeline for Michael. "Boys and girls of any age, wouldn't you like to see something strange? Take a chance and roll the dice—ride with the moon in the dead of night!"

Michael wandered into his embrace, entranced. "I know he's probably going to kill me, but he makes it sound so awesome!"

Bae pushed him out of the way and dropped into a kung-fu stance. "Hey punk, pick on someone of your own bloodline!"

"Ooh, okay!" the Shadow agreed happily, seizing him by the arm.

Wendy ran to her foster brother's side. "No, Bae, you can't leave us! You're the coolest person who's ever graced this house, except maybe him!" She nodded briefly at the Shadow. "Without you, this family is just plain whitebread!"

"Sorry, but I've made a deal and I can't go back on it. Check my backstory and you'll understand." He shook her off and allowed himself to be dragged away. "Thank you, Darlings, for the brief and wonderful reprieve from dysfunctionality!"

The Shadow dragged him through the skies of London at lightspeed, narrowly dodging rooftops and smokestacks. "Yahoo! I can fly, I can fly, I can fly!" Bae cried ecstatically.

"Quiet! This moment isn't supposed to be enchanting in this version!" the Shadow scolded.

Bae pouted. "Party pooper." He glanced up at Big Ben as they zoomed past. "Dude, it's 8:15 again?"

Meanwhile, Regina was still mired in Stage Five of the monomythic cycle. "Atonement sucks," she wheezed.

"Orphanhood sucks more—Neal will back me up!" roared Greg. "And now I'm going to make sure you never murder anyone again!"

"As a Charming, I'm afraid I can't allow that," said David, appearing in the doorway with a gun.

"What the hell is wrong with this family?!" Greg griped, running for his life.

Mary Margaret ran to her stepmom's side. "David, there's no time to pursue the rampaging super-criminal right now. We've got to get Mom to the ER."

David paused in the doorway. "So do it. There are two of us."

"No, if we split up even for a second, we're probably going to end up on another months-long quest for reunification."

Unable to argue with her logic, David picked up his walkie. "Emma, block the exit. You know how you said Greg was telling the truth about being a harmless tourist? Wrong again."
"I was right. Your superpower is a load of bunk," said Neal smugly.

"Only ninety-five percent of the time," Tamara whacked her over the head with a conveniently-placed lead pipe and snatched her gun. "Say hello to the other five percent."

Neal gaped at her. "Tamara, did you just get violent?" He shivered excitedly. "Mm, just when I thought you couldn't get any sexier!"

"Shut up, old man."

He gaped at her in disbelief. "So it was all a lie? You don't find my advanced age, raging PTSD, crippling array of daddy issues, and obvious love of another woman attractive?"

"Duh." She rolled her eyes.

His face fell. "Does this mean I'm not scoring tonight?"

"It's looking doubtful."

"Tamara, stop proving me wrong. You're embarrassing me in front of Emma." He reached for her gun.

Tamara shot him in the chest and took a picture with her cellphone, which she promptly sent to Greg. "There, are you happy now?" she captioned it.

A text message came back a few seconds later. "That wound doesn't look mortal to me."

"Ugh, he's got to be the most insecure man I've ever met." She pointed her gun at Neal's head. "Sorry, homie."

"You will be when my pop catches up with you," Neal said darkly.

"Oh, I don't think we need to wait around for him. I'm good at revenge, too!" Emma picked herself up off the floor and, in the culmination of half a season of longing, kicked Tamara in the face. "Emma SMASH!" She giggled hysterically. "Damn, that felt good. Emma SMASH! Emma SMASH! Emma SMASH!"

Neal watched raptly as the two of them grappled. "Ooh, catfight. Hot."

"Neal, wipe the drool off your face and grab the gun!" Emma screamed, but it was no use. Neal was on the verge of swooning. "Ugh, men!" She knocked her opponent to the ground and snatched it up herself.

Tamara reached into her pocket and came up with a magic bean. "Aw, hell, not those things again!" Neal wheezed.

"That's right—prepare for your journey to come full circle, you bastard!" She tossed it at their feet and split.

"Emma!" Neal scooped her into his arms and hefted her to safety. She stared at him. "I thought you'd just been shot."

"It's only a flesh wound." He attempted to pick her up bridal-style and carry her off into the sunset, but wound up stepping on a banana peel and tottering into the portal. "Man, that was just cruel, making me think I was actually going to escape doom for a change."
Emma grabbed him by the hand. "Neal, don't leave me again! It's really starting to get annoying!"

"You're telling me, baby," he grumbled. "But you can't come with me—Henry needs a mother!"

"He already has a mother, stupid!"

"He needs a back-up far more than I need protection and companionship in a terrifying new dimension." He waved his free hand dismissively. "Don't worry about me—I'm used to this sort of thing."

"But I love you more than chainsaws and McCutcheon's whiskey put together!"

"I love you too!"

"You do? Wow, that was easy. I was expecting at least some form of hesitation, considering you were engaged thirty seconds ago."

"Hey, if you're going to keep questioning my feelings, I'm out of here." He released her hand and disappeared for the umpteenth time.

Emma cried for a few minutes, then stood up and dusted herself off. "Well, no use crying over spilled milk. Time to go find that sexy beast Hook and move on with my life."

Greg had managed to find the single square foot of ground in the woods that contained his father's bones through the power of SCIENCE! "Da-Da go bye-bye! No!" He picked up his father's skull, weeping profusely. "Alas, poor Kurt."

The Mother Superior had somehow acquired fairy dust, now that the plot no longer demanded that it be scarce, and was waving her wand over Regina. "You sure you don't want me to turn her into a toad while she's nice and helpless, Eminem? Last chance."

"For the last time, no."

The fairy shrugged and turned to leave. "Your funeral."

Emma staggered through the door, looking dazed. "There aren't enough Zoloft cupcakes in the world for what I just went through."

"This sounds serious," said Mary Margaret. "Let's get you to Neal. A little adversity could really help to advance your relationship."

"Neal's gone."

Mary Margaret blinked. "What, *again*?"

"That scoundrel! I'll kill him!" roared David.

"No, I mean Tamara offed him."

"Did you at least manage to squeeze in a quick 'I told you so' before he died?" her mother asked.

As the isle of Neverland came into site, Baelfire could hear the Others whispering in the distance. "No! Not the Island! I hate purgatories!" He took a book of matches from his Playboy Junior
smoking jacket and torched the monster until it released him. "Man, I really wish I'd thought of that before I let it carry me to another dimension," he lamented as he plunged into the sea below.

The Shadow frantically searched the water's surface for the boy, but getting wet was simply too high a price to pay for the fulfillment of all his goals and the promise of eternal life, so the creature gave up and went home to listen to some metal.

As Bae floated lifelessly in the water, some pirates pulled up beside him and hauled him to safety. "And all without asking for a reward. Maybe my fangirls were right—I do have a kinder, gentler side," Captain Hook mused.

Bae coughed up several gallons of seawater, a rusty anchor, and a baby mermaid. "Another damn dimension. Well, that's just great."

"This kid's as bitter as a lemon peel soaked in cough syrup. I approve." Hook bowed. "Welcome aboard the SS Coincidence, my young friend."

David found Emma weeping bitterly on the stairs. "Honey, I don't mean to intrude, but I'm your father, we've known each other for a year, and we have yet to form any kind of relationship. Mind if I grieve with you?"

"If you must," Emma sniffled.

"That's my girl." He took her in his arms. "Comfort mode."

Mary Margaret got her husband to give Regina a peck on the cheek and the former queen finally came to. "You saved me? What the hell is wrong with you people?"

"We're too sweet to be medieval," David explained. "Besides, if we let you die, Henry would yell at us."

"If you're so special, how did you manage to fail at capturing those pathetic excuses for villains?" Regina challenged sarcastically.

"In our defense, you couldn't do it either," Mary Margaret reminded her.

Tamara found Greg still sobbing over his father's remains. "Oh, quit your blubbering. If you were too dumb to realize she'd killed him, you have only yourself to blame. We have more important things to worry about now, like this." She held up the hideous chocolate diamond. "Our buddies from the Inquisition have analyzed it with SCIENCE! and determined that it is…"

"A trigger?" said David.

"A Cracker Jack prize…I mean, a trigger," Tamara corrected.

"I was going to use it to murder all of you. What, seriously, you're surprised?" Regina laughed. "You two never cease to entertain me. But now that Henry and I are in danger, you should really do something about this."
As Hook gazed soulfully at a Sears portrait of Milah, Smee peered over his shoulder. "Milah may have been a cruel liar who kidnapped and robbed me for no apparent reason, but at least she was hot."

Hook decked him. "Find your own lost love, punk! This one's mine!"

"Yes sir."

"Never mind that. What's the deal with that kid we found floating face-down in the middle of an empty ocean? Is he some kind of merman who bought legs from a witch? Or was he just trying to commit suicide, like so many others in our universe?"

"Well, this is Neverland, he's a boy, and he appears to be lost. Do the math."

"One of the Lost Boys?" Hook brightened. "Excellent! Maybe we can trade the kid to Pan for some of that delicious imaginary pie he makes."

He headed down into the hold, where Baelfire was attempting to contort his adorable features into something resembling an embittered scowl. "Stop embarrassing yourself, lad," Hook pleaded. "What are you pouting for, anyway? You just survived a fall into the ocean from several stories up. You ought to be on your knees, giving thanks for the obvious act of divine intervention that kept you from breaking every bone in your body."

"I choose not to notice that," Bae seethed.

"Then you should fit right in. So, what brings you to Neverland? If you're here to pick up mermaids, I think it only fair to warn you, they're not nearly as friendly as Barrie made them out to be." Hook displayed his hands, which bore a series of bloody bite marks.

"No, I'm here because I sacrificed myself to save a family of lovable idiots from their own stupidity." Bae broke down sobbing. "Why must everyone I love suck so much? WHY?!"

"You sound like a real hero." Hook pulled a face. "I hate heroes."

"Well, that makes us even, because I hate pirates. They killed my mother. Granted, she sucked just like the rest of my family, but it's the principle of the thing."

"Show some respect, I saved your life!"

"Yeah, well, so did my father. If I didn't thank him, what chance do you have?"

Hook glared at him. "What's your name, you little punk?"

"Baelfire."

The pirate tensed. "F-from the Wheel of Time series?"

"No, from the Enchanted Forest."

"Aw, nuts."
Henry was on a swing at the playground, frolicking, as Charmings do, when Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Anybody dumb enough to dangle himself over a pile of jagged rocks in a town full of homicidal maniacs is no blood of mine. Time to die, alleged grandson!" Gold started sawing through the rope with his brain, but then the Charmings appeared, and he stopped for fear they might actually punish a murderer for the first time ever. "Gold, what are you doing here?" David demanded.

He indicated their grandson. "Stalking a family member. I figured you, of all people, would understand."

Mary Margaret glanced at her daughter. "Emma, he's probably going to turn us into snails for giving him news like this, so why don't you go over there with Henry? That way, you two will still be in one piece to come and rescue us."

"More bad news?" said Gold. "What, finding out we were related wasn't traumatic enough all by itself?"

"Apparently not. Tamara just offed your kid," David informed him.

"Wh-what?" Gold burst into tears. "But he was the point of the whole freaking show!" He crumpled to the ground, sobbing. "My baby! No!"

David dragged him back on his feet. "Yeah, yeah, very sad, but the real problem is that they're going to come for us now, so stop whining and fix that."

"This is not happening!" Gold bawled, heartbroken. "Why, God, why?!"

Mary Margaret slapped him. "Get a grip, old man! You've got work to do!"

"What's your problem, anyway?" said David quizzically. "I thought you two hated each other now."

"Yeah, but now I can't kill Henry because he's the only family member I have to turn to if I ever need a kidney!" The old man sniffled. "This bites! You know, I'm really starting to think that recreating the magical forces that alienated me from my son in order to reunite with my son was a less-than-prudent strategy."

"You finally caught that, huh?" sneered David.

"Can we please discuss magical parenting methods after you're done saving us?" Mary Margaret pleaded. "In case you didn't hear me the first time, we're all gonna die!" She grabbed Gold by the lapels and shook him until his teeth rattled.

"What do I care? I'm three hundred years old—I've had a good run." Gold turned to leave. "See you in hell, dearie."

Hook followed Greg and Tamara through the mines. "Is your boss Professor Otto Lidenbrock? Are we going on a journey to the center of the earth?"

"We don't know who our boss is," Tamara replied.

"Then how do you know he's not a criminally-insane, four-hundred-year-old abomination of magic?"

"Because that would be ridiculous, ironic, and just plain weird. And that's not what Storybrooke is
"all about," scoffed Greg.

"You guys are the lamest allies I've ever had, and that includes Smee," said Hook contemptuously.

"We're not lame. We simply have faith in the sacredness of our cause."

The pirate studied them curiously. "Are you saying your actions here are being driven by religious beliefs?"

"Shh! You're going to draw the attention of the censors!" Tamara hissed.

"But that's a really interesting angle. It could provide a lot of depth to you and insight on your motivations—"

"Quiet! You could possibly end up offending somebody, somewhere!" Greg clamped a hand over his mouth. "He didn't mean it! This holy crusade against witchcraft is in no way affiliated with any kind of religion!"

"Please don't cancel us!" Tamara screamed, looking around nervously.

"Fine, whatever, nobody cares what you two think anyway," said Hook dismissively. "Let's get down to business. Why did you drag me down here, and why are you holding that pickaxe? I assume you're planning to beat me senseless with it? Everyone always does." He prostrated himself wearily. "All right, let's get this over with."

"Get up!" Tamara took Regina's uncharacteristically ugly piece of jewelry out of her pocket, setting the diamond on the ground.

"A Ring Pop! Yum, I love these things!" Hook reached for it, but Greg swatted his hand away.

"Stop that! It's not candy, it's a WMD. We're going to use it to blow up the town, and with it, the four people inside who use magic. Terrorism! It's the wave of the future!"

Hook nodded excitedly. "Excellent, excellent, and we escape the destruction by?"

"The sweet release of death."

"Oh." Hook forced a smile. "Sounds great. Well, if you'll excuse me, before we all die, I'd like to go finish up my New Years' resolution to make less homicidal friends."

"'Kay," Greg agreed, whacking obliviously on the diamond.

Over at the Princess Pad, Henry dove into his adoptive mother's arms. "Mom-slash-Great-Grandma! Good news, I've lost a parent, so there's room on the roster for you again."

As they embraced, an earthquake rumbled through the building. "Are we doomed yet?" asked Emma.

"Yeah, pretty much," said Regina.

"Am I the only one who's a little upset about this?" said Henry.

Regina stroked his face reassuringly. "Don't worry, you're not going to die. You're simply going to witness the death of everyone you've ever known and loved, and spend the rest of your life alone in a world that deems you insane."
"Well, that's a relief," said Henry sarcastically. "Biological Mom, you got anything?"

"Comfort mode!" Emma cried boldly.

"That's the spirit!" The boy smiled proudly.

"Regina, can't you do anything about this?" asked Emma. "I mean, since you have a better understanding of the threat we're facing than anyone else in the world…"

"You'd think so, but no." Regina shrugged helplessly.

"I really hate you!"

"Stop, we can all hate each other later!" Henry yelled. "In fact, given our history, it's an absolute certainty. But first, we've got to nip this impending doom thing in the bud. You saw how upset I got about losing my dad, and I barely knew the guy. Think how insane I'd go if I lost the people who kind of raised me."

Hook appeared in the doorway. "I'm new here, but even I know better than to ignore the sage counsel of the wise Henry. Let's all shut up and do what the kid says."

David decked him. "That's for the last time we met!"

"You're mad at me for punching you?" Hook stared at him incredulously. "I left your wife and child to die!"

The quasi-prince shrugged. "Eh, I'm cool with that. They get on my nerves too, sometimes."

Hook turned to Mary Margaret. "Normally, I'd tell you to ditch this clown and run away with me, but the fact that we're all about to die horribly kind of kills the mood."

"Regina told us you've been working with Tamara and Greg," Emma accused.

"I finally came to my senses," Hook replied.

"Good man," said Emma, clapping him on the back.

"Well, that doesn't do us any good now," said Regina bitterly. "Even combined power of Hook's sex appeal and mine can't stop this thing now that it's been activated."

"No worries," said David. "We'll just swipe the beans back from Greg and Tamara, and then put someone besides that useless Blue Fairy in charge of guarding them while we gather everyone for evacuation."

"I can lead you to Greg and Tamara. With my shirt off." He leered at Emma. "Am I your hero yet?"

David pulled his gun. "Hit on my daughter again and I'll blow your head off."

Hook shrugged calmly. "Meh, I'm sure I'll find a way to survive it. I always do."

"This banter seems like the start of a budding bromance. Why don't you two go after Greg and Tamara together? It'll be the perfect opportunity for some male bonding," Emma suggested. "Regina and I will go keep the diamond in check until the climax. Mary Margaret, Henry, you have half an hour to rally the entire population of our dimension for evacuation, so you'd better get cracking."

As they headed for the door, Regina took her son aside. "Henry, I owe you an apology for that
pesky evil relapse I had. I'm not sure exactly how to do this, but…” she enfolded him in her arms. "Comfort mode."

"Aw, Mom-slash-Great-Grandma, that was beautiful!" her son gushed.

Hook watched them queasily. "Embracing goodness for the sake of a child you love, huh? Yeah, I narrowly dodged that bullet myself."

A rowboat pulled alongside the Jolly Rancher, and Smee screamed. "Oh no! A bunch of frightened little boys! God help us all!" He latched on to Hook's leg and wouldn't let go. "Quick, give them the kid, before they start attacking us with their mighty slingshots!"

Hook shook him off irritably. "Get a grip! Baelfire could be the key to my revenge against the Dark One." He snapped his fingers. "I know! I'll make him love me instead of his father. Smee, get me a copy of Why Parents Hate Their Children, and set up a baseball diamond on the gun deck."

The Lost Boys, led by that irrepressible emo Felix, scuttled aboard the ship. "Do you know who I am?"

"You're Pan's girlfriend, right?" said Hook.

Felix blushed. "Shut up!" His comrades giggled. "You too!" He turned back to Hook. "We're looking for a boy. We would have just sent the Shadow to kidnap him, but apparently the damn thing is hydrophobic."

"I'm afraid you're sad out of luck," said Hook. "You're dealing with the only sailing ship in the universe that doesn't have a single cabin boy, apprentice, or powder monkey among its crew."

"That seems a little far-fetched," said Felix skeptically. "We're going to have to search you and see this unusual phenomenon for ourselves." The boys looked through every desk drawer, cigar box, and cookie jar on the ship.

Hook snickered. "No luck, eh? Tell your boss this is why he should be enslaving adults."

Felix's second-in-command started crying. "Can we go now? I think I need a diaper change."

Felix glared at him, and then at Hook. "Do you know what Pan does to people who cross him?"

"Perpetuates racial stereotypes about them?"

"Worse. He rips their shadows from their body. RI—ii—II—iiip!" squawked Felix.

Hook raised his eyebrows. "Is that your idea of intimidation?"

"No, I think my voice just changed." The boy cleared his throat experimentally. "Come on, boys, let's get home. I want to write all about this milestone in my diary."

Once they were gone, Hook went to look in on Bae in the cargo hold. "Compared to those weirdos, you and your band of murdering criminals seem positively decent," the boy observed. "I thought pirates only cared about themselves."

The pirate grinned. "That's not entirely accurate. We also care about hot babes, and those affiliated with hot babes."
Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, the Seven Dwarves had decided to embrace their impending doom by stealing from Mr. Gold. "I just lost my beloved child and am about to die horribly, but if you insist on crossing me, I suppose I can work up one last dose of hilarious sarcasm."

"That won't be necessary," said Leroy. "We just came for Sneezy's drinking stein. You see, Mother Superior actually did something useful for once. She made a potion that will restore his memory, but he needs to drink it out of his prized possession."

"It's a good thing his prized possession isn't a bracelet or something. But what's the point?"

"The point is, I'll be damned if I'm going to die as one of the Six Dwarves!" Leroy proclaimed boldly. "It just doesn't have the same ring to it."

"Does anyone care what I think about this?" stammered Clark.

"No!" yelled his brothers in unison. "Take him back to Granny's," Leroy commanded. "He's probably gonna need a Zoloft cupcake when he comes to." The dwarf turned back to Gold. "Long ago, Belle tried to keep my relationship with Astrid from being a complete train wreck. She failed, but ya gotta love her for trying, so I begged an extra dose of personality for her." He tossed the pawnbroker a vial. "Don't let her die as Lacey. Everyone hates that loon, including you."

Out behind the cannery, Greg was wasting precious time burning papers that would soon be destroyed in a catastrophic explosion, because he was an idiot. David and Hook looked on, snickering. "Well, mate, this should be a piece of cake."

A very seasick Bae approached Hook, who was posing for his fangirls at the wheel of the Jolly Rancher. "I just puked in your favorite hat. Sorry."

"Eh, I can't stay mad at you—you're too freaking adorable." He draped an arm around the boy's shoulders affectionately. "Want to try steering the ship? Chicks dig a guy who can drive."

"You're not worried I'll steal your sweet ride?" said Bae. "That's a first."

"You like to steal, too? That settles it, I love this kid!" He used his hook to scratch the words "Bae and Hook, Friends 4-Evar" on the helm. "So, you told me about your mother dropping dead and your father leaving you. If it's any consolation, I think half our world's population has the same problem, myself included. You see, when I was a boy, my father and I boarded a ship with plans to travel the realms. And there was also an older brother involved in the story somehow. Anyway, Dad was so determined to get away from me that he actually managed to run away from a sailing ship. How does that even work? Did he walk on water? Turn himself into a dolphin? I've spent decades trying to figure it out."

"Wow, that's seriously baffling." Bae patted his shoulder sympathetically. "I can relate. Somehow, my papa had no problem charging crippled and unarmed into a burning building full of hostile warriors for me, but following me into a kid-tested, fairy-approved portal was too much for him to handle." He twirled a finger in circles around his temple. "Cuckoo."

"Oh right, the Dark One." Hook infused his voice with false sympathy. "So, anyway, Baelfire, old buddy, my dad's Achilles heel was booze. What was your dad's?"

"Definitely tea."

"And?"
"Well, he used to cry every time I asked him to hand me a pan."

"Hm, interesting. What else?"

"Well, there's always that oddly Asiatic dagger that can control-slash-kill him."

"Now that's what I call dirt!" He mussed his unwitting stepson's hair. "Good boy!"

"Hook, I know we should probably stay quiet so Greg and Tamara don't hear us coming, but that would be boring, and we're all dying for some insight into your motivations. Weren't you suicidal just last week?"

"Yeah, but I realized that my death would be a tragic waste of hotness, and I can't bring myself to put the women of this world through that," said the pirate with a heavy sigh.

"Uh oh, I think I hear Greg. We'd better ourselves for an onslaught of whining." David crammed a pair of plugs into his ears and handed a second pair to his new bro.

Greg emerged from the shadows. "Wah wah, my daddy's dead. Wah wah, magic's scary. Wah wah, my hairline is receding and it's probably your fault somehow!"

"Will you shut up and give us the beans now," asked David, "or are you going to give us a chance to show off our mad combat skills first?"

"The second one," said Tamara, appearing with a gun.

"Yay!" Prince and pirate drew their weapons and charged. Hook wrestled Greg to the ground. "Look over there—Lord Voldemort!"

Greg sat up and drew a gun. "I'll kill him!"

"Sucker!" Hook reached into his pocket and bolted.

Greg turned. "Where'd he go? Eh, I guess it doesn't matter—he'll be back to haunt us eventually."

He ran over to Tamara, who had been cornered by David, and jump-tackled him.

Unarmed and helpless, the quasi-prince sighed. "I didn't want to do this, but you leave me no choice." He dropped his own weapon and flexed his muscles. "I will always find you."

"Oh no, not the Charming Family Charm!" The villains cowered.

David flashed a stunning smile at them. "Comfort mode."

Greg's eyes took on a glazed look. "I don't know what just happened, but I now feel that we should leave him alone and give him all our money."

"Ditto," said Tamara in a monotone, the pair setting their wallets on the ground and retreating.

Once they were out of the picture, Hook emerged from wherever he'd been hiding. "Nicely done, homie. Before they took off, I managed to take advantage of my maxed-out pickpocketing skill." He held up a bean. "You're welcome."

David attempted to shove him aside. "Not now, Hook—I've got to go after them! Your incessant reappearances have made me realize that my little habit of sparing villains needs to end!"
"Don't you start off on some revenge quest," the pirate warned. "That job sucks, and is taken, at any rate." He pointed at himself. Pouting, David snatched the bean and ran home.

Regina and Emma made their way through the mines. "I think I'm allergic to doom," Emma wheezed, on the verge of hyperventilation. Finally, they came upon the diamond. "Regina, it's so tacky. I'm disappointed in you."

"Hey, I made it while I was recovering from eye surgery. Cut me some slack." The former queen approached the gem uneasily. "All right, I'll try to contain this thing for as long as I can, but I'm still off my game from all that torture, so don't dawdle."

"Don't worry," Emma reassured her. "We can leave as soon as my old man gets the beans, provided he doesn't swap them for a cow on the way home."

Regina rolled her eyes. "You still don't get it, do you? I'm going to die and Frankenstein won't be here to resurrect me."

Emma was horrified. "But you can't die! With you and Neal both gone, I'll have full custody of Henry, and he still gives me the creeps!"

Regina just smiled. "Emma, you know how last week, your mom finally rediscovered all the awesome qualities she had before my mother died?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, now it's my turn." She unleashed her powers on the gem, laughing evilly all the while. "Bwa hah hah! I'm back, baby!"

Mr. Gold poured some McCutcheon's for his girlfriend. "Here, dearie. I'm too lazy to try and save you from the impending apocalypse, but I hope this makes up for it."

Lacey glared at him. "I should smack you for that, but I can't turn down free booze, no matter the circumstances." She reached for the glass, but knocked it over.

Gold examined the fallen glass. "It's not even chipped." He looked up at his girlfriend in disgust. "You know, Leroy was right. I do hate you." The pawnbroker took a pouch out of a cupboard and poured the shattered remains of dear Chip onto the counter. "I suddenly remembered I'm magic." He tapped the shards with a wand. "Reparo."

"Dude, what's with the teacup? I'm starting to think that thing has more lives than Hook," Lacey grumbled.

"Drink this and get out of my girlfriend!" Gold snarled, dumping the memory potion into the cup and shoving it into her hands, brandishing his cane at her when she hesitated.

Cringing, Lacey took a cautious sip, and was immediately enveloped by a vortex of color-coded righteous magic. "Rumple?"

Gold grinned. "The one and only, dearie."

His relief was short lived as she punched him in the face. "You pig! I turn my back for two episodes-two freaking episodes!-and you devolve into a sadistic baby-killer!"
"Well…you told me to," he defended in a small voice.

She slugged him again. "If I told you to stick your head in a blender, would you do that too?!"

"Probably."

She swatted him over the head with his own cane. "And to top it all off, you let me go out of the house dressed like this!"

"Hey, cut me some slack! I just lost my son!" he whined, trying to deflect her blows.

Belle sighed, opening her arms to him. "All right, you get a pass, come here." She stroked his hair gently. "So, Rumple, now that you love me again, would you mind lifting a finger to save me from certain doom?"

"Shh, not now, Belle. I'm trying to pout."

David burst into Granny's diner, Hook in tow. "I know this is going to shock everyone, but Prince Charming has saved the day."

"About freaking time," said Emma. "Let's get this show on the road. Henry, did you remember to pack your ogre repellent?"

Henry patted his ever-present knapsack. "Got it right here, but where's my mom?"

"I'm right here."

"No, the other one."

"You really need to come up with a different name for one or both of us. This is getting confusing," said Emma. "Anyway, to answer your question, Regina's rediscovered her awesome side, and she's staying here to throw herself on the proverbial grenade."

"And you're just going to let her? Right when she's getting interesting again?!" Henry was aghast. "This is totally OOC! You saved her from that dementor!"

"Dementor!" Mary Margaret cried, her eyes lighting up. "Henry, you're a genius!"

"Of course he is, but what made you say so?" asked Emma.

"We sent the dementor through a portal to another realm, and we can do the same with the trigger. All we have to do is remember not to jump in after it this time."

Her daughter frowned. "Well, okay, that would save us, but what about the dimension it lands in?"

"When doomsday's on the table, it's every dimension for themselves."

Emma shook her head ruefully. "The cricket's not going to go for this plan."

"Actually, I do," said Archie. "Apart from the plot, Snow and Charming have never failed to protect us. And they're so adorable!" He pinched his monarchs on the cheek.

"This plan has the approval of Archie, which proves it's moral, and of Henry, which proves it's strategically viable," Mary Margaret reminded her daughter smugly. "You're all out of reasons to oppose it."
"Actually, I've got one more. If we fail, Henry will be an orphan just like everyone else in this town."

Mary Margaret was unmoved. "Yeah, well, I still need redemption for killing Cora, so he's just going to have to deal with it."

Emma glanced from her parents to her son, who was flashing his patented Little Orphan Henry smile. "Is there any possible way I can get out of this?"

"No," the other three Charmings replied in unison.

With a longsuffering sigh, she held out her hand. "Give me the damn bean."

Hook snatched the bean while it was in transit and pocketed it. "So, let me get this straight? Allowing a mass murderer seeking atonement through death to be killed is immoral, but chaining your own ally to a beanstalk and leaving him to be eaten by a giant for no reason is just fine?" He stared at them in disbelief. "I'm sorry, but I just don't feel safe working with people as mentally unbalanced as you. This alliance is over!"

Emma grabbed the pouch he'd slipped the bean into and pulled him into a vicious headlock. "I don't think so, buster! Graham and Neal are both dead—I'm not going to lose my last potential love interest, damn it!"

"Wait a minute, you were dating Baelfire?" Hook pried himself free, gaping at her. "Just when I thought this family tree couldn't get any more twisted."

"Oh, it gets worse. He's Henry's father."

"I'm a grandpa? But I'm so hot!" The pirate stumbled out of the diner in shock. "If you'll all excuse me, I really, really need a drink."

Hook was on deck smoldering aimlessly, as usual, when he was interrupted by a terrified Smee. "Captain, you've got to give Baelfire up! The Lost Boys just sent us a message that if we don't surrender him in twenty-four hours, they're going to be back with water balloons!" He shook his captain hysterically. "Water balloons, sir!"

Hook, who had forgotten that he'd become a pirate because of his progressive views on individual freedom, slapped him and screamed, "Shut up and do as you're told!"

But before he could start administering beatings at random, Bae charged out of the hold with a sword. "Baelfire SMASH!"

"Dude, what the hell?" Hook yelped, ducking for his life.

Bae held up Hook's Sears portrait of Milah. "You killed my borderline-abusive mother! For some reason, I'm outraged!" He swung the sword again.

"Chill out, boy, I didn't kill your mother. Your father lied. For some reason, he didn't think the story I gave him about your mom being kidnapped as a sex slave for fifty guys was suitable for a five-year-old." Horrified, Baelfire swung at him again. "Hey, relax, that was a lie, too."

"How many of these are there?!" the boy screamed furiously.

"Okay, the truth is that your mother ditched you because I'm hot." He tossed his hair sultrily. "Can
"You really blame her?" Bae wasn't amused. "Oh come on, it's mostly your dad's fault for failing to throw his life away in a pointless duel and leave you an orphan. He totally killed her, by the way."

"Damn it!" cried Bae, choking back tears. "I have the worst family in the entire Enchanted Forest, and that's quite a distinction!"

"If it makes you feel any better, your mother and I intended to come back when you were older so we could destroy your reality, tear you from the arms of the man who raised you, and drag you into a life of crime."

"You really suck at comfort mode!" Bae yelled angrily, burying his face in his hands. "Ugh, it's starting to look like my father is actually the best relative I have. How sad is that?"

"Hey, I resent that!" Hook protested.

"Shut up! You've got no room to talk! You fell in love with a married woman, and that's every bit as evil as brutally murdering the mother of your child!"

"But Bae, if you join me, we can get revenge on Rumplestiltskin as father and son! Look, I even got us custom lightsabers for our quest." He held up a pair of metal cylinders, engraved with the words "Killian's Stepson" and "Bae's Stepdad."

Bae shoved the offering aside. "I don't want to live with you! Unlike everyone else on this show, I prefer the company of my adoptive family!"

"No can do, little dude. We're kind of stuck. In retrospect, I probably should have swiped two of those beans before I came here," Hook mused.

Bae glared at him. "Then send me ashore, or so help me, I'll take a page out of your old man's book and find a way to run on water!"

The Charmings found Regina grinning gleefully as she channeled all her power against the trigger. "Sacrificing myself for the greater good. Heh heh, Mom is going to be so pissed when I tell her how I died!"

"Mom-Slash-Great-Grandma, stop committing suicide," Henry pleaded. "It's sweet of you, but it's really not necessary."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on Emma. "Swan, I gave up my beloved son and sacrificed my life for people I hate, and all I asked in return was that you keep the kid away from the doomsday device!"

"It's their fault." Emma pointed accusingly at her parents. "They Charming-Family-Charmed me into it."

"Shut up, both of you! Our plans always work—we're Charmings," David boasted.

"We're going to open a portal and pass the buck to some other unlucky dimension," Mary Margaret explained.

"Or not," said Emma, opening up Hook's pouch and finding it empty. "Curse Hook and his maxed-out pickpocketing skill!"
Meanwhile, Hook himself was at the helm of his ship, staring gravely down at the legume in question. "To betray or not to betray, that is the question."

Bae's bags, which he hadn't had when he came aboard, were packed with possessions he hadn't had when he came aboard. "Are you sure you won't stay? It looks like you've got a natural talent for theft," Hook observed.

"I hate dads," seethed Bae.

"Okay, you've got the teen rebellion thing going. I can respect that. But it doesn't have to end like this." Hook smiled hopefully. "Please, just try the life of a thief! Sample the life of a crook! There isn't a boy who won't enjoy a-living with Captain Hook." He took a sealed document from his coat pocket. "I'll sweeten the deal. Sign the adoption papers without delay, and you'll get a free tattoo."

"Screw you. I've known you for..." Bae paused to check his watch. "Thirty-one minutes, and am well qualified to judge you incapable of ever changing for the better."

"Jeez, so judgmental." He eyed his stepson suspiciously. "Let me guess. You're a friend of the Blue Fairy."

"Yes, actually I am."

Hook's face hardened. "Well, I'm afraid that changes things. I refuse to sail alongside anyone affiliated with that sanctimonious pipsqueak." The captain snapped his fingers. "He's all yours, Felicity."

The Lost Boys descended on Bae, Felix glowering at Hook. "For the last time, I'm not Pan's girlfriend! I'm his boyfriend! I mean—STOP LAUGHING, DAMN IT!" he roared at his men. "Or no dessert for a week!" The children burst into tears, sullenly dragging Bae to their longboat.

"Are all father figures self-centered scumbags, or just mine?" Bae wondered aloud as they hauled him over the railing.

Hook approached Felix. "All right, you have the boy. Now give me what's rightfully mine." Felix produced a pastry stuffed with neon red, green, and blue frosting. "Imaginary pie! Score!" He sank his teeth into a slice. "Mm, it's every bit as delicious as you promised."

"I really hate you!" Bae yelled up at him.

"And someday, I'm sure I'll care," Hook retorted.

Back in the present day, Hook turned his ship around and headed back to Storybrooke. "Well, what do you know? 'Someday' has finally come!"

Trees and vines chased crowds of frightened townspeople through the streets of Storybrooke. "Whatever they offer you, don't feed the plants!" they screamed.

Down in the mines, Regina was getting fed up. "Emma, you and Henry have the ability to cross the town line at will! Take him and go! There's nothing stopping you!" Trembling from the effort of holding the curse in check, she turned to David and Mary Margaret. "Or you, either, for that matter! Wouldn't you rather be amnesiac than dead?"
"We choose not to notice that," said all four Charmings in unison.

"Damn you all!" she screamed.

Emma smiled sadly at her parents. "Well, Mom, Dad, it took three decades and two apocalypses, but I finally noticed that you love me."

"We appreciate the gesture, pumpkin." Mary Margaret glanced at her watch. "So, it looks like we've got a few minutes to kill before our doom gets here. Who wants cuddles?"

Three hands shot up. "I do!" Her husband, daughter, and grandson all joined her in a group glomp.

"Ugh, this is not the last thing I want to see," Regina complained queasily.

"Aw, you're just feeling left out, Mom-Slash-Great-Grandma." Henry pulled free of his cuddly forebears and went over to embrace his adoptive mother. "Comfort mode."

"You're a good son. Sorry I was such a crummy mother." She smiled sadly. "I wish I could keep you from being orphaned, but I'm not strong enough to stop this spell and your other mom is too stubborn to listen to good advice." She glared at Emma over their son's head.

A light bulb appeared over Emma's head. "That's it!"

"You're coming to your senses and leaving town?" Regina asked hopefully.

The savior pried her parents off her with a crowbar. "No, I think we should team up!"

"Yuck, I'd rather die!"

Emma raised an eyebrow. "Literally?"

Regina heaved a longsuffering sigh. "Okay, fine, but no touching this time. The last time we made beautiful magic together, our shippers had a field day with it." Emma put her hands opposite Regina's, and they threw everything they had at the gem. "Swan Queen SMASH!" they screamed as it died with a mighty blast.

Over at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Rumbelle's latest round of end-of-the-world sex was interrupted when the vines on the windows began to recede. "NO! FEEEEED MEEEE!" the evil greenery screamed with its dying breath.

David peeled himself off a wall and helped his daughter to her feet. "We're alive. Why am I not surprised?"

Regina picked up the ugly accessory and stuck it in her pocket. "This hideous thing is going straight to Goodwill."

"Henry was right again," David realized. "Why do we ever bother to doubt that kid? It just wastes precious airtme."

"Henry, don't you owe us all an 'I told you so'?' Emma glanced around, perplexed. "Henry? Henry!" She kicked a wall in frustration. "Ah, hell! We didn't even get a full minute's rest between crises this time!"
Greg and Tamara dragged a bound Henry across the docks. "You think these bonds can hold me? Do you have any idea how many jailbirds I'm descended from?" the boy scoffed.

"Relax, kid, we're going to break character and not hurt any innocents for a while," said Tamara.

"You tried to blow up Storybrooke!"

"So did your mom, and you still like her," Greg reminded him. "At any rate, blowing up Storybrooke is just a hobby. Kidnapping you is what we actually get paid for."

Meanwhile, Emma had called on her hereditary love radar and followed it straight to the docks. "Emma, give it up, you'll never find him," said her mother.

Emma gave her a weird look. "Since when are you such a pessimist?"

Mary Margaret shrugged helplessly. "Someone's got to do it, and you seem to be taking a break at the moment."

"Aw, nuts, it's Miss Here-I-Come-To-Save-the-Day again!" said Greg, glancing over his shoulder.

"Don't you ever sleep, woman?" Tamara tossed the last bean into the sea and they jumped in with Henry.

"No!" Emma was in a state of panic. "We have find a way to go after him! Nobody kidnaps my son but me, damn it!"

"Don't look at me," said Regina. "I just stopped an apocalypse. It's someone else's to come up with a crazy scheme."

That was Mr. Gold's cue to pop out of nowhere, as usual. Belle was close on his heels, both of them sporting new designer outfits. "Sorry we're late. We ripped each other's clothes to shreds in the heat of passion and had to swing by Saks to pick up some new ones. What did we miss?"

"Henry's been kidnapped!"

"Yay! Moral dilemma averted!" cheered Gold. Belle smacked him over the head. "I mean, the poor dear," he amended grudgingly.

"Gold, you like to meddle," David remembered. "Meddle in this, please."

"No can do. The only way I know of to cross dimensions in search of a lost family member is to doom an entire world, and you people won't even let me beat up a florist." Belle hit him again.

"So there's nothing we can do?" Regina scowled. "I choose not to notice that."

Emma hugged her. "Welcome to the family!"

Belle pointed at a lone ship on the horizon. "Hook's back. If anyone needs me, I'll be out buying life insurance."

Hook swaggered down the Jolly Rancher's gangplank and handed over the bean, grinning. "That's right, I have a hidden noble streak. Don't let it shock you—I am, after all, a Jack Sparrow knock-off."

"I'd thank you, but I'm simply too jaded," said Emma.
"Ditto," Regina echoed. "Let's get going, time waits for no man but Peter Pan."

"Wait, can somebody catch me up?" asked Hook.

"We averted Crisis #44, and now it's time to get cracking on Crisis #45," David summarized.

"But how are we going to track them? Mr. Gold's been awfully stingy with his tracking spells lately." Regina glared accusingly at her former teacher.

"Oh, I'm sure I can come up with something suitably epic," the Dark One assured them.

"Sweet. Everything seems to be in order—let's get out of here before Godzilla steps on the ship or something," Mary Margaret shepherded her family aboard.

Belle hung back with her boyfriend. "Well, we're together and in love—I guess that's your cue to screw it up somehow?"

"You know me so well." He smiled at her adoringly. "I have to go, and you have to stay here."

"But I want to help save Henry!"

"Belle, have you ever even met Henry?"

"Uh…"

He handed her a scroll. "Here, take this cloaking spell I have on hand for some reason and use it to protect the town."

"I don't want character development! I want fluff!" she protested.

"Honey, it's for the best. The freaky blind kid told me I'm going to die saving my grandson, and spending my final days with the woman I love would make no logical sense."

Belle rolled her eyes. "Rumple, the freaky blind kid also said you'd ride a cow into battle. I'd think you'd be smart enough not to listen to her anymore." She kissed him. "Don't worry, this is obviously not goodbye."

Meanwhile, Neal was lying unconscious on a beach in the Enchanted Forest, a redheaded mermaid hovering over him. "What would I give, to live where you are? What would I pay, to stay here beside—ow!"

Prince Philip and Aurora came along and started throwing rocks at her. "You shoo, Ariel!" the princess scolded.

"Who are you?" Philip asked the wounded man, kneeling to examine his wounds.

"I don't even know anymore," Neal croaked.

"We've got to get him to safety." Aurora noticed a masked warrior looming over her shoulder. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Mulan," she replied in a phony Chinese accent.

Aurora tore off her mask. "You are not!"
"Imposter!" Philip drew his sword. "Quick, Aurora, grab him and let's get out of here!"

Aboard the Jolly Roger, Gold and Hook were engaged in an epic staring contest. "Please tell me you're done trying to kill me," said Gold. "Milah is so not worth it."

"Agreed," said Hook grudgingly.

"Good man." Gold conjured up his Rand McGuffin and pricked his finger, a map of an island appearing.

Regina squinted at the image. "Is that... the Island?"

"Even worse," said Hook. "It's Neverland."

"Bye." Gold ran to the railing and attempted to jump overboard, but David held him back. "Get back here or I'll break your other leg!" the quasi-prince threatened.

Felix and company arrived ashore with Bae slung over his shoulder. "Is this the boy we've been looking for?"

His comrade, a boy in a surgeon's mask, glanced at a picture. "No, too jaded."

Felix unceremoniously dumped Bae on the ground. "Well, that was a waste of time and spookiness. Throw him on the pile and get back to work!"

Aboard the Jolly Rancher, the gang had finished their new sailor orientation and were preparing to sail through the portal. "So who is it that we're up against?" David asked Gold. The pawnbroker didn't answer, he just broke down sobbing.

"Wouldn't this search go faster if we simply showed this picture to the Shadow?" the boy in the surgeon's mask asked quizzically, holding up a drawing of Henry.

"Don't ever question the methods of the man I love again!" Felix smacked him, then took out a pair of pom-poms. "Pan, Pan, he's our man! If he can't do it, we're all damned!"
The Heart of the Truest Believer

In a hospital room at a nonexistent women's correctional facility in Phoenix, a flushed and sweating Emma Swan looked up at the clock. "It's 8:15 again? Aren't there any other times of day?" she panted.

"Keep pushing, Emma!" her doctor ordered. She pulled a chainsaw out from under the bed and revved it menacingly. "Or don't." He turned to his nurse. "How the hell did she get that in here?"

Emma screamed. "Man, I wish Neal knew about condoms!"

Henry emerged into the world with a charming smile and an evil giggle. The doctor held him out to his mother. "Congratulations, Emma. It's a healthy six-pound catalyst."

"Whatever it is, it's creepy as hell." Emma turned her head away. "Get it away from me."

The nurse whispered something into the doctor's ear. "You're giving him up for adoption?!" he shrieked incredulously. "Are you crazy? You know that always goes horribly, horribly wrong in this universe, right?"

"Hey, it could be worse. I could be stuffing him in a closet someplace."

Aboard the Jolly Rancher, Hook and his latest scurvy crew were clinging to the rigging in order to avoid being thrown overboard in the chaos of the portal, because the door to the hold was stuck. As they emerged, Emma's eyes fell on a distant island. "Is that the Island?"

"No, it's an expy of the Island," Hook replied. "It goes by the name of Neverland."

Greg, Tamara, and a bound Henry washed up on the beach. The latter, not wanting to be around when his captors' stupidity finally caught up with them, attempted to run. However, he proved less talented at it than previous Golds, and Greg tackled him. "Knock that off! You're here for half a season, so you may as well try to settle in and get comfortable."

"I can't believe you actually kidnapped me," said Henry. "I'm the son of a nuclear-powered homicidal maniac and the woman who defeated a nuclear-powered homicidal maniac. If you want to die, there are cleaner, easier ways to go about it."

"Your wacky non-traditional family can't help you here!" Tamara bragged. "You're in Neverland now, and lost little boys have no power here!"

Henry buried his face in his hands. "I'll make you a deal. I'll go with you, but I'm going to stand back a little so I don't get gore all over my clothes when you die."

"Fine, whatever." She took Greg's communicator and switched it on. "Tweedledum and Tweedledumber to Home Office. Come in, Home Office, this is Tweedledum and Tweedledumber."

Henry raised his eyebrows. "An office? In the middle of a jungle? Plotting to destroy magic, yet based in the magical heartland?"

"That is correct," said Greg stiffly. "We don't exactly know who or what they are, but we don't ask questions because we're not smart enough to understand the answers anyway."
Tamara was still fiddling with the communicator. "Greg, this thing isn't working. The screen just keeps flashing the word "suckers" at me.

Greg opened the battery compartment, and found it filled with sand. Henry giggled. "Hah, you're doomed because you didn't have the sense to listen to me. Maybe this will be a lesson to the rest of the cast."

"We choose not to notice that!" Greg and Tamara snarled, hauling him to his feet and dragging him into the jungle.

Hook was attempting to pilot the Jolly Rancher while Regina loomed over his shoulder with a heavy bat. "Why are you slowing down? The life of some kid you've never met is at stake, here!" She whacked him angrily.

"Would you knock that off? I'm executing a strategically sound, ethically flawless, well-thought-out strategy for the first time ever, and I need to concentrate." The pirate sighed. "This is tedious. Remember when I was a morally bankrupt hothead who ran around trying to stab Rumplestiltskin? That was fun. What ever happened to that, anyway?"

Regina shrugged. "Beats me. You know, Greg or Owen or whoever told me that villains don't get happy endings."

"What a killjoy. Let's sic our fangirls on him!"

Meanwhile, Emma was standing at the railing, looking longingly across the water and singing "Candle on the Water" at the top of her lungs. Her parents stuck their fingers in their ears and approached her. "Honey, please stop brooding. I think Regina and Hook already have that covered," said Mary Margaret.

"This is all your fault!" Emma raged. "Creating 'Take Your Children to the Apocalypse Day' for me and Henry back in Storybrooke was definitely not your finest hour."

"Comfort mode?" her parents tried.

"I don't want to hear it!" the savior screamed.

"That does it. Stop rubbing our bad decisions in our face or you're grounded," Mary Margaret threatened.

"And stop trying to raise me!" Emma snapped. "It's sweet, but just too late and too trippy."

Mary Margaret looked bored. "Emma, what part of 'if we hadn't abandoned you, you would have been slaughtered like a hog' do you not understand? Find something new to be bitter about, because I'm sick of this conversation."

"And quit worrying about Henry. You're my daughter. You'll find him, and look seven kinds of fabulous while you're doing it." David bragged.

"You two are so sweet you're making my teeth hurt." Emma shuddered.

"Thanks." Mary Margaret put her arms around her family and led them in a sound bite. "Together now: We will always find him!"

"Like hell." Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual, dressed in head-to-toe fanservice. "I'm too sexy
for my leather, too sexy for my leather, and you're in for bad weather, so I'm out of here."

"You can't desert us now!" Regina protested. "With Henry gone, you're the best strategist available!"

"Why are you doing this?" asked Emma. "Are you trying to keep us from seeing you cry, because you have some sort of severe psychological trauma that involves this island?"


Emma picked it up. "He finally realized he could heal himself, I see."

"And it only took him...how many months?" David sighed. "Maybe we're better off without him."

---

"I just had a brilliant idea," said Greg, gathering some driftwood. "Let's build a signal fire in the middle of the most dangerous place in the cosmos."

Tamara raised an eyebrow quizzically. "You know, I'm starting to think the kid might be right about you."

"Hey!"

Felix and the Lost Boys suddenly emerged from the jungle. "Too little, too late, I'm afraid," Felix informed Tamara coldly.

"Are you kids Boy Scouts?" Greg asked tentatively. "If you're here to sell popcorn, I'm sorry, but all my credit cards seem to have turned to sand."

"No, we're the Home Office and you're dumber than a bag of hammers."

"Told ya," Henry gloated.

"The Home Office is a bunch of teenagers?"

"Actually, I'm two-hundred-and-ninety-one," Felix corrected, flashing his flier's license to prove it. "Huh?"

Henry finally took pity on his mentally-challenged captors. "I'll give you a hint. This is Neverland. They're boys. And they seem to have lost their parents."

"Oh, I get it. You're Jake, and these must be your Neverland Pirates." Greg squinted at Felix. "You look a lot blonder in person."

"We're the Lost Boys, genius."

"Why would the Lost Boys want to destroy magic?"

"To con certain morons into doing our bidding. Speaking of which, fork over the kid."

"Over my dead body."

"Yay, I was hoping you'd say that!" Felix giggled happily. "Yo, Shady! Waste him!"

The Shadow swooped down on them. "Beyond the pale, now everything is black! No turning back! No turning back!" it sang, tearing off Greg's shadow and leaving him dead on the ground.
"I'm starting to get the feeling that we should run," said Tamara.

Henry rolled his eyes. "Gee, ya think?" They both took off.

"Kill the spare," Felix ordered. One of the kids fired an arrow into Tamara's back. "Remember me... as a terrible mistake," she gasped, crumpling to the ground.

Henry raced through the jungle, as fast as he could be. "Watch out for that tree!" a voice behind him cried out.

"Huh?" He glanced over his shoulder and smacked into a tree trunk.

"I warned you." A pair of hands popped out of the foliage and dragged him into it as the Lost Boys ran past.

Henry found himself face-to-face with the only child more cunning and dangerous than himself.

"Thank you."

The boy smirked. "No. Thank you."

"Are you a Lost Boy?"

"Sure. We'll go with that." The young stranger took off running again. "Now come on, we've got to get out of here before you come to your senses and realize how creepy I am!"

Back on the Jolly Rancher, Emma's parents had temporarily confiscated her chainsaw, so she had been reduced to doing pull-ups in the hold in order to blow off steam. Hook walked in, smoldering aimlessly, as usual. "You're beautiful when you're angry. And the rest of the time, too."

"Go away, Hook. I'm trying to tire myself out for the upcoming battle."

"Um, okay, whatever. I just came to butter you up with a present."

Emma groaned. "If it's more skimpy lingerie, I'm not interested."

"Damn!" Hook tossed a scrap of lacy fabric in the trash and racked his brain for another gift idea. "All right, how about this?" He handed her a cutlass. "Baelfire once tried to stab me with this for seducing his mother. Now I'm using it to pick up his grieving baby mama. Only in this family, right?" He laughed.

"He was always Neal to me."

Hook shrugged. "If he wants to give up a cool name like Baelfire for a boring one like Neal, that's his problem. Now take the damn thing before I stab you in the back with it. I don't want to, but old habits die hard."

"I didn't realize you were sentimental."

"Tell anyone and I'll gut you like a fish." He rummaged through his liquor cabinet. "Why is the rum gone? Ah, here's some more." He poured them each a glass. "Here's to our dearly departed what's-his-name."

At that very moment, their dearly departed what's-his-name was awakening on the only bed in Philip
and Aurora's palace. Mulan stood over him with a sword. "I suppose you're here to win the heart of the lovely Aurora, like everyone else?"

"Um…no, I have a girlfriend. Kind of," he replied hoarsely.

Mulan relaxed. "Then you can live."

Aurora held a glass of water to his lips. "Welcome to the fabled Kingdom of Someplace."

"The Kingdom of Someplace?" Neal repeated with trepidation. "That's the kind of shoddy world-building you only see in the Enchanted Forest."

"Bingo," said Philip.

"Aw hell. I've returned to the beautiful, magical world that gave me life? This is the worst thing that's ever happened."

"Ingrate," said Aurora.

"I'm not an ingrate!" Neal snapped. "I just can't relocate right now because I have a girlfriend…kind of."

"He's lying," Mulan accused. "Look how clean and vaccinated he is. He's from the same world as Emma."

"You know Emma?" said Neal.

"I know an Emma, but there's probably more than one in the multiverse," Mulan reminded him.

"No there isn't," he replied simply.

"If you say so. So, how do you know her?"

"Did she ever mention a career criminal who abandoned her and ruined her life?" asked Neal nervously. "Because if she did, it wasn't me!"

"Uh…"

Neal broke down in tears. "Okay, okay, it was me, but I'm not going to let it happen twice!" He struggled to sit up. "I've got to get home to her before Hook starts working his magic and I lose her forever!"

Philip raised his eyebrows. "Dude, you may not have noticed, but you've just been shot in the chest. You shouldn't even be able to breathe on your own, much less save the day and get the girl."

Aurora looked him over appraisingly. "Cute smile, abandonment issues, an utter refusal to recognize your own limitations…you're related to Henry, aren't you?"

Neal sighed. "It's a long, long, long, long…"

Seven hours later…

"…long, long, long, long story," he finished hoarsely.

"Fair enough." Aurora yawned sleepily. "But as it happens, you have not yet exhausted your share of crazy coincidences. You're looking at one of three people in the world who can communicate with
"Fine, whatever, I'm too weak and tired to question this insanity—just get on with it," Neal groaned, lying back down and popping some Advil. "Tell Emma that I'm alive, and I love her, and the men in my family have a history of murdering women who ditch them for Hook. Just so she knows."

Emma and Hook were still drinking in the dark. "Is this a date?" she wondered. "If it is, it's even worse than the one Neal took me on at the convenience store."

"Good old Bae," Hook sighed wistfully. "Courageous and pure of heart. My only living link to the woman I loved. You know, there are days I almost feel badly about sacrificing him like a hog." He took another swig of rum. "But then I get back in character again."

The ship lurched, and Emma breathed a sigh of relief. "Whew, that was close. I almost bonded with you for a minute, there."

They ran up on deck and found David and Mary Margaret pulling on the helm. "For the last time, chicks can't drive worth beans! Let me do it!" David yelled.

Mary Margaret clung stubbornly to the wheel. "No way! You always refuse to stop for directions! I'm driving!"

"Stop that!" Hook thumped them both on the head with his titular appendage. "We've got bigger battles than the one between the sexes to worry about right now! We're under attack!"

"By what?" Regina wanted to know.

"You'd only laugh if I told you. Just grab a weapon and try to look intimidating, everyone!" He struck a pose with his sword.

They crowded along the railing. "Come on, Hook, we promise we won't laugh," Emma reassured him. "What's out there? Is it the seldom-seen whale Monstro?"

At the word "whale", David had started frothing at the mouth, so Mary Margaret tried to change the subject. "No, we're sailing with a Jack Sparrow expy. It's probably a kraken."

"Do you mean one of those Greyjoy jerks, or a literal kraken?" asked her husband.

"Worse than both of those put together," their captain said grimly. "Mermaids."

"All right, Ariel's my favorite!" Emma hung over the railing. "Can I get your autograph?"

Her aspiring boyfriend pulled her back. "I'm afraid Ariel won't be along for a few episodes yet. These mermaids are a lot less cute and may or may not be planning to eat us."

"Shall I pull my Ursula impression on them?" Regina offered.

"Naw, me and my future father-in-law have got this." Hook slapped David on the back, handed him a harpoon, and ran to the helm.

David shoved the harpoon into one of the ship's guns. "Firearms exist in our land? Wicked!"

Mary Margaret grabbed a dinner fork, tied it to some fishing line, and dangled it over the side of the ship. "All right, I've got a bite!" She and Emma began reeling in their catch. "This baby is going right on my wall!"
"Does anybody remember that they're traveling with the most powerful sorceress in the world?" Regina asked gently. A resounding chorus of no's answered her. "Well, you are." She blasted the school of mermaids with a series of mushroom clouds. "See?"

Mary Margaret and Emma were still hauling their catch aboard. "I think we've got a whopper this time!" the savior bragged.

"Hey! My personal trainer says I'm only a few pounds above average!" a voice called up to them indignantly.

"You're welcome," said Regina to nobody. Sighing wearily, she teleported the mermaid aboard and restrained her to a large filleting board. "You know, I'm starting to remember why I never work with you people."

Henry and his nameless young friend were still running through the jungle. "Boy, was I a fool in school for cutting gym!" Henry gasped. "How about a breather?"

"Sure, anything my darling donor wants." The boy giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "I don't remember seeing you around here before. Did Marilyn Manson kidnap you, too?"

"No, no one that cool; just a couple of losers named Greg and Tamara," Henry replied sadly.

"I'm sorry to hear that. That means Pan wants you, and Pan always gets what he wants, even if it means destroying his own offspring. In fact, especially if it means destroying his own offspring!" The boy danced a happy jig.

Henry quirked an eyebrow at him. "So what does he want with you? Is he jealous because you're the only child in the world who's creepier than he is?"

"No child in the world is creepier than he is, though you come close." The boy took a vial from under his cloak. "This is pixie dust. I stole it from him because I'm not athletic enough to simply climb up a tree and harvest some of my own. I was going to use it to fly home, but it's defective, so I'm trying to find a Better Business Bureau office I can report it to."

"No worries. My family has no tolerance for shoddy merchandise, and I'm sure they'll be happy to avenge you when they get here." Henry rubbed his hands together excitedly. I can picture it now! First, my grandpa will turn Pan into a snail, and then my mom will poison that snail, and then my grandparents will get all soft-hearted and make them heal him…but then my other mom will hack him to pieces with her chainsaw and all will be well."

"I'd like to see them try," scoffed the boy. Henry gave him a double-take. "And of course I mean that in a pessimistic way, not a defiant way," he saved. "Come on, let's go hide out at the Echo Caves like I should have done in the first place."

Aurora needed to sleep and there was only one bed in the castle, so Neal had been forced to recover at an unnatural speed so that he could vacate it. "Are you feeling better?" Mulan inquired.

Neal shrugged. "So it would seem."

"Go figure that one. So, how did you get here?"

"I was accidentally ripped across dimensions in an attempt to save someone I loved." He sighed.
"Story of my life."

"Harsh. Well, what's it like in the other world?"

"Which one?"

"Your latest."

"The people there have been writing down our life histories since long before most of us were born." He frowned pensively. "I'm still not entirely sure how that works."

"Weird."

"Oh, it gets weirder. You actually existed in sixth-century China, so I guess your presence in the present day must be due to some form of interdimensional reincarnation."

"…Huh?"

"You know, I'm starting to see why Jefferson has so many psychological problems," Neal mused. "Trying to make sense of this stuff is truly maddening."

Luckily, Aurora awoke before their sanity could slip away from them for good. "I'm sorry, but it looks all your loved ones are doing some serious caffeine at the moment."

"Aw, hell," Neal griped. "Now I'm going to have to be a complete hypocrite and turn to my father's magic for help."

"Who is your father?"

"Rumplestiltskin. And don't even ask about the rest of my relatives. It just gets worse."

Mr. Gold found Tamara lying betrayed and wounded in the back. "Karma blows, doesn't it, dearie?"

"Urk!" gurgled Tamara.

"That kind of language isn't necessary. I'll be happy to help you." He reached down and healed her injuries. "Did they kill Henry?"

"No."

"Oh. Yay," he said insincerely.

Tamara burst into tears. "Mr. Gold, I'm sorry I killed your son, but in my defense, he really should have seen it coming. I mean, I gave him every opportunity. I told him I was a spy. I told him I didn't care what happened to him. Hell, I waved a gun in front of his freaking face and said 'please don't make me kill you!'"

"True."

"So, can you forgive me?"

"No, sorry, but it would be completely OOC." He turned her into a snail and stepped on her. "Tee hee! The Dark One's back in the game!"
Back aboard the Jolly Rancher, Hook was cringing in terror. "Ah! A naked, unarmed woman with no legs! We're all doomed!"

"Get a grip, man!" Regina hit him over the head. "After your idiotic attempt to kill Belle back in my palace, I know you don't understand the concept of taking hostages, but surely someone here will?"

"Nope," said David.

"Nope," said Mary Margaret.

"Oy," said Regina. "I should have gone with Gold."

"Damn right you should have." The mermaid took up the magic trumpet no one had had the foresight to divest her of and blew a resounding blast on it. "And now you'll pay the price for your bad judgment."

Emma rubbed her ears. "If that was one of Sebastian's compositions, the old crab's definitely losing his touch."

"No, it was a warning," the mermaid said darkly. "Let me go…or spend the next twenty minutes sitting through an Aesop about teamwork!"

Neal had purchased a pocket copy of the Big Book of Deja-Vu at some point, so he knew the Dark Castle existed and how to get there. Also, before setting out, he had bumped into a helpful fairy who had graciously magicked away all traces of the near-mortal wound he'd had a few hours ago. "It's a great day to be me," he sighed contentedly.

"While you're on a roll, would you mind answering some questions?" asked Mulan, who had tagged along in an effort to impress Aurora.

"If this is about the interdimensional reincarnation thing, I think it defies explanation. Sorry."

"No, this question is about Emma. You say you love her, but when she was here, the only man she talked about was some guy named Graham."

"One of these days, I really want to find out just who this Graham guy was." Neal scowled. "To answer your question, I was kind of a jerk, though Pinocchio was an even bigger one. I abandoned Emma because he told me she needed some conflict in her life in order to be a well-rounded character. Once she'd broken the curse and there was room in her character arc for a love interest, I could have gone to Storybrooke to find her, but I was afraid that if I did, my dad might apologize to me." He shuddered in abject terror.

"Uh…okay, I'm sure it makes sense in context."

"Allow me to summarize. The moral of the story is, love rules, so don't blow it."

Henry and his nameless friend were still sprinting through the jungle together. "When we get home," Henry panted, "we should do a commercial for track shoes!"

"We can get online and look for a producer when we reach the caves," the other boy promised. "They're right over here." He raised his voice. "Boy, I sure hope somebody doesn't cut us off and back us into a corner!" An arrow came firing out of their path and thumped into a tree trunk scant inches from his head. "Hey, watch it, guys! You almost hit me!" he snarled angrily.
David finally took away the mermaid's magic trumpet. "What is this? What did you do?"

The mermaid rolled her eyes. "If your captor asked you what your escape plan was, would you tell them the truth?"

"Yes," said David and Mary Margaret in unison.

She faltered. "Well, we can't all be epic paragons of honesty. My lips are zipped."

Regina conjured up a bazooka and aimed it at the mermaid's head. "You don't want to cross me! Just ask them!" She nodded at her companions.

Mary Margaret gasped. "Regina, are you threatening an enemy? I can't believe what I'm hearing! What's next, are you going to start gloating?"

"It doesn't matter if you can get her to talk," Hook scoffed. "Mermaids are backstabbing liars."

"What, unlike you?" said Emma.

"Shut up!"

"Everyone calm down," Mary Margaret admonished. "I'm sure she and her friends didn't mean to murder us. They were probably just having a bad day, or upset over the tragic loss of their favorite stable boy."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil on her stepdaughter. "You know, your soft stance toward villains is really annoying when it's not directed at me."

Black clouds began to gather overhead. "The Smoke Monster's come for us again!" David screamed. "Run for your lives, everyone!" He grabbed his wife and daughter by the arm and started dragging them belowdecks.

Hook seized him by the collar. "Stop that, it's just a storm! The mermaid must have called it. Let's take her voice! That'll teach her!"

David held his sword to the mermaid's throat. "Stop the storm, or I might forget how chivalrous I am and mess you up."

Regina started fanning herself. "Phew, you're hot when you're bloodthirsty. I think my first-season crush on you is returning."

"Ew!" David dropped the mermaid like a hot potato. "What I meant to say is, I love every living thing. I would never harm an unarmed foe. Sunshine and daisies, etcetera." Regina pouted.

"Am I the only one who understands the severity of the situation, here?" Emma yelled.

"I do!" Hook sprang into action.

"You're growing on me, baby," said Emma.

Regina turned her Glare of Evil on the mermaid. "Make it stop, or face the unbridled horrors of my homemade apple pie!"

"No! We're not killers!" Mary Margaret protested.
Regina gave her a double-take. "I've got a graveyard full of unlucky henchmen who would disagree with your self-assessment."

"She's right, you know," said the mermaid serenely.

Mary Margaret shot the creature a dirty look. "This fish is getting on my nerves. Can we throw it back, please?"

Regina rolled her eyes. "That feel-good nonsense, Snow, may play in the Enchanted Forest. But this...is...SPARTA! I mean, Neverland."

David joined Hook as the helm. "You're an even worse driver than my wife!"

"It's not my fault!" the pirate protested. "We're taking on water! Most old-school sailing ships are built with flood pumps—maybe we should go see if we can find them."

"That sounds like a lot of work. It'd be easier to just have ourselves a fish fry." Regina donned a chef's hat and conjured up a butcher knife. "Les poissons, les poissons, how I love les poissons!"

"No!" Mary Margaret yelled. "If you kill her, we'll have enemies, and that would totally be a first for us!"

"Guys, we've been screaming at each other more or less nonstop for a half-hour!" Emma hollered. "Can we take a breather? I think I'm losing my voice!"

Regina frowned. "Wait a minute. Why am I wasting time arguing with you people? I'm freaking magic—I can do whatever the hell I want." She turned the mermaid into wood. "I'll change you back when you prove yourself brave, truthful, and unselfish."

A split second later, a gigantic tsunami came barreling down on them. "Don't you ever get tired of being wrong all the time, Regina?" Emma snapped.

"Yes!" sobbed Regina, clinging to a life preserver.

"Aw, crap, we're doomed again?" David sullenly braced himself for impact. "It's only been an hour since last time!"

"This is really getting old," Mary Margaret griped, supergluing her hands to the rigging.

Mulan and Neal entered the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, finding the floor strewn with shattered glass and rubble. "Uh oh. Papa must have gotten dumped again." He noticed a teacup on the table. "Someone's been sitting at Papa Bear's table. Someone's been drinking Papa Bear's tea." An arrow thumped into the wall next to his face. "Jeez, what is this, "Let's Shoot Neal Day'?"

Mulan drew her sword. "You're Goldilocks, I presume?"

"It's not out of the realm of possibility, but I go by Robin Hood," said the interloper.

"Why are you trespassing in the Dark One's castle? Is it your lifelong dream to become a mollusk?"

"I'm not afraid of the Dark One. There are sled dogs less whipped than he is."

"If you're referring to Belle, she's evil now and you're screwed, but I don't really care," said Neal. "I'm just here because I need to cross dimensions in order to reunite with my son."
Robin eyed him suspiciously. "You're related to Rumplestiltskin aren't you?"

"A chip off the old block, aren't I?"

"You torture me a lot less than your father, though. I respect that."

"You crossed my father? How crazy can you be?"

"Not as crazy as you think, because he spared my life." Robin paused. "Well, actually, Belle saved my life, but the writers seem determined not to mention her." As Neal rifled through the room, Hood shook his head. "You know, it seems like if your father had magic that could cross dimensions, he would have used it to go to you and skipped the apocalypse."

"You underestimate Papa's commitment to theatrics."

"Well, I fear you're wasting your time," Robin apologized. "Everything's been stolen, and for once, it wasn't me. I suspect Will Scarlett is behind it."

Neal noticed an old staff on the floor and picked it up. "I remember this. Our village shaman Rafiki was always hitting people with it, so one day, Dad got fed up and swiped it from him." He waved the staff over his head. "Alakazam." A hidden door opened in the wall. "Dad was always using blood spells to protect his property," Neal explained. "It's a good thing he doesn't have any horrendously evil relatives who might potentially use that tendency against him."

"So, what's in there? Baby pelts?" Robin hazarded.

"Frankly, I don't want to find out, but the plot demands it." Taking a deep breath to steel himself, Neal went in.

---

Back on the Jolly Rancher, Hook and Emma were still the only ones who cared that everyone was about to die. "So, I take it we're screwed?"

"Yup," said Hook grimly.

"Regina's right. We should have gone with Gold," the savior sighed.

Meanwhile, Mary Margaret was pulling Regina's hair, while the former queen smacked at her with limp, girly hands. "I hate you! You doomed us, and killed my father, and borrowed my lipstick without permission, and spread a rumor that I liked Leroy!"

"I also tried to save your life while you stood around wondering whether Neverland is a signatory of the Geneva Convention!" Regina retorted, pulling her stepdaughter into a headlock and giving her a noogie.

"You're such a… I can't actually say it, or we'll get censored." Mary Margaret had to settle for punching her in the face.

"Censor's pet!" sneered the former queen.

Mary Margaret slapped her. "Butcher!"

Regina slapped her back. "Spineless jellyfish!"

Mary Margaret slapped her back. "Septuagenarian!"
Regina slapped her again. "Ghandi wannabe!"

Mary Margaret returned the slap. "Spinster!"

"Oh, that does it!" Regina wrapped her hands around her stepdaughter's throat. "Now you die!"

"Why you little—" Mary Margaret started counter-strangling her stepmother.

Still steering the ship with his hook, their captain used his free hand to take a smartphone from his pocket and shoot a video of the catfight. "Mm, hot!"

David decked him. "Stop insulting my wife's honor, or at least have the sense to do it where her big, buff husband can't hear you!"

As Hook lit into her father, Emma looked at the pirate with dismay. "And... my last sane ally is gone. I've got to give him props, he held out for so long." She climbed up the rigging. "Guys, knock it off! You're going to semi-unintentionally kill us!"

David dug the captain's own hook into his throat menacingly. "I'll teach you to be better-looking than me!"

Regina wrapped a chain around Mary Margaret's throat. "I've been fantasizing about this since you were eight years old, punk!"

"Ugh. I don't want to live on this planet anymore," Emma muttered, throwing herself overboard. "I'm a-coming, Graham!"

"No! My large, violent baby!" David screamed.

"Emma!" cried Mary Margaret. "Stop attempting suicide in order to save your loved ones! Henry and your dad already have that covered!"

Regina ran to the railing. "Wow. She's going to die and I actually seem to care. Start your engines, Swan Queen authors!"

Henry and his little friend reached the edge of a large cliff. "Well, we're doomed," the boy observed. Henry laughed. "I've been doomed before. Trust me, it never sticks. We've just got to devise a plan, and then come up with a cool name for said plan." He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Whatever it is, how do you feel about calling it 'Operation Tarantula'?"

"I prefer the name 'Operation Pixie,'" the other boy hinted unsubtly. Henry was unusually oblivious. "Nah, too girly."

Exasperated, the boy took the vial from around his neck and dangled it in front of Henry's face. "Yo, remember this? Don't use it. It will never work."

"Don't tell me what to do!" Henry raged. "I say we should use it and it will work."

"That's Grandpa's little rebel." Smirking, the boy allowed Henry to snatch the vial, open it, and whisk him into the air.

"Whee! Trippy!" Henry squealed happily.
Mary Margaret looked at her stepmom calculatingly. "Hey, you're magic. Can't you just snap your fingers and teleport Emma back?"

The Queen began waving her hands impotently as she fumbled for an explanation. "Uh…I don't have a good line of sight to her?"

"You didn't have a line of sight to the mermaid, either, but you teleported her aboard."

"All right, I'll level with you. I don't want to save her—I'm sick of her messing up my yard."

Mary Margaret sighed. "Well, thanks for your honesty."

"Hey Eminem," said David. "Remember when you flung yourself into a dark abyss to save our daughter? I'm not going to be upstaged. It's my turn!" He climbed up onto the railing.

"Wait!" Hook tossed him a rope. "I'm afraid I sold all the life jackets to buy rum, so this will have to suffice."

"Thanks, bro." David looped it around his waist and dove into the stormy sea. "I'll save you, Thomas! I mean, Emma!" he cried. Luckily, somebody had filtered and chlorinated all the water in Neverland's oceans, so Emma was easy to spot once he got underwater. He hauled her to the surface. "I found her. Did you ever doubt I would?"

Mary Margaret and Regina tried to pull them aboard, but Hook stopped them. "Hey, wait! I'm Emma's love interest. I should play at least a small part in her rescue." He shoved them aside and rigged up a makeshift pulley system. "Can one of you get a picture of this so I can show it to her when she wakes up, please?"

David dumped Emma on the deck like a sack of potatoes, and he and Mary Margaret hovered over her anxiously. She blinked her eyes open. "I had the weirdest dream. It was a place, and you were there, and you were there, and you were there." Then she looked up and saw the storm clouds dissipating. "Aw, man, it was real!" She groaned. "Well, at least you guys are done strangling each other for today."

Gold's ears perked up. "Do I detect the unmistakable sound of my dear stepmom?"

Felix stormed angrily out of the jungle. "For the last time, I'm not Pan's girlfriend!"

"Sure you aren't, dearie."

The boy glared at him. "Pan welcomes you to the island. He wanted me to tell you he hopes you're not mad at him for abandoning his only son, since it seems to be a hereditary birth defect in your family."

"I'm not mad at him for abandoning me. I'm mad at him for naming me Rumplestiltskin," the Dark One seethed.

"I can't excuse an atrocity like that," Felix conceded, "but he wanted me to let you know that if you try to take Henry away from him, he'll be forced to tear you to shreds with a chainsaw."

"Tell me. Is there anyone in the multiverse who isn't trying to get custody of Henry?" Gold rolled his eyes. "Tell Pan to go to hell, and say hi to my mother, Cruella de Vil, for me when he gets there."

"But if you go against him, you'll die, and your fangirls will probably burn down ABC Studios or
"That sounds epic!" said Gold gleefully. "I can hardly wait!" He grabbed Felix by the throat. "Come on, let's do the final battle right now!"

"Uh…sounds tempting, but I think I left my oven on." Felix retreated. "He wanted me to give you one last thing, though." He threw a little doll at Gold's feet. "Oh yeah. He went there."

Gold picked it up and broke down in tears. "I have an even worse dad than Bae does!" he sobbed pathetically.

Neal took a crystal ball from the hidden closet. "A crystal ball? Those are really a thing?" He sat it on the table with a sigh. "Oh, I've spent my whole life brooding over the pain my father's magic has inflicted on me, but now that the safety of my son is at stake, my first move is to turn to it for help. Gee, maybe I really am a chip off the old block." He broke into pitiful sobs at the thought. "Okay, okay, no time for an identity crisis right now. Emma and Henry need me." He placed his hands on the ball, but all that appeared inside was a family of gingerbread me and some plastic snow. "Dude, what gives?"

"Try thinking of Emma. Robin and I will turn away in case you catch her in the shower." Mulan and Robin hid their faces in the nearest corner.

He tried again, and a swirl of dark purple fog appeared inside. "Oh no! Emma's in Neverland, and it looks like the Smoke Monster's after her again!"

The Nevengers staggered ashore, munching on Zoloft cupcakes that Emma had passed out to temporarily subdue their homicidal urges. "Why won't you let me use a spell to fix the ship?" Regina griped. "Are you jealous because I'm better at magic than you are?"

"Yes, but that's beside the point," said Emma. "I think that ship must be cursed, because every time people go aboard, they get killed, betrayed, or both. I mean, you guys were strangling each other. I thought that only happened in cartoons." She took a deep breath and counted to ten. "We need to quit trying to kill each other and start trying to kill Pan."

"Oh yeah. That guy."

"Are you saying we should be friends?" asked Regina.

"Building a friendship with my loving parents, a man I'm clearly interested in, and the mother of my child? Perish the thought." said Emma.

"Phew," said Hook. "There's nothing I hate worse than being friend-zoned."

Emma ignored him. "Maybe this is the Island talking, but if we don't live together, we're going to die alone." She turned to Regina and Hook. "I don't care if you're evil. It's being lame that I can't forgive, so let's quit yapping and go get our boy back."

"You forgot to say the line," her father whispered.

Sighing, Emma raised her sword. "I will always find him."

"Atta girl!" Her parents proudly fell into step with her.
Hook hung back with Regina. "So do you really think we're going to find this kid?"

"I don't know. He could be a thousand miles away, or locked in an impenetrable vault, or hidden in the darkest depths of the forest."

"Or hovering a short distance over your heads, losers!" Henry's shifty companion hollered as they flew by.

"What did you say?" yelled Henry.

"Just singing 'Second Star to the Right', homie," the boy saved. He pointed at a patch of ground that had been spraypainted with a large target. "Land over there." They crashed into a heap of dirt, and stood up with mud on their faces and twigs in their teeth. "Henry, my boy, I think you need to retake fliers' ed."

"How did you know my name?"

"I'm your great-grandfather."

Henry started cracking up. "Yeah, right, good one. But seriously, how?"

"I'm Peter Pan. And anyone who says otherwise is lying bastard." Pan's eyes darted around nervously.

Henry facepalmed. "How did I not see this coming? I'm a disgrace to the Mills-Swan-Blanchard-Nolan-Darling-Cassidy-Gold name!"

"Yeah, but we forgive you."

"I don't get it. Why did you bring me here? If you're looking for a son, I'm sorry, but I've already got three parents—I really don't have any room on my plate for another one right now."

"Perish the thought. No, I want your heart."

Henry covered his chest protectively. "Aw, great, just what I need—Cora, Part Two!"
Lost Girl

Mr. Gold threw away his matches, conjured a ball of flame, and used it to light a campfire. "Laziness never looked so awesome." That being said, he took out his dagger and began hacking at his shadow.

"Ow! All right, I'm up, I'm up!" the shadow snuffled sleepily.

Gold held out his dagger. "Yo, I know you're just an obstruction of direct light, but could you do me a favor and hide this far away from Pan like I should have done to start with?"

Having abandoned all regard for their own safety, the Nevengers were following Hook through the jungle. "There's a scenic overlook up here. Once we chase away the tourists, we'll be able to see the whole island."

"It's a pity this episode has to be an hour long, or I could just teleport us there," Regina lamented, hacking her way through some vines.

"You know, Mary Margaret, I'm starting to think this little alliance of ours isn't going to be as awesome as advertised." Emma sighed.

"The name's Mom," her mother corrected stubbornly.

"I can't call you that. It would screw up my troubled loner vibe."

"Well, you should have thought of that before the season finale!"

"Sorry. We must have new writers this week."

David came upon a tangle of briars, and decided to get through them by hitting them with his sword, like he did with all his other problems. "David, wait! Look!" Hook yelped.

"Before I leap? Do you have any idea who I am?" the quasi-prince scoffed.

"But that's dreamshade, the poison I used on the Dark One."

"Yeah, and all it did was score him points with his son and his girlfriend. Us regulars are invincible."

"Not if I foreshadow how horrible it would be to die of this stuff!" Hook threatened.

David caved. "I'll be good."

As they continued on, Hook lagged behind with Emma. "You know, your dad's a real pain. Maybe you should rebel against him by running off with some bad boy." The pirate leered sultrily.

"Cut the guy a break, he's probably just weirded out by the realization that Prince Charming and Snow White are working with Captain Hook and the Evil Queen. I know I am."

"Oh, it's only going to get worse from here," he warned her grimly. "Peter Pan's the freaking Antichrist, Tinkerbell's even more bitter and vengeful than usual, and I'm unusually sexy." The pirate smoldered aimlessly, as usual.

Emma shoved past him. "I'm not interested, so save it…for a day or two."
They found her parents snapping pictures at the top of a cliff. "This is definitely going to be my new wallpaper," David breathed in awe.

"I'm not impressed by this, as I have not been impressed by anything for the past decade," said Regina sullenly.

Hook pointed. "Pan's lair should be over there, but as Regina said, this episode has to be an hour long, so it isn't anymore. Let's make camp. That ought to eat up some time."

"Are you crazy?" Regina shrieked indignantly. "I can't rest while my son is suffering at the hands of someone besides me!"

"Your Majesty, there's this thing called sleep that the human body requires in order to fight evil. Or, if you wanted, you could use your magic to conjure us up some energy drinks, but we both know you lack the creativity."

Unable to argue with that, she followed him into the jungle, while Emma stood around brooding, as usual. "Emma, are you being a pessimist again?" her mother inquired.

"It's me, isn't it?"

Mary Margaret hugged her. "Comfort mode."

In an enchanted forest far, far away, Prince Charming galloped furiously along on his horse. "Faster, Silver! There's got to be a bathroom around here someplace! Oh, and my true love, too." He sighed. "You know, I'm getting really tired of redoing this scene. Can we fast-forward a little?"

A split second later, he found himself standing over his True Love's coffin. "Thanks." He cleared his throat. "NOOOOOOO, etcetera. Now open up the case—it's necrophilia time."

Evil Henchman #9827 frantically ran through the palace with the Queen's mirror. "Hey everybody, remember me?" said the genie inside.

With Snow White gone, Regina had decided to fill in for her and frolic serenely through nature for a while. "With a smile and a song, life is good since I made Snow White pay. My cares fade away… except my love's still gone." The queen hid a tear.

"You're getting pretty good at this frolicking stuff," the mirror said, "but I'm afraid I have some bad news."

Regina groaned. "You're going to take me on another magic carpet ride? Wasn't the first one disastrous enough?"

"Even worse." He flashed her an image of Snow and Charming singing by the edge of a well.

"He woke his dead lover with a kiss?" Regina made a face. "Ew."

"Wanna get married?" the prince's image asked hopefully.

"Well, on the one hand, we haven't spent more than a couple of days, total, together, but on the other hand, that makes us the most deeply-developed couple in fairytale history."

"She's right, you know," said the mirror. "A couple who actually had a meaningful conversation before deciding to get married? The whole world is going to want to attend their wedding and see
these freaks of nature in the flesh."

"I'd prefer to go visit our families. With napalm," said Snow's reflection.

Regina conjured up a fire extinguisher. "I'd like to see you try."

At one of the few villages Regina hadn't got around to exterminating yet, Snow White was standing defiantly on a soapbox. "Regina may be the coolest villain since Original-Trilogy Darth Vader, but that doesn't give her the right to terrorize us!"

"Right on!" cried the townsfolk.

"The kingdom isn't hers! It belongs to us, meaning me!"

"…Whatever, she's still better than the other one. Right on!" cried the bulk of the crowd.

"That's the spirit!" Snow White beamed. "It's time to stand up and show her we're not afraid of her ability to turn us into snails, or break our necks with her mind, or usher in the apocalypse, or feed our children to cannibalistic witches…"

"Uh…"

Snow White was still horrible at recognizing when she was upsetting people. "The fact that our enemy is a nuclear-powered megalomaniac and we've got no actual weapons, armor, supplies, or training doesn't mean anything. We're the good guys, and this is a fairy tale!"

Regina barged in, as usual. "A fairy tale advertised as dark and nontraditional!" This reminder quashed any vestige of hope the townsfolk might have had, and they scattered.

"They may be afraid of you, but we're not," scoffed Snow. "You were defeated by a freaking makeout session."

"I'd hate to see what would happen to your plans if I ever scored," Charming snickered.

Regins unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil, and Charming's hair suddenly caught fire. "Look, I didn't come here to fight. I came to offer you a deal."

"The last time I made a deal with you, you murdered me and tried to behead my boyfriend, but it still beats doing business with Rumplestilskin." Snow sheathed her sword. "I'm listening."

"It's becoming obvious that you're too damn cute to die, so let's try the next best thing. You give up all claim to the throne, go into exile, and give me your spot on People Magazine's Most Beautiful People list, and I'll let you live."

"And if I don't?"

"Then I'll have to settle for killing a different cute, innocent little girl who's never done me any harm." She conjured one up out of thin air and began choking it. "Bwa hah hah!"

"Eminem SMASH!" roared Snow, charging her stepmom with a chainsaw.

"Hehe, psych!" Regina poofed herself across the road, while Charming administered comfort mode to her victim. "For every day you defy me, I will kill one of your loyal subjects."

"Only one murder a day? Sounds like a vast improvement over the current state of affairs. The fight
Regina rolled her eyes. "Give it up, Snow, you'd make a horrible queen anyway. Knowing you, you'd probably issue royal pardons to unrepentant genocidal maniacs and doom the entire planet." Snow broke down crying, because the truth hurts.

The Nevengers tried to sleep while the Others lurked in the surrounding foliage and cried for their lost series. Emma woke with a start and went straight for her chainsaw. "Yo, I think we're doomed again," she announced. But it was no use. Her parents had hung out their 'Do Not Disturb' sign. "Great, now I've got to head into the darkness and investigate a bunch of eerie noises on my own." She sighed. "If—no, scratch that—when I get killed, I don't want anybody kissing my corpse, you hear?" Pouring a can of premium unleaded into her weapon, she tiptoed into the jungle.

Peter Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Hint, hint," he said cheerfully.

"Ah! A sweet little boy!" she screamed.

"I'm not a sweet little boy, I'm a four-hundred-year-old rat-bastard—uh, I mean, yeah, that's me." He genuflected theatrically. "Peter Pan's the name, mental abuse is the game."

"Emma SMASH!" Emma roared, body-slamming the boy.

"Help! Child abuse!" Pan screamed.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't mean—" Emma started to release him, then caught herself. "Hey, knock it off!"

"Mm, you're gorgeous when you're angry." The child leered, which should have been an oxymoron. "It's times like this that I almost miss sexual maturity."

"You're giving me a headache, so let's cut to the chase. Why did you kidnap my estranged, yet beloved, and supernaturally-gifted son?"

"Because Walt wasn't available."

"Answer the question."

"I can't, I'm too cryptic," Pan apologized.

Emma eyed him suspiciously. "Are you Gold's long-lost son or something?"

He nodded. "Or something."

"Well, what do you want?"

"To psych you out. Is it working?"

"Hell no."

"Damn," the boy cursed. "Looks like I'll have to give Plan B a try." He handed her a map. "This will lead you to Henry."

"Yeah right," Emma snorted. "The likelihood of this thing doing what you say it will is probably about as high as the likelihood of you being Henry's great-grandfather."

Pan tensed. "Who told you that? Was he crippled and dastardly? ANSWER ME!" He shook her
furiously.

"Woah, dude, chill out, it was a hypothetical example!" she choked out. "What's with you?"

He released her. "Er, nothing. That was just…uh, a very cryptic joke. I don't blame you for not being able to pick up on it—being four centuries old, I have a very advanced sense of humor."

"Uh…okay." She backed away nervously.

Pan smirked. "Emma's lame excuse for a superpower fails again. This should be the easiest war of my career."

Emma looked at the map skeptically. "Why are you giving me this?"

"More mental abuse."

"Then how do I get it to work?"

"Mental abuse."

"But wh—"

Pan held up a hand impatiently. "Let me save you some time. Whenever you have a question about me, my motives, or my methods, the answer is 'mental abuse.'"

Emma took the map and found it blank. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good," she tried, giving the parchment a tap.

"Wrong 'verse, Emma. In this one, you get blank maps to work by admitting who you truly are."

---

"Pan is neither Henry, nor Gold, so why are we all taking his advice without question?" Regina wondered aloud.

"If he wanted to lead us into a trap, he'd have lured us there with a jar full of Tinkerbell," said Hook. "Besides, scavenger hunt has always been his favorite party game."

Mary Margaret emerged from the jungle with David close behind. "No sign of Pan—did it ever occur to any of you that he might have, you know, flown away?"

The quasi-prince peered over his daughter's shoulder. "Have you tried 'I solemnly swear I'm up to no good'?"

"Yes, will everyone please quit asking me that?"

Regina raised her hand timidly. "Does anyone care or notice yet that they've got the most experienced sorceress in the world sitting on the bench?"

"No," her companions all replied.

"Oh, for Pan's sake!" She grabbed for the map, but Emma swatted her hand away. "Who's the protagonist, here?"

"You," Regina admitted sullenly.

"And don't you forget it."
"Well, can you try not sucking at it?"

"Leave my kid alone, Regina, or I'll do absolutely nothing to you again." Mary Margaret patted her daughter on the back. "Comfort mode."

Over at Snow White's Summer Camp for Displaced Youths and Runaway Slaves, the titular princess was lacing up her Nikes for a long run. "All right, guys, I want to you have our stuff packed by noon. I'm going over to Rumplestiltskin's for a fleeing lesson, and when I get back, I want everybody's tails tucked securely between their legs."

Her husband stared at her incredulously. "Don't you even care that Regina murdered your father and is well on her way to murdering the rest of the world, too?"

"Eh, I don't blame her for killing my father." She held up a script labeled *Bleeding Through*. "New evidence suggests that their marriage was sick and wrong. Besides, she's probably right about me pardoning unrepentant genocidal maniacs and dooming the entire planet."

"Aw, Snow, stop worrying. She may have vast armies and an arsenal of dark magic at her command, but you've got seven short, chubby dudes with axes," said Bashful proudly.

"Comfort mode!" Charming added helpfully. "I mean, honestly, you're Snow White. If you lose a fight, God just smites your enemies with lightning and sends some stranger to rescue you. I don't get why you're worried about this…or anything, for that matter."

"I choose not to notice that!" Sobbing, Snow ran off to cheer herself up with some housekeeping. Charming facepalmed. "Will someone please remind me why I fell in love with this nutcase?"

"Because you're a gold-digging slut," said Grumpy.

"Oh, yeah. I mean, no. I mean, what?"

"You're not good enough for our little girl!" The dwarf cocked a shotgun menacingly. "Have her back by curfew, and no hanky-panky!"

"But I'm Prince Charming! Literally! If I'm not good enough for her, who the hell is?"

"We were sort of hoping she'd hook up with that nice Huntsman boy."

Charming groaned. "Am I the only one who cares that millions of innocent people are going to die and we have the power to prevent it?"

"Yep," seven voices replied.

"I hate you all so much."

Charming made his way back to the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, where Rumplestiltskin was in the process of placing an anti-Charming charm on the doorbell. "Damn it, haven't you learned your lesson about asking me for help yet?"

"Uh-uh. Do you have a cure for pigheadedness in stock?" The quasi-prince rifled through a few shelves hopefully.

"If I did, I would have used it on myself a long time ago," the Dark One apologized.
"And then snuck my old man a dose," Gold mused, looking down at his favorite voodoo doll. Then he heard a rustling in the bushes. "Aw, nuts. I'm being stalked by another damn fangirl." He grabbed the nearest blunt object and raised it menacingly. "Look, I've had enough of you crazy chicks! For the last time, I already have a girlfriend!"

A hand shot out of the foliage and snatched the voodoo doll. "Hey, that's a family heirloom, passed down from my dear Grandmama Odie! Give it back!" He ran after the culprit, and thanks to his expertise on running and her perpetual use of high heels, caught up with her in seconds. He pulled off her hood, and found himself face-to-face with his true love. "Belle? Yay, the promos came true!"

"Jeez, when the Charmings aren't around to interrupt us, our advertisers do it for them. We can't win." The Dark One pouted. "We'd better finish this conversation quickly, before it happens again. What are you doing here?"

"Mental abuse," Belle replied.

"I choose not to notice that."

"Good boy. Now then, how dare you dress so sexily when I'm not around to see it?"

"I need the extra sex appeal to help save my grandson."

"I think Hook and Regina already have that particular skill set covered. Why don't you just come home?"

"Because this show would fall apart without me. And anyway, why should I listen to you? You're probably a hallucination." He wrapped his hands around her throat and slammed her against a tree trunk.

"Ow! Rumple, I told you before, I'm not into this sort of thing!"

"Shut up! How do I know you're not Pan in disguise, trying to pull some kind of borderline child molestation on me?"

"Because I say so."

"Well, that's good enough for me."

The apparition raised her eyebrows. "Don't take this the wrong way, but you're kind of lame when you're not evil."

Back at the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Charming was hitting up the Dark One for help, as usual. "I miss my old girlfriend, the violent, vindictive one who shot me and tried to drown me when I got in the way of her revenge. There must be something you can do to restore her character to its former greatness!"

"Have you tried the Charming Family Charm?"

"Yes."

"If even that didn't work, there's no hope left for humanity. Magic can't make someone believe. If it could, I'd use it on your daughter." Rumplestiltskin heaved a longsuffering sigh. "We're in for a rough couple of years with that one. I think you should take the Queen's offer and flee."
"What, because that worked out so well for you?" the quasi-prince sneered.

"You've been talking to that damn fairy again, haven't you?" Rumplestiltskin glowered. "Speaking of which, why don't you go to her for help?"

"Because she's a useless little homewrecker."

"You're trying to get on my good side, aren't you?"

Charming found Snow on the outskirts of camp, firing arrows at a roast pig. "On a subconscious level, I think you still want to rebel against this oppressive regime," he observed.

"Get bent."

"Just hear me out. I went to Rumplestiltskin for help. That never backfires, right?"

She stared at him in open-mouthed horror. "Are you insane?! You already achieved a world record by surviving three whole deals with that psychotic reptile! Are you really going to tempt fate by doing it again?"

"'Fraid so."

"I think this is insane and I don't even want to know what he's selling." Charming just smirked knowingly. "All right, fine, what's he selling?" she sighed.

"Excalibur."

"I thought Excalibur was returned to the Lady of the Lake by Sir Bedivere?"

"Uh, I mean, Durendal."

"I thought Durendal was buried with the late, great Roland?"

"Uh…I mean Ice."

"I thought Ice was melted down into two blades after the death of Ned Stark?"

Charming was starting to sweat. "I-I mean, none of those—this magical sword of legend is completely nameless, with no backstory whatsoever."

"That makes absolutely no sense, and anyway, I'm not interested in fighting without a guarantee no lives will be lost."

Her fiancé stared at her. "Honey, I'm an unlettered peasant whose military education didn't even include 'pointy end goes in the other guy,' and even I know that's an idiotic approach to warfare. Who the hell was your history tutor? He owes you a refund."

"Ugh, fine, if it'll shut you up, I'll try to save the kingdom." She nocked another arrow. "Now back off—I'm trying to hit the apple."

Emma was still staring down Pan's map. "My name is Emma Swan. I got it off an ice cream truck."

"I don't think that counts, baby," said Hook.
A wolf randomly started howling in the distance. "Ruby, you came back!" Mary Margaret ran off into the woods. "Where the hell have you been?"

Emma pressed on. "I'm five-foot-five, I enjoy long walks on the beach and fights to the death, my turn-ons include heart disease, piracy, and grand theft auto…" She glanced over her shoulder. "Hook, what are you doing?"

"Writing this stuff down. This is gold!"

David snatched his quill and stomped on it. "Hey, don't make me set my wife's dwarves on you, pal!"

"Just say the s-word," said Regina, "while I distract the censors with my neckline." She started tugging her blouse down. "You guys had better appreciate this."

"I've got a thing for Captain Hook," Emma tried. The map remained blank. "Oh, come on, there's nothing I've denied more than that!"

Regina raised her hand. "Most experienced sorceress in the world. Still sitting on the bench. Just FYI."

They all ignored her. "David, do you have any suggestions?" Hook asked conversationally.

"Oh, for the love of..." She snatched the parchment and cast a locator spell on it. "I think you people must still have some memory problems leftover from the curse." She shoved Emma down the trail. "Now shut up and follow that parchment!"

Belle led Rumplestiltskin to the rim of a cliff, but he failed to notice anything sinister about it, having completely lost his edge. "So, why did you bring me here?"

"I was lonely, and the Beauties were getting antsy."

"And…?" she prompted.

"And against all logic, you see goodness in me."

"And you're afraid you'll screw up and prove me wrong again."

"Bingo, dearie. Pan offered to refrain from killing me if I stay the hell away from him, and that's the closest he's ever come to telling me he loves me, so I'm tempted to just take the deal and get out. Of course, there's still the matter of what you'd do to me when you found out I'd left the adorable little boy who saved us all to die."

"I think I'd be cool with it," the apparition said serenely. Gold narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "Heh, just a joke to lighten your mood. That's something I do, right?"

He relaxed. "So, what should I do?"

"Well, you could throw away your voodoo doll. It symbolizes the darkness of your past, and is incredibly ugly, so why the hell are you keeping it?"

"I can't bear to part with this. It's a beautiful memento of the time my father abandoned me twice and sacrificed me to a monster so that he could prance around in tights."

"Seriously, Rumple? Seriously?"
"You're a nag. Maybe you really are Belle." Rolling his eyes, he tossed the doll over the cliff. "Will you get off my back now?" He looked up and found her gone. "'Bout time."

Regina tapped Emma on the shoulder. "Most experienced sorceress in the universe. Just saved the day. Have you noticed yet?"

"Fine, fine, if it'll shut you up, I'll notice."

Regina stopped in her tracks and sniffed the air cautiously. "I smell peanut butter. Pan must be around here somewhere."

"All right!" David cheered, drawing his sword. "Time for the clang clang, stabbity stabbity!" Everyone looked at him queerly. "Cut me a break, these fight scenes are the only times I get to do anything anymore."

"Careful," Hook warned darkly. "Pan may look cute and harmless, but so does Emma, and we all know how scary she can be."

Emma readied her chainsaw. "Emma smash?" she squeaked tentatively.

"Comfort mode," her mother interjected helpfully. "We, by which I mean you, will stop him."

"You're not helping." Emma stormed off to the front of the line. "I'm going to go see if my old man has any better material."

Snow and Charming were journeying through the forest, periodically hitting each other with rocks for the sake of nostalgia. "Hey, this is the first time we've been alone since you proposed. Shouldn't you be jumping my bones?" the princess wondered.

"Nah, this is a family show, and besides, your dwarves said they'd shoot me down with a bazooka if I tried."

"Well, I have faith that you'll charm them as you charmed me."

"By trapping them in a net and threatening them with arrest?" The quasi-prince looked thoughtful. "Remind me to swing by a bait shop on our way home. But first we'd better nab Excali—Duren—Ice—uh, the Sword With No Name." He gestured at a jeweled hilt sticking out of a rock. An inscription on the base of the stone read, Whosoever shall pulleth out this sword from this stone is rightwise wrong and should listen to her boyfriend. Snow still looked skeptical. "If this sword has no name, maybe you're the one who should be wielding it."

"No, it can only be wielded by a true monarch, and I'm just a glorified con man."

She gave him a double take. "…Wait, what?"

"Just take the damn sword."

Snow eyed the sword thoughtfully. "You know, this sword looks a lot like that one I gave you for your birthday."

"Could you choose not to notice that?"
"Sure baby." She gave the blade a tug and it slid free. "This is the big WMD you've been bragging about? It doesn't even explode!"

Night fell and there was still no sign of Pan. "Maybe your spell ultimately failed just like every other spell you've ever cast, Regina," Mary Margaret suggested gently.

"Not calling attention to it would be the polite thing to do," the former queen sulked.

Upon stumbling across a boy in Henry's coat, Emma froze in her tracks. "I want to believe that's Henry, but the creepy background music suggests otherwise."

Pan spun around. "I'm not Henry, but it's a perfectly understandable mistake. There is a strong family resemblance between us."

"I choose not to notice that!" She revved her chainsaw menacingly. "Where's my kid?"

"I spared you the trouble of sacrificing him to a monster when you got tired of him. You're welcome." The boy turned to Hook. "And as for you—" He held up a clock. The pirate trembled, but held his ground.

"Give Henry to me!" Emma demanded.

"Yeah, give Henry to Emma!" Regina echoed, then realized what she'd just said. "What the hell has happened to me?"

"Well, since you asked so nicely…no," Pan drawled, snapping his fingers and summoning mob of armed children.

"Are those…child soldiers?" Regina gasped. "I'll have you know, you're in violation of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child!"

"Kill the mouthy one first," Pan instructed as the boys charged into battle.

"They're also using chemical weapons," said Hook, pointing at an arrow dripping with poison.

"That's it!" Emma roared. "We're taking you to Switzerland to be tried for war crimes!" She held her chainsaw aloft. "Get him!"

The Lost Boys loosed a barrage of arrows, but luckily David had his trusty lightsaber on hand to deflect them. "For the Republic!" he roared, swinging at super-speed. Then one of the boys took aim at Mary Margaret, and he threw himself in front of the arrow to save her. "Ah, memories," he sighed dreamily as it grazed his ribs.

"Quit committing suicide for me all the time, David!" his wife screamed, helping him to his feet. "I'm starting to think you might have a problem."

Regina fired a blast of nondescript purple evil at the enemy. "I get to redeem myself by killing frightened children? Something seems wrong with this, but that's a debate for another day!" She cleared her throat. "Bwa hah hah!"

"Hey, Felix, how's your boyfriend?" said Hook conversationally, swinging at the boy with his titular appendage.

"Pretty good, though he's been working pretty long hours ever since Henry—I mean, he's not my boyfriend!" Infuriated, Felix swung his sword at the captain's head.
"You remember what I did to Rufio?" Hook taunted.

Their brawl was interrupted by a guy in a suit tapping him on the shoulder. "Mr. Hook, I represent Amblin Entertainment, and I'm afraid you're infringing on—"

"Oh, shut up!" Hook and Felix yelled, momentarily setting aside their differences to attack the lawyer together.

Meanwhile, Emma was sitting on top of some poor child, smashing like she'd never smashed before. "Give me my kid or I'll get Regina to adopt you!" she threatened.

"NOOOOOOOO!" screamed the boy. "Mercy, I beg you!"

"Gah, what have I become?" she yelped, jumping off him.

"Emma, are you all right?" her mother asked.

"I'm fine, thanks for asking," said Emma's victim, gathering his bloody teeth up off the ground.

"Shut up, kid—you're not mine and therefore insignificant!" the lovely Eminem yelled, kicking him in the head.

"Man, physically abusing armed adults is a lot harder than physically abusing friendless little children," Pan observed. "I think I'm going to stick with the mental stuff from now on." He whistled for his child soldiers and proceeded to dance mockingly around Emma. "Nobody loves you! Nobody loves you! You're damaged and lonely! Nobody loves—"

Felix tugged at his sleeve. "Pookie, I think I left the oven on at home again."

"I told you never to call me that in public!" Pan flushed. "Well, the mood is gone—we may as well go home and turn it off. Come on, boys."

Regina's cage rolled ominously through the Shire. "Run for your lives!" a peasant screamed. "Regina's coming to destroy us, and our rightful queen is obviously too lazy to do anything about it!"

Snow White arrived on the scene, dwarves and quasi-prince in tow. "Lucky for you, my man's strong work ethic is finally starting to rub off on me." Said man handed her the sword, smiling smugly.

"What exactly were you two up to today?" Grumpy growled.

"Nothing indecent. Please don't hurt me, sir!" Charming pleaded.

Regina emerged from her carriage. "So, are you ready to embark on your new life as a self-centered coward?"

"Sorry, I tried, but I'm just too awesome," Snow apologized.

"Drag." Regina waved a hand at Grumpy. "Force choke!"

"No! Not Grumpy! He's everyone's favorite!" Grumpy's brothers cried, rushing to his aid.

"Force push!" Regina crowed, slamming them into the nearest wall. "Heh heh, I spent the last six weeks at Jedi camp! Do your worst!"
"Charming, you know how I've always been such a strong, independent woman?" Snow squeaked. "I'm done with that—hold me!" she screamed, jumping into his arms.

He shook her. "Snow, will you get a grip? Comfort mode!"

Snow relaxed. "Thanks baby—you always know just what I need." She charged her stepmom, the Sword With No Name held high. "Eminem SMASH!"

Regina dropped the dwarf, hand flying to her bloodied face. "Ah, not my good looks! They're all I have left!"

"Oh yeah. I went there," her stepdaughter gloated. "You know, I've never disliked anyone before, but I think I'm ready to give it a try. You—you, uh…"

"Stupidhead," Charming supplied helpfully.

"You stupidhead," Snow parroted, her eyes gleaming with triumph.

"I don't have to stand here and listen to this kind of language! I'm going home!" Regina ranted, disappearing in a cloud of evil purple.

"Hey, what about us?" her driver cried, panicking as a mob of angry peasants converged on his undefended carriage.

"Aw hell, she did it again?" one of her footmen groaned. "Run for it, guys!"

Mary Margaret touched the gash along her husband's ribs nervously. "Um, are you sure we shouldn't do something about the deadly poison seeping into your veins as we speak?"

"Nah, as long as you don't draw attention to it, it'll probably be forgotten by next episode," David replied dismissively. "Right now, I think our time would be better spent giving our daughter a heaping helping of comfort mode." They joined hands and went over to her. "Comfort mode, pumpkin."

"Oh, save it," Emma grumbled.

"Shoo, David. Identity issues are girl talk," said Mary Margaret, shoving her husband aside and sitting down next to her daughter. "Comfort mode to the max," she tried.

"We're doomed," Emma seethed. "Pan and Hook both said so, and they're way more trustworthy than you are."

"Emma, don't take this the wrong way, but you're kind of wrong in the head. I mean, you spared that boy who was trying to kill you, and that's not something an emotionally healthy person would do." Her daughter gave her a sideways glance. "Shut up, we're talking about your mental health issues right now."

"I did it because Pan was right," she sobbed. "Nobody loves me, nobody loves me, I'm damaged and lonely, nobody loves me—"

"Actually, I do," Mary Margaret interjected.

David reappeared. "Me too."

Hook raised his hand. "So do I."
"Henry does, too," said David.

"So did Neal," Hook reminded her.

"And Graham," Mary Margaret added.

"I choose not to notice that!" Emma covered her ears. "La la la, orphaned!"

Mary Margaret glanced down at Pan's parchment. "Okay, that made absolutely no sense, but it got the map to work, so I guess I'll just let it go for now."

"Rumplestiltskin!" yelled Snow White, standing in an empty clearing. "I know you don't have anything better to do than meddle in my life, so you may as well stop playing coy and show yourself!"

The Dark One popped out of nowhere, as usual, looking haggard. "Can you two just put me on speed dial or something? This is getting tiresome."

"I understand Charming was dumb enough to go to you for help a fourth freaking time, and you told him of Excalibur or Ice or whatever the hell this is supposed to be." She patted her weapon's hilt. "I was hoping I could settle his debt with another clump of soggy hair."

"Look, your prince came to me for help fighting the queen, but I told him he needed to figure it out himself or risk becoming completely irrelevant to the plot." Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Come on, what is this summons really about? Do you have a thing for me?"

"Ew, no!"

"No need to be ashamed, dearie. Most women seem to, these days," the Dark One demurred. "So, how's it going to be? Do you want to break my heart, or should I break yours instead?"

"Neither, you sicko!"

"Then why are you wasting my time?" He started to leave, then remembered he was supposed to be scary, and mugged her first.

Prince Charming was standing around looking cute, as usual, when the dwarves approached. "I never touched her! I swear I never touched her!" he cried, reaching for his sword.

"No, no, I came to apologize," said Grumpy. "Enjoy it as you would a blue moon, because it's just as rare and amazing." He held up a keg. "Now, who wants McCutcheon's?"

Charming brightened. "So...for once in my life, nobody's mad at me for no good reason?"

"You wish!" Snow snarled, shoving through the dwarves with a large rock in her hand and dragged him off toward some angry rapids.

"Stop abusing me. You're setting a terrible example for America's young women," the quasi-prince complained.

She brained him with the rock. "You taught me to believe in myself and gave me the courage to save everything I hold dear, you scumbag!"
"Yes, exactly!" David groaned, shielding his head with his arms.

"Hm, I see your point." She lowered the rock sheepishly. "Wanna make out for a while before the dwarves catch up with us?"

"Yes, please." He glomped her.

Emma and Mary Margaret ran back to their camp. "Pan was right! The answer is always 'mental abuse!'" the former cried, holding up the map.

"Pity we've got to fight this Pan guy. I like his style. So where's my kid?" asked Regina.

Hook studied the map. "How am I supposed to read this thing? There's no treasure on it." He squinted awkwardly. "Ah, here we are. To find Henry, we have to pass through the most dangerous part of the island. Bet you never saw that coming."

"Here's a thought," Regina proposed. "Now that we know where it is, why don't I just poof us straight to the camp?"

"This whole episode was nothing but one big handwave for why that wouldn't work," said Emma. "If you're too stupid to realize that, maybe we'd be better off without you."

Hook giggled. "Mm, I love it when you get feisty. Wanna go for a drink, hot stuff?"

"Is rum your solution to everything?"

"No, Rum is your parents' solution to everything. I thought that was established earlier." He shoved a bottle into her hand. "So, how did you unlock the map? 'I solemnly swear I'm up to no good'?"

"For the last time, no!"

"Well, enough polite conversation. I've given you a whole day to mourn the death of your beloved—are you ready move on yet?" He took off his shirt in an effort to influence her answer.

"Ugh!" Emma shoved him aside and headed into the jungle to forage for Zoloft cupcakes.

"Call me, babe!" he yelled after her.

"Ah, walking aimlessly around the jungle. Such a brilliant tactic will save my grandson for sure!" Gold bragged. Then he heard something lurking in the bushes. "Belle, if that's you again, I think you've spent enough time nagging me for one episode. Go make a friend or find a hobby, why don't you?" But it wasn't her—it was his voodoo doll again. "Ah, hell, more mental abuse?" The sorcerer sighed. "They get it, I'm tortured, can we move on now?" He flung a ball of fire at the doll, but it just reappeared. "Oh, right, I forgot for a minute that that spell never works." Defeated, he picked up the toy and hid it away in his coat. "I'll be damned if I'm going to let word get out that I used to play with dollies."

Emma was trying to distill a rudimentary antidepressant from some wild berries, when Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Ah, nuts, is it mental abuse time again already?"

"Correct," said Pan smugly. "Are you aware you have abandonment issues?"

"Yeah, it's kind of the point of the whole series."
"Excellent. Then Henry will have a hereditary susceptibility to them." Pan giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron.

"Are you saying you want to make Henry bitter and jaded?" Emma broke down laughing. "And who are you going to go work on when you're through with him, Pollyanna?"

Pan faltered. "Well, maybe this little barb will be more successful. I'm going to kill your parents!"

Emma was unworried. "Villains always do, but it never sticks."

Meanwhile, on the outskirts of camp, David had finally noticed he was dying. "Eh, no biggie. It never sticks."
Quite a Common Fairy

The Nevengers were wandering aimlessly around the jungle for the ninety-seventh consecutive hour, when David suddenly crumpled into the fetal position, shivering and vomiting. "My common sense tells me that this must be the natural result of not going to the gym for a few days," his wife theorized, helping him to his feet.

"Y-y-yeah, that m-must be it, p-p-pumpkin" David drooled incoherently.

"Stop loving each other so much—it's insufferable," Regina snapped. "Are we there yet?"

Emma studied the map. "We should be getting close, yet somehow, we're not." She sighed, glancing heavenward. "Is it too much to ask that just once, my plans go as expected? Just once, to see what it feels like?"

"You got us lost?" said Regina. "Damn it, I told you we should have asked for directions!"

"I know where I'm going, woman, just pipe down and let me think!"

Regina snatched the map irritably. "We're already late picking up our kid! Let's just go back to that last gas station!"

Mary Margaret was watching her daughter and stepmom with horror. "Dear gods, maybe you two really are going to end up married."

Hook realized that if he wanted a chance with Emma, he was going to have to nip this round of banter in the bud. "It's not her fault. Pan's mentally abusing us again."

"What, already?" Emma groaned. "This is gonna be a long season."

Henry was dozing under a tree, trying to slip into a coma so that someone beautiful girl would come and rescue him. Pan pranced by, screaming 'cuckoo' in order to drive home the fact that he was insane. "Yo Henry, wake up. I brought you a non-poisoned apple."

"NOOOOOOOO!" Henry screamed. "I don't wanna die again!"

"Oh, you won't—it's not quite time yet. The apple isn't for eating. It's a prop for our next performance of William Tell." He placed it on Henry's head and drew a crossbow. "Guess who you get to play?"

At the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Neal was riffling through Rumplestiltskin's secret stash for a way to Neverland, but all he found were a bunch of security tapes of Belle in the shower. "Damn it! The one time I actually want to fall through an interdimensional portal, there's none to be found!"

Robin Hood raised his hand politely. "Excuse me, I haven't had much of an opportunity to show off my heroics yet. If you'd just tell me what your problem is, I'd be thrilled to devise and execute some flamboyant solution."

"The problem is that my cherished son of five days is trapped on the Island with the only child more devious than he is."
"We only saw Emma in that ball. Maybe she got a sitter for the kid," Mulan suggested.

"For Henry?" Neal laughed. "Fat chance. Besides, Emma has no reason other than Henry to go to Neverland."

Mulan raised her eyebrows. "But what about that pirate guy from Neverland that she's so into?"

"I choose not to notice that!" Neal returned to his search. "Lots of things make interdimensional portals. Maybe my father had one all along, and just invented the Dark Curse out of boredom."

As Neal rummaged around, he knocked over one of the few glass objects his father had managed to avoid smashing in anger, and the noise alerted Robin Hood's comrades. "What's wrong? Did our nemesis Prince John suddenly decide to exist?" Little John asked nervously, drawing his weapon.

"Not just yet, homie," Robin replied.

The personification of cuteness emerged from the group and ran into Robin's arms. "How adorable am I?" he giggled adorably.

"Ah! A child who isn't Henry!" Neal yelped.

"This is my son, Roland. Hopefully not the Roland who gets tragically slain by the Saracens in the pursuit of chivalry."

Neal giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "The boy is slated for a premature death? Excellent, then I won't have to feel guilty about risking his life for my own ends."

Emma and Regina were on the verge of decapitating each other, as usual. "You're always talking me into doing things I don't want to!" the former queen ranted. "Not destroying Storybrooke, not Apparating into Pan's camp—what about my needs, damn it?"

"Don't talk to me that way! I bore your child and gave you the best two seasons of my life!" Emma fired back at her.

"Okay, you guys are seriously weirding me out!" said Mary Margaret, clinging to her husband fearfully. "Hook, can you please provide us with a change of subject?"

"Gladly. I say we go enlist the help of Tinkerbell." The pirate produced a large jar. "By any means necessary."

"I just discovered that I banged the two hundred year old son of a magic crocodile, yet the knowledge that Tinkerbell is real shocks me," said Emma. "What can she do, frolic our enemies to death?"

"No, she might have pixie dust that I can use to prove you're into me, and maybe fly us into Pan's camp if there's any left over."

"Pixie dust? You mean the stuff that's in Pixie Sticks? Excellent, I'm starving."

"No, pixie dust is the nucular version of fairy dust," her father corrected. Then the Grammar Police descended on them with torches and clubs, and they were forced to abandon their conversation and flee.

The newly-crowned queen Regina was so depressed she'd developed a chronic overeating problem,
and was attempting to devour seventeen enormous platters of food by herself. Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "A roast swan dressed in its own plumage?" The imp's nose wrinkled. "Historically accurate and deliciously ironic, but still gross."

Regina was smart enough to know that trying to argue with Rumplestiltskin was futile, so she stuffed some cotton in her ears and went back to eating. He yanked it out, annoyed. "Knock that off! You're late for your evil lessons." He handed her a tardy slip. "One more absence and you'll have to repeat the course."

"I don't know, Rumplestiltskin. I'm starting to think you may not be the right role model for me. I mean, you're ugly. Why the hell would I want to emulate that?"

"My feelings would be hurt, if I had any. What's with you? You don't seem to be enjoying our wacky exchange of insults as much as you usually do."

"What have I got to be happy about?" Regina moped. "My husband is still in love with both his dead wife and my mom. For one thing, that's just gross, and for another, his taste in women seems to be even worse than yours, so what does that say about me? And worse yet, that damn kid of his is always telling me how much she loves and respects me." She broke down in tears. "I can't live like this! I want adventure in the great wide somewhere! I want it more than I can tell! I…I…"

"I want to be where the people are. I want to see, want to see 'em dancing-
"

"Oh, I see how this is," said her mentor knowingly. "You think you're a Disney Princess, when you're actually a Disney Villain. Nice try." He leered at her. "But the darkness wants to taste you, baby!"

"Ew, another one of Mom's old boyfriends is coming on to me!" she balked, slapping him. "Get out of my house—I've had quite enough of your kind!"

"There's no point in trying to avoid your inevitable descent into darkness, dearie. You always wear black, so it's going to happen eventually," he trilled before Apparating back home.

Regina stormed to the railing of her balcony and started beating the hell out of it with a baseball bat. "Regina SMASH!" The railing shattered and the queen went flying overboard. "Damn it, if I survive this, I really need to find a more productive outlet for my rage, like murder," she mused as she plummeted toward the pavement.

A cloud of hovering green sparkles suddenly enveloped her, and she screamed. "Ah! Magic that isn't purple!"

A green fairy fluttered to her side. "Hi! Want some absinthe?"

"No, now put me down!"

"What, seriously?"

"…Okay, I see your point. Put me up."

Once they were safely back on the balcony, the fairy morphed from fun-size to king-size. "Hiya! Name's Tinkerbell—I'm with the Suicide Hotline."

Regina decided to take her new friend up on the offer of absinthe, so they flew over to the nearest bar. "Your stepdaughter's name is 'Snow White'? That's even less subtle than your name being Latin
"I know, it's infuriating! Plus, the little brat had my beloved fiancé of three hours killed."

"I seriously doubt that-she's nine. What did she do, hire a hitman with the money in her piggy bank?"

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Don't make me plot your murder, too."

"Hey!"

"Sorry, sorry, I'm just a little on edge from having to listen to Snow and Leopold's incessant upbeat musical numbers." She shuddered. "Thankfully, they're out by the well, frolicking with their animal friends most of the time, so I'm not subjected to them very often." The queen pouted. "Unfortunately, this means that the only action I ever get is from brainwashed slaves."

Tinkerbell patted her hand sympathetically. "Sounds like a fate worse than death to me."

"Oh, I haven't told you the worst part yet. My husband is my mother's ex-fiancé, and so is my pervy green father figure, and my daughter is about six years younger than I am, and my daddy is a spineless jellyfish, and divorce doesn't seem to have been invented yet—"

Tinkerbell looked pained. "If I'd realized the extent of the trauma in your life, I'd have just let you jump." She handed the queen a pistol. "If you still want to kill yourself, you have my blessing."

Regina swatted it away. "Are you crazy? I don't want to die! I have no one to kiss it better."

Realizing what she'd just said, she broke down sobbing and reached for another bottle of absinthe.

Tinkerbell snatched the bottle out of her hand. "Now now, drinking a beverage that's not cinnamon cocoa never solved anything. I have a better idea. You need to get laid."

"I'd rather strangle some sweet little girls."

Tinkerbell giggled. "With charm and personality like that, you're going to be fighting the guys off with a stick."

Regina was unmoved. "Even I know that's a load of crap."

"No, really! Someone out there is bound to be reckless enough to love you, and with a little pixie dust..." She stood on her head. "Hey, Reg, think you could shake me up and down a couple of times and see if any falls out?"

"Er...no."

The Nevengers were wandering aimlessly around the jungle for the hundred and fifth consecutive hour, when Regina pulled Emma aside. "If I promise not to murder you, can we have a minute alone to talk?"

"Look, if this is about me leaving the toilet seat up again, I could make a few complaints of my own. You've been very rude to my mother these past few decades!"

"No, I was wondering if you wanted to try making beautiful magic together again."

"I hate magic!"

"Then I guess you'd better kill yourself."
"Shut up."

"So...you're so afraid of your own nature that you won't use your own God-given talents to save your child's life...yet I'm supposed to be the crazy one?" Regina sulked. "This bites. The only reason you're going along with Hook's plan is because he hypnotized you with his damn sex appeal, and hypnotizing people with sex appeal is supposed to be my job."

Mary Margaret came to her daughter's defense. "Hey, show some compassion. Emma just lost her on-again, off-again one true love."

"You're right, I'm sorry," said Regina.

"AAAAAHH! She apologized!" Emma screamed, clinging to her mother.

"The world's coming to an end!" Mary Margaret yelped. "Quick, find a bomb shelter!"


"The Evil Queen's son, shooting an apple full of poison. Yes, I get it. Very funny," Henry grumbled.

"All right, Henry, you'll be playing the role of William tonight," Pan reported, handing the bow to Henry. "Felix, you'll be playing Jemmy."

"But I don't want to shoot him. It's been my lifelong ambition to break with family tradition and not kill anybody," Henry protested.

"Come on, Henry, we live in a jungle without Xbox or cable," the Lost Boys whined. "This is the only form of entertainment we have."

"Well, when you put it that way..." Henry lifted the weapon hesitantly.

"Don't worry, you won't hit him, and if you do, I have plenty more fangirls where he came from," Pan drawled lazily.

"Henry SMASH!" Henry screamed, turning his aim on Pan and firing.

"That's my boy!" Pan caught the quarrel in mid-flight. An applause sign hanging from a nearby tree flashed, and the Lost Boys did some halfhearted cheering.

The Nevengers were wandering aimlessly around the jungle for the hundred and seventh consecutive hour, when Hook approached David. "So, are you going to tell your family you're dying, or just wait till you start decomposing and hope they take the hint?"

"No, that's Plan B. Plan A is getting Tinkerbell to cure me with pixie dust."

"No offense, but when people try to make me happy, someone usually ends up dead," Regina warned her new bestie.

Tinkerbell smacked her with a sparkly wand. "Stop being such a downer! Just think of a wonderful thought—any happy little thought—and I'll be back in a few." The fairy flew off, ending up at a place that was either fairy headquarters or someone's acid trip.
The Blue Fairy hacked her way out of a giant flower bud with a chainsaw. "Gah! Damn it, Green, who let the Audrey Two in here?"

"Uh…it wasn't me."

"Don't lie to me!" Blue snarled. "And as if that wasn't bad enough, you've been helping lonely, troubled people in desperate need of guidance again!"

"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," Tinkerbell replied serenely.

"Stop that!" Blue barked. "There's only room for one Christ-like figure in this series, and it ain't you, capisce?"

Tinkerbell stared at her. "Wow. I always thought that fiasco with Dreamy was just a one-time fluke, but you really are a jerk."

The Blue Fairy glared. "Just for that remark, I'm confining you to…" she glanced at their psychedelic surroundings uneasily "…whatever the hell this place is, until further notice."

"Well, I guess there's only one thing I can say to that." Tinkerbell pointed theatrically over her mentor's shoulder. "Uh oh. The Tooth Fairy's car just pulled up, and she's carrying a big sack. I think she wants you to help her sort her loot again."

"Ew, never again!" said the Blue Fairy queasily. "I'm going to go hide in the basement. If she asks, just tell her I'm in the shower."

Once she was alone, Tink made a beeline for the petty cash box. "Works every time."

"So…you want me to use my four year old child as bait for a monster in order to help the son of a guy who tried to torture me to death?" Robin Hood stared at Neal incredulously. "And here I thought you would turn out to be the sane one in your family."

"Relax, I'm the world's premiere expert on unwilling interdimensional travel. All I've got to do is take the proverbial bullet for Roland like I took it for Emma. And Michael. And Dad."

"You know, I'm starting to think that befriending a guy with your kind of luck wasn't the best idea I've ever had."

"Come on, help a brother out! Emma and Henry are all I have, except for that guy who sold his soul to keep me safe. And that chick I was in love with until yesterday." He grew pensive. "I wonder whatever happened to her?"

"Oh, so it's an angst war you want?" Robin challenged. "Fine, I'll play. My pregnant wife almost died and my grief drove me into temporary insanity, which resulted in me crossing the Dark One and getting subjected to his exotic dancing routine, and then my wife kicked it and left me a single parent, and then I maybe or may not have gone to war against the Normans."

"And who was it that temporarily saved your wife so that your son could be born?"

"Belle."

"You're supposed to say my father," Neal hissed.
"Like hell. It was all Belle."

Seeing that he was losing this debate, Neal broke out his Little Orphan Bae smile. "Pretty please with pixie dust on top?"

Robin's eyes took on a glazed look. "Perhaps I'm being selfish. You can endanger my son all you like, and please accept all my money, as well," he droned, emptying his pockets.

As the Nevengers wandered aimlessly around the jungle for the hundred and fourteenth consecutive hour, Regina started to hang back. "You guys go on ahead, I'm a little busy…uh…watching this caterpillar slowly transform into a butterfly." She forced her atrophied facial muscles into a smile. "Ooh, the wonders of creation."

Emma gave her a weird look. "Regina, you're acting even crazier than usual. What gives? Did you ruin this Tinkerbell's life, too? Look, there's no need to worry. After all, I forgave you pretty quickly."

"Yeah, but Tinkerbell's a lot more rational than you are, and I seem to have discovered remorse at some point. For the sake of Operation Cobra 3A, I'd better stay out of sight." She rose. "Maybe I'll go see if Gold is done with his midlife crisis yet."

Regina sat at her vanity, writing in her diary. "...And then I watched the last half of Mirror, Mirror and went to bed. PS, Hi, Leopold—no worries, I'm not having an affair yet." She put down her quill and glanced over her shoulder. "Tinkerbell, you managed to scrape some pixie dust out of your hair?"

"Nah, I acquired it by...uh, using strictly legal means." Regina looked skeptical. "Cut me some slack, I embrace a Pre-Columbian style concept of ownership. Processed diamonds can't be owned—they belong to everyone!"

"I'm pretty sure the cops would disagree," said Regina. "Violently."

"Stop showing concern for others like I wanted you to," said Tinkerbell, dumping a saltshaker full of the stuff on her new friend's head. "Now, let's go get you laid!"

As she rose into the air, the queen squinted. "Are those wires sticking out of my back?"

"Let's choose not to notice that," Tinkerbell suggested, casting a handful of glitter into the sky and watching it light up a trail. "Hey, look. Your soul mate is right over there, in sight of your house. Don't you just love it when fate is convenient like that?"

They followed the dust through a back alley. "My eternal happiness can be found in a bar?" Regina started laughing hysterically.

"Found him!" said Tinkerbell, peeking in the window. "Mm, that's the dreamiest back of a man's head I ever saw."

Regina fidgeted uneasily. "Hey, do you think wearing my jammies to a nightclub is going to make me look weird?"

"Nah." Tink pulled her over to the window, where some poor guy was scratching his neck frantically. "Gah! What is this green stuff all over me?!" he yelped.
"Looks like he's a Leo," Tinkerbell noted, pointing at a lion tattooed on his arm. "That clinches it, this is a match made in heaven. Go get 'im, tiger! And call me in the morning—I want to hear tons of details."

As Tinkerbell turned and left, Regina stood in the doorway nervously. "'Hey there, hot stuff, I just fell from the heavens and it hurt. No seriously, my fairy godmother doesn't quite have the hang of landing yet,'" she rehearsed under her breath. "'No, that's no good. 'Are you a fruit, because honeydew you know I love apples?' No, that's even worse. Screw this, I'm obviously not cut out for the bar scene.'"

Regina sat on a log staring into the darkness. "Maybe I should be doing something to help Henry. I know! I'll raise awareness about the issue by going on a hunger strike." She continued to sit on the log staring into the darkness. "Passive resistance is boring. Can somebody please get out here and instigate some conflict?"

"Yo," Tinkerbell emerged from the darkness and blew some opium...poppy-based sedative powder, into her face.

"Ah, thank you, that'll do nicely," Regina drooled as her head hit the ground.

Hook poked his head into Tinkerbell's treehouse. "Bad news, baby—I'm taken now, you can't have me." But the house was empty. "Looks like there'll be no hysterical sobbing, David, so I won't need you for comfort mode."

"As you may recall, I don't care about your love life, as long as you keep my daughter out of it. I'm just here for the miracle cure," David muttered, rifling through both of Tinkerbell's possessions.

Emma followed them up. "An empty, lonely, unadorned bachelorette pad?" Her face lit up. "That means there's got to be Zoloft cupcakes around here somewhere!"

"And maybe some net-based traps we could use on Pan," Mary Margaret added.

David came up with a handkerchief. "This is Regina's. I can tell because it's monogrammed with a BHH, for 'bwa hah hah'. Looks like Tink's been stalking Regina."

"Stalking? That settles it, we've got to befriend this fairy," said Mary Margaret.

Regina came to on the cold hard ground. "Beaten to death by an angry fairy in the middle of the jungle. I never thought it would end like this, and I bet nobody else did, either."

"Bwa hah hah! I've come to gloat!" Tinkerbell snarled.

"Wow, I never realized how annoying that was," said Regina.

"You ruined my life, you evil hag!"

"Don't take it personally. I do it to everyone, myself included." She conjured up an icepack and slapped it against her temple. "'Ugh, that opium you hit me with makes for a killer hangover. So, how's this revenge of yours going to go? To the death, or to the pain?'"

"A little of both." Tinkerbell shoved a poisoned arrow against the former queen's jugular.

Regina stared at her. "Aren't you supposed to be some adorable little mute girl who prances around
in a tutu?"

"Aren't you supposed to be named Grimhilde?"

"Touché."

Tinkerbell carefully dodged her way through the gauntlet of bug zappers Regina had inexplicably hung around her chambers. "All right, dish! What happened with Bachelor Number Two-did he take you for a romantic midnight walk to his camp and sing you songs about the phony king of England?"

"No, he was a total jerk. He, uh, said he wanted me to come live with him in his rustic hunting lodge, have six or seven strapping boys, and spend my nights massaging his feet."

"A romance where the man and woman start out hating each other? Gee, I've never heard of such a thing before." The fairy snickered. "But seriously, I find it hard to believe that any human being could be that obnoxious. You're making this up, aren't you?"

"Are you accusing a Mills of deception? How absurd!" The queen forced a laugh.

Tinkerbell giggled. "Somebody's bashful, and for once, it isn't Bashful!" she sing-songed.

"Shut up! You...you—uh, you... bad fairy!" she spluttered nervously.

Tinkerbell burst into tears. "I know you're upset, but there's no need for that kind of senseless cruelty!" She broke out an electric guitar. "Lighten up and sing with me! All you need is love! All you need is love, love, love. Love is all you need!"

Regina snatched the instrument and smashed it to pieces. "I had love, and it turned me into an emotionally-crippled nutcase with a corpse stashed in her basement!"

"Ew."

"Exactly. Let the bug zapper hit you on the way out," the queen said curtly.

"But I embezzled for you, and the Blue Fairy's about as forgiving as a Texan criminal judge!"

"Sucks to be you."

"But I thought we were friends!"

"Why the hell do my enemies keep thinking that?" Regina wondered, glancing over at the heart-speckled valentine her stepdaughter had made her in art class earlier that day. "I really need to learn how to express my hatred more effectively."

"If you're going to kill me, at least try to do it in a suitably showy fashion." said Regina, tearing out her heart and handing it over. "I'm a supervillain—I deserve to go out with a bang."

"Um, ew." Tinkerbell recoiled.

Regina rolled her eyes. "Give it up, Tink—you're too adorable to kill anyone and we both know it."

Tinkerbell was on her way back to Psychadelic Central Station when the Blue Fairy caught up with
her. "You tried to ease a suicidal woman's pain, and I'm afraid the penalty for that is one hundred lashes." The Blue Fairy cracked a bullwhip ominously. "Remove your tutu and let's get this over with."

"But she's one of the most powerful sorcerers in the world, and her only friend is a manipulative Satanic weirdo who wants our whole species dead! Shouldn't we be doing something about that?" Tinkerbell prodded gently.

"Pointing out my utter lack of foresight? That's most heinous crime of all! You're so fired!" Blue roared.

"Aw, come on," Tink wheedled. "Let me stay and I can get you free absinthe."

"You're really going to make me say it, huh?" The Blue Fairy sighed. "I do not believe in green fairies!"

Tinkerbell's wings disappeared and she fell to the ground. "No!" she wailed, clapping her hands frantically.

Tinkerbell squeezed Regina's heart. "Ouch, be careful. That thing is almost seventy years old," the former queen cautioned.

"You cost me the chance to be a self-righteous bug trapped in an eternity of servitude without any hope of love," the former fairy seethed. "For that, I can never forgive you."

"Instead of being mad about losing your lame career, maybe you should be mad about being trapped here in the tenth circle of Hell," Regina suggested. "How and why did that occur, anyway?"

"Don't change the subject! Why didn't you just go score with Bachelor Number Two and make everyone's lives easier?! Are you allergic to happiness or something?!"

"No. It's just that every good character needs a fatal flaw, and mine is anger. If I was to set it aside and spend the rest of my life frolicking through the woods with some cute blond, I'd be…well, Snow." She shuddered. "And one of her is plenty."

"That's weak. Give me one good reason not to stab you in the heart with a broken absinthe bottle!"

"My Evil Regals would shoot you down with a skeet gun."

"They don't scare me. What else you got?"

"Take it from one who knows-if you start crushing people's hearts over some overblown slight from ten years ago, you're going to end up broken, lonely, hated, traumatized, overthrown…"

*Seven hours later…*

"…Estranged, orphaned, single, and marooned," Regina finished hoarsely.

Tinkerbell yawned. "That's quite a list, all right."

"Feel free to kill me if you want. I deserve it, and to tell you the truth, death would preferable to more of David and Mary Margaret's awkward flirting." She shuddered again. "Or you could break back into being a do-gooder and help me find my kid. I think you'd like him. He enjoys plotting my downfall too."
"I can't break back into being a do-gooder. You said yourself I was a..." She broke down sobbing. "B-b-bad fairy!"

"Please forgive me. Those horrible words were out of line, even for me," the former queen apologized.

"The use of such a vile expletive can never be forgiven!" Tinkerbell bawled.

Regina cringed. "Okay, this goes against every fiber of my being, but...comfort mode."

Tink eyed her calculatingly. "Do you really love your off-again, on-again son?"

"Yeah, but don't spread it around. It'd kill my image."

"Eh, screw it, you were right—I am too adorable to kill anyone." Tinkerbell forked over the heart and left. "But there's no way I'm joining your group. David and Mary Margaret's awkward flirting sounds too horrible to bear."

---

Some Lost Boys were flinging knives at each other, for lack of anything better to do in a place without electricity. "This island is paradise. No wives or bosses to nag you, no IRS to audit you, no damn kids expecting to be fed and clothed all the time..." Peter Pan noticed Henry looking at him strangely. "Oh, and no parents, either. Parents are so lame, I assume."

"Not mine. Mine are a nuclear-powered megalomaniac, a chainsaw-wielding bounty hunter, and an interdimensional fugitive," Henry bragged.

"Be that as it may, you have to stay. You're the chosen one."

"You mean Harry Potter?"

"No, the other chosen one."

"You mean Anakin Skywalker?"

"No, the other chosen one."

"You mean my mother?"

"What if I told you that your mother's only truly meaningful achievement was the son she gave birth to?"

"I'd say you're a male chauvinist pig," said Henry.

"So...what?" said Pan skeptically. "You believe your birth was some wacky coincidence? That Rumplestiltskin's son managed to live for three hundred years, and find and impregnate Snow White and Prince Charming's unwitting daughter, in another dimension, among seven billion people, by accident?"

"Uh...it was fate?" Henry ventured lamely.

"Fate, schmate, it was all me! I led your mom to your dad's car with a trail of Zoloft cupcakes, and spent the next few months spiking their food with fertility drugs! To be honest, you're lucky you weren't quintuplets."

"Wait a minute, why?"
He took a Sears portrait of Henry out of his wallet. "Well, I got this centuries before you were born —"

"How? Why? From whom?"

"That's none of your business."

Henry tossed the picture aside. "You sound just like Mom-Slash-Great-Grandma!"

"And you sound just like Bae," Pan griped. "You two are so damn noble—you sure as hell didn't get it from me."

Back at the unimaginatively-named Dark Castle, Mulan had taken command because everyone else was too busy brooding. "All right, we'll put Roland in front of the window. Neal and Robin, I want you to dress up as concubines and set up a distraction while I save the kid."

"I'm not wearing a dress. I already get called a sissy for wearing a shawl as a kid," said Neal stubbornly.

"Fine, then just tackle the damn thing while I hit it with some firecrackers."

"I don't know about this plan, Neal," said Robin. "What if you're wrong about my son's safety like you were wrong about that raving lunatic Tamara?" Neal flashed his smile again. "Sorry. I don't know what I was thinking. My acquaintance's girlfriend's safety is the only thing that matters," he drooled in a daze.

"Actually, she's not technically my girlfriend," said Neal sadly. "But with August neutralized, I might actually have prayer of rectifying that."

"Emma forgave me for trying to strand her at the top of a beanstalk and leave her for dead," Mulan pointed out. "Whatever you did can't be worse than that."

"It came pretty close," Neal muttered darkly. "Take it from me, when you love someone, you should tell them. At best, you'll live happily ever after, and at worst, you'll make a lot of Sleeping Warrior fans happy."

An adorable giggle of "How adorable am I?" rang out behind them. Little John carried Roland in, a bright red target painted on the boy's face. "Just so you know, if we survive this, I'm calling social services on you people," the bandit warned.

"Noted." Robin took his son in his arms. "Let's have a quick review, sport. How does the cow go?"

"Moo."

"And how does the duck go?"

"Quack."

"And how does the bait go?"

"I believe."

Robin smiled proudly. "That's my boy."

"Let's just get this show on the road before my conscience gets back from its lunch break," Neal
pleaded, crouching behind a couch as Robin positioned his son in front of the window.

"I believe I am adorable," said Roland adorably.

"Eh, close enough," said Robin.

"It's not working," Neal observed. "Roland, try, 'I refuse to heed my foster brother's obviously correct warnings.'"

That did the trick. The shadow smashed through the window. "I am the 'who' when you call, 'who's there?' I am the wind blowing through your hair. I am the shadow on the moon at night, filling your dreams to the brim with fright!" it sang darkly, lunging for the boy.

"I'm the coolest!" roared Mulan, throwing herself in front of the monster and hacking its hands off.

"Gah! You just cut my wrists like cheap coupons! That must mean death is on sale today." The shadow retreated.

"Um, Neal, don't you have a flight to catch?" Mulan prodded, as Neal hung back to answer a text message.

"Oh, right, my all-important quest." He dropped his phone and grabbed the shadow by the foot. "Shady, old buddy, wait up! It's me, Bae!"

Robin tucked his son into bed. "Remember, if the social workers ask you, we've been playing Pat-A-Cake all night."

Mulan appeared in the doorway. "So how traumatized is he?"

"Oh, not very, thanks to you. I know you probably hear this all the time, but you're the best Disney heroine ever."

"Nah, Aurora's the best Disney heroine ever, and you'll never convince me otherwise." She sighed dreamily. "In related news, I'm going back to my Aurora before I turn into a lonely, miserable wreck like Neal."

"You're gay?" Robin cursed. "Damn, I was hoping you'd stick around and replace Regina as my canon love interest." He looked frightened. "I mean, she's hot and all, but I've heard what happened to her last boyfriend."

Aurora looked up from her flower garden Mulan walked in, sighing with relief. "Mulan? Oh, thank the gods you're here—I'm so damn sick of all this frolicking!" She threw her arms around the warrior. "Please tell me you're here because you need my help killing something. I'm about to go crazy!"

"Not this time, I'm afraid," said Mulan, smiling for absolutely the first time ever. "Where's Philip?"

"Prancing around a local forest clearing with some owls."

"Excellent, then he won't be back for several days, at least." Mulan took a deep breath. "Aurora, you know how we used to fight like an old married couple, exchange meaningful looks, display fierce loyalty to one another, and literally hold each others' hearts? Do you ever think that maybe there was some subtext going on there?"
"Sub…text?" Aurora looked puzzled. "I'm a product of the Golden Age of American animation. That word isn't part of my vocabulary." She patted her abdomen. "Tell me, do you think you could teach this 'subtext' thing to my baby when it's born? I want it to have all the advantages its father and I didn't."

"Aw nuts. Dating someone with a spouse is one thing, but dating someone with a child is just sick and wrong, as was established by David and Mary Margaret." Mulan's face fell. "Well, that was a short romance."

"Huh?" said Aurora.

"I, uh, just dropped by to let you know I'm running away to infiltrate yet another male-dominated association of warriors," the warrior saved tearfully.

Aurora looked disappointed. "Aw, do you have to? I'm so much cooler when you're around."

"Please just let me leave," Mulan begged. "I'm going to start sobbing hysterically and I really don't want to do it on camera. It'd kill my image."

The Nevengers were wandering aimlessly around the jungle for the hundred and twenty-second consecutive hour when they caught up with Tinkerbell. "Hold up, Sparkle! I think you've forgotten the cardinal rule of the universe—villains can't be killed, no matter how much they may deserve it!" Emma barked, drawing an arrow.

"I love this series," Hook sighed happily, drawing his sword.

Emma ignored him. "Where's Regina?"

Tinkerbell stared at them quizzically. "Since when do you care?"

"Since Gold and Henry both disappeared, making her the brains of this family," said Mary Margaret.

"Hey, I thought I was the brains of this family now?" said Emma.

"Let's call it a tie," Regina suggested, arriving on the scene.

"Do you do this often? Ask people for their help by jumping them in the wilderness?" asked Tinkerbell quizzically, several knives still pressed against her throat.

"All the time. It's how we met." David set aside his weapon to squeeze his wife affectionately.

"It's a sad day for Storybrooke when the Evil Queen has to tell Snow White and Friends to tone down the violence." Regina swatted her companions' weapons aside.

"Hey, it's the bell I sort of like," Hook waved. "Hey, baby, are you ready to succumb to my undeniable charms yet?"

"Hell no."

Emma relaxed a bit. "This fairy's growing on me. So, is she going to help us?"

"I can help you psychologically come to terms with your upcoming death," Tinkerbell offered.

David sighed. "I'll take it."
"No, wait, you know where Pan is, right?" Emma held up the jar Hook had provided her with. "Take us there or else!"

"AH!"

"Emma, we're not savages!" Mary Margaret took the jar and set it aside. "How about this? If you help us get Henry back, we'll help you find a home. That's what you want, right?"

"That's what everyone on this show wants," sighed the fairy. "All right, you've got yourself a new Neverenger. Here's the scoop. Pan trusts me for reasons I'm never going to reveal, so he'll let me in. And when he does, I'll sneak some opium—uh, poppy-based sedative powder into their food stores, leaving you free to simply walk in and pick up your boy."

"Aw, but I wanted to impress Emma with my swashbuckling!" Hook whined.

Tinkerbell rolled her eyes. "Fine, fine, if that's the way you want it, I'll just leave the door open for you to storm the place. But you're really being irresponsible."

As they all headed back to Tinkerbell's place to toast their new partnership with a round of absinthe, David fell to the ground in violent seizures. "Honeymuffin, is that some kind of new dance craze?" his wife inquired.

"Uh…yeah, s-s-sure, why n-not?" David stuttered, breaking into a cold sweat.

She helped him to his feet. "You seem a little stressed. Perhaps I should cheer you up by reminding you how much I depend on you, and how, through all the hardship I've endured, your love is the only thing that's kept me going, and how I'd have to fling myself off a cliff if you ever died permanently, unlikely as that may be—"

Her husband groaned miserably. "I'm really not cut out for tragedy. I hope we can get back to fluff soon."

Henry was sitting on a log back at Pan's camp, staring at the Sears' portrait the alleged boy had given him. "Pan's been stalking me? Hm, we must be related."

The Shadow dumped Neal roughly on the shore of the island. "Oof!" He shook his fist at it. "Don't expect a big tip from me!"

Felix appeared behind him. "Hey, Bae. How's the family?"

"Kidnapped and mentally abused, worried about her son and mentally abused, and just plain mentally abused, respectively," Neal replied.

Hook surreptitiously snuck some absinthe into Emma's coconut milk. She gave him a grateful smile. Meanwhile, Tinkerbell and Regina had chosen to lift their spirits with some girl talk. "You know, Reg, you should really be ashamed of yourself. Thanks to you, your True Love ended up with a wife he loved enough to risk torture and death for, and a beautiful child whom he adores with every fiber of his being." The fairy shook her head disgustedly. "How do you sleep at night?"

"Hint hint," said Robin Hood, abruptly appearing on screen after the discussion about Regina's mystery man.
"Tis not better to have loved and lost!" bawled Mulan, nibbling a Zoloft cupcake as she entered the Merry Men's camp.

"That bad, huh?" Mulan just sniffled and nodded in response. "Well, it could be worse. You could be paired up with Regina." He flashed his tattooed arm pointedly. "Speaking of which, when I inevitably drop dead, please take care of Roland for me."
Nasty Habits

Felix was dragging Neal through the jungle with glee. "I still haven't forgiven you for putting this tattoo on me in my sleep all those years ago." Felix rolled up his sleeve, revealing a heart with the words "Pan's Girl" inside it. "It's payback time!"

"Relax, I'm not here to poke fun at your weird little marriage. I just want my son back."

"What the hell do you care? You barely know the kid."

Neal bristled. "Well I'm trying to fix that!"

"Well, if you ask me, you should just cut your losses and go make a new one. My pookie's kind of a sadist, in case you've forgotten."

"I choose not to notice that," said Neal.

Felix laughed. "You were a lot smarter when you were Baelfire. Maybe you should consider changing your name back."

"Hey, I get enough of that kind of slander from trolls on the Internet—I don't need it from you too!" Neal snapped his bonds and punched the little punk in the face. "Ooh, that felt good." He kicked him in the head one last time for the road and then took off. "Estranged Daddy's on his way, son!"

Bae sat at a table trying to draw a square and failing miserably. "Man, I can't control this suddenly enormous body of mine." He looked up as his father entered their happy hovel. "Papa, can you shrink me or something? This is freaking me out."

"Not now, Bae—I have a fourteenth, fifteenth, or possibly sixteenth birthday present for you." Beaming, the Dark One handed his son a pencil sharpener. "Now this is what I call luxury!"

Baelfire tossed the pencil sharpener aside in disgust. "Stop ransacking the dead, Papa, or at least do a better job of it."

"Okay, you want a palace for your birthday instead?" Rumplestiltskin tried.

"No!"

"A lifetime supply of bagels?"

"No!"

"An autographed copy of The Complete Works of Neal Cassady?"

"Tempting, but no. What I really want is adventure in the great wide somewhere. I want it more than I can tell!"

Rumplestiltskin was dazzled. "Wow, just when I thought I couldn't love you more."

"Don't change the subject!" Bae stamped his foot. "I'm…uh…well, we know I'm at least fourteen, anyway. By medieval standards, I should have a job and several children by now. Are you ever going to let me move out?"
"Sure, as long as I can come with you."

Bae facepalmed. "It's a good thing you're my dad and not my mom. Otherwise, I'd probably still be breastfeeding."

"I'm just looking out for our family's safety, son. After all, if you should chance to meet one of my enemies, they might dupe you into banishing me to another dimension or something."

"Fat chance. I think the real reason you're acting like this is because you've got the worst case of abandonment issues in the Enchanted Forest. Which, by the way, is quite a distinction." Being a medieval peasant, Bae didn't have a room to storm off to and slam the door of, but he probably would if he could have.

The situation being what it was, though, he had to stick around and listen to more of his father's lame rationalizations. "Hey, it could be worse. You could be living with your mom." The Dark One shuddered.

Because *Peter Pan* wouldn't be *Peter Pan* without incorporating Native American stereotypes, Gold was slathering his face in warpaint. "Hana Mana Ganda, Pops—I'm coming for you!" he snarled.

Belle smacked him in the back of the head. "Wash that off. You look ridiculous."

"Can't," Gold apologized. "I need to look dangerous in order to psych out Pan and save my grandson. I'm a scrawny old man, so my only real options are warpaint or some sort flaming skull tattoo."

"Why do you want to save the boy who be your doom, anyway? Are you suicidal or something?"

"Yep."

She smacked him again. "Well stop that! And quit trying to break into heroing, you cold-blooded snake. You're just going to embarrass yourself."

Gold raised his eyebrows. "Aren't you supposed to be telling me I can be a better man despite all evidence to the contrary?"

"I, uh, finally wised up," the apparition saved. "Anyway, you shouldn't be so hard on yourself. Being a cold-blooded snake is a noble profession. And it drives the girls crazy." She opened a couple of buttons on the front of her dress, batting her eyelashes coyly. "Come home and I'll prove it to you."

"Eh, what's the point? You're just going to dump me like everyone other human being I've ever met has." His eyes welled up with tears. "Dear gods, I'm pathetic."

Emma sat on a log, looking confused. "Uh…I'm not sure what we're doing in this episode, but okay. I guess we could do some preliminary strategizing." She started doodling in the dirt. "The plan is exactly that same as it was in last week's episode. Tink's going to open the wards for us and we're going to storm the place so Hook can impress me with his fancy sword work."

"Just try not to get poisoned like David," Tinkerbell cautioned.

"I'm n-n-not p-poisoned," David gasped, ashen-faced and shivering on the ground.
"Good, because if you were, you'd be ashen-faced and shivering on the ground right now," said Tinkerbell. "Then your brain would start to melt, slowly and painfully, and your teeth would all fall out, one by one, and then your eyeballs would explode—"

"We get it, we get it!" the quasi-prince groaned.

Hook raised his hand timidly. "Excuse me, but does this man's behavior seem...amiss, to any of you?"

"No."

"This is pathetic," the pirate grumbled.

Emma ignored him. "Does anyone besides Hook have any questions?"

Tinkerbell raised her hand. "I have one. How are we getting out of here?"

"Once we find the wise and mighty Henry, he'll show us the way," the savior replied calmly.

"I don't know if any of you have noticed, but Henry's eleven years old! This plan sucks!"

"C-c-comfort m-mode," David rasped.

Tinkerbell fell into a daze for a few seconds, then shook herself out of it. "Nice try, Your Highness, but I'm afraid even the Charming Family Charm is no match for Pan." She took a wristwatch out of her pocket. "I got this off the crushed snail that used to be Tamara."

"I know I'm not supposed to do this anymore, but...bwa hah hah," snickered Regina.

"Wait a minute, a crushed snail?" said Emma. "Don't worry, that was Gold, and he's on our side. Kind of."

"Sorry, but my point remains valid. The only reason I care about your stupid problems in the first place is because you said you could get me off this island! When you're done choosing not to notice that, give me a call." She stormed off into the jungle.

David crawled after the fairy. "Get back here, or I will find you! I will always find you!" he threatened, waving a gun.

"David, give it up, she's clearly immune to the Charming Family Charm," said Emma. "Besides, she's right. We're all being uncharacteristically stupid today. Hook, your intelligence level seem to have risen substantially this season. You got any ideas?"

"Sorry, but no. The last time I left the island, I used a submarine, but I'm afraid Locke has blown it up since then," said Hook. "I guess we could always ask Neal when he turns up. We never saw the body, so you know he's not going to stay dead for long."

Gold was feeling depressed, so he went on a jog through the jungle to get his endorphins flowing. "Maybe I'll go save Henry in the morning, unless I find something better to do again," he mused. Voices whispered behind him indistinctly. "The Others again? Guys, either do something or shut up, already!" But it was just a pair of Lost Boys. "Well hello, dearies. You've got two choices, here. I can either beat you up or hock you to some lonely villain. What's it going to be?"

"Beating, please," the boys replied nervously.
"I was hoping you'd say that!" He conjured up a two-by-four and whacked them both in the head with it.

Neal suddenly emerged from the jungle, a nail gun and a bundle of missing posters bearing Henry's image tucked under his arm, and stared at his father. "Pops, wash that off. You look ridiculous."

"Using the face of my dead son to trick me into betraying my grandchild? Jeez, Dad, you're even more abusive than I thought!" Gold snarled, advancing on his son. "Well I'm not falling for any illusions that aren't hot babes, so beat it!"

"But Papa, it's me!" Neal protested. "I survived the gunshot wound in order to give my loved ones false hope for a future together!"

"Shut up! I'm trying to do something nice for a change and I don't need any distractions!" Gold slammed his son against a tree trunk and pressed a spear to his throat. "You can't stop me! I'm going to lay my life on the line for some kid I barely know if it's the last thing I do!"

"Me too!" gasped Neal.

"Okay, maybe we really are related." Gold relaxed, tossing the spear aside.

Rumplestiltskin walked into his happy hovel with a golden crown. "Hey Bae, check out what I swiped off some twerp named Arthur!" But Bae, unlike his father, understood the proper response to abuse and had fled.

A group of townsfolk were attending a seminar on how to form an angry mob, when Rumplestiltskin popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Fair warning, I get almost as mad at people who take my son away from me as I do with people who leave my son with me!" he roared, waving an escargot fork like a man possessed, which he totally was.

"You really think we're dumb enough to deliberately piss the Dark One off?" scoffed the mayor. "Give me a break, we're not Cinderella! We're just here because some guy in tights lured our children into the woods."

"Well, today's your lucky day. I happen to have a moral objection to tights." Rumplestiltskin giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Finally, an actual reason to get violent!"

"So, how'd you get back?" Gold asked his son idly. "Did yet another of those supposedly extinct beans turn up?"

"No, I got Robin Hood to repay you for saving his wife."

Gold frowned. "But Belle saved his wife."

"Don't make me go through this argument again!" Neal snapped. "Speaking of beautiful ladies, where's Emma? I need to pop the question ASAP, before Hook has the chance to work his magic on her."

"I ditched 'em. I didn't want them to see me wallowing in my own angst-uh, I mean, murdering children," his father saved.
"You should really cut down on that, by the way," Neal scolded.

Gold pouted. "You sound just like your stepmom."

"So what's with all the death wish talk you've been throwing around? Are you looking for attention?"

"Well, yeah, but it's also the only way to save Henry. I mean, I once cried on Pan and it didn't stop him, so a suicide attack seems like the next logical step."

"What is it about this damn island that makes everyone's IQ immediately drop by thirty points?" Neal dragged him into the jungle. "Come on, Pops—it's time for me to prove that genius doesn't skip a generation in this family." He led his father to a beach, where he picked up an ornate seashell.

"Ooh, are we going to dazzle Pan with the beauty of Ariel's voice?"

"No." He sounded a blast on the shell and grabbed his father's spear. "We're making calamari!"

The Kraken slithered onto the beach, a tri-corner hat stuck in its teeth. "Aw nuts, not another Gold!" Neal sank a spear into its head and Gold hauled it ashore. "Two Golds at once?! Man, could this day get any worse?"

"As we both know, but I'm going to repeat for some reason, magic squid ink can immobilize the most magical of creatures," Neal boasted.

"How the hell did you know that?"

Neal shrugged. "I'm pushing three hundred. I probably ran across the Monster Manual at least once in all those years."

"Fair enough, but how do you plan on getting close enough to use it?"

"Live bait."

"Good idea. Hey, wait—" But it was no use protesting. Neal was already handing him a grass skirt, a ham, and a lei.

The Nevengers were wandering aimlessly through the jungle for the hundred and thirty-eighth consecutive hour when Hook stopped to point out an overgrown cave. "This is Neal's bachelor pad. Makes Emma's place look positively homey, doesn't it?" He cozed up to Emma, smoldering aimlessly, as usual. "Come on, Swan. Let's ditch the parents and sneak a cuddle." David punched him in the face. "Hey, I'm just trying to help! Soon you'll be dead, and she'll need a man around to fix her appliances and do her yardwork."

"Heh heh. I love this guy's wacky sense of humor." David pulled the door open and slammed his head in it. "Whoops, sorry."

Once everyone was inside, Hook started to come to. "Lying to your family? Refusing to believe in the power of goodness and love? Are you sure you're Prince Charming and not yet another evil twin?"

David took a mirror out of his pocket and studied his face at length. "Eighty-five percent sure, yes," he finally answered.

Hook groaned. "Damn it, you're really going to do this, aren't you? You're going to make me, of all
people, be the hero in a freaking fairy tale." The pirate buried his face in his hands. "Poseidon give me strength."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'd love to explain, but this is Bae and Rumplestiltskin's episode. We'll talk next week, mate."

---

They went back inside, where David used a lighter that had somehow escaped Pan's anti-technology field to light a torch. Emma studied the carvings on the wall quizzically. "So…Neal spent all his time reminiscing about the three days he spent with you, while ignoring the fourteen years he spent with his father, the five or six years he spent with his mom, and the year or so he spent with his adoptive family?"

"No, there were other carvings, but I erased them out of jealousy," Hook replied cheerfully. "He was a moody teen, so he should have a diary around here somewhere. Provided he didn't get the kind with a lock, we can read it and see how he escaped."

---

Rumplestiltskin was perched on a shadowy rooftop, waiting for the perfect moment to pop out of nowhere, as usual, when a flute in the distance started playing "I Won't Grow Up." Several boys crawled out of their bedroom windows. "Hey man, did you hear that? It sounds like…mental abuse." Having been born into a society that still practiced corporal punishment, they figured that was the best deal they could hope for in life, so they ran off to find the music's source.

The Dark One followed them to a bonfire, which was surrounded by masked children dancing around to a primitive tribal beat. "What made the red man red?" they chanted. "What made the red man red?!"

Rumplestiltskin reached out and grabbed one of the kids. "I didn't raise you to be a racist, Bae! You're so grounded!"

Peter Pan pulled back his hood and flashed a his trademark pervy grin. "I'm not Bae, but it's a perfectly understandable mistake. There is a strong family resemblance between us."

"Papa?"

Pan clamped a hand over his son's mouth. "Shh! You'll spoil the big reveal!" He laughed nervously. "Just a pet name, folks—nothing to see here."

"What are you doing here?"

"I've come to destroy your family and your mental health."

Rumplestiltskin groaned. "Again?"

Pan giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "You're so screwed up. If your mother existed, she'd be so disappointed in you."

"So…you're making fun of me for being traumatized because you sacrificed me to a demon?" Rumplestiltskin glared. "There are not enough curse words in this language to describe you."

"Don't take it personally. It's just a ploy to trick the audience into thinking I wasn't involved," said Pan.
"Well, it's not going to work, and neither is stealing my son. I'm almost as violent as I am bitter," the Dark One informed him proudly.

"Wow, that's an impressive feat," said Pan. "Okay, change of plans. We'll ask Baelfire who he wants to live with."

"What if he says Morraine?"

"Then we'll have to resort to tug-o-war."

The Lost Boys were jumping randomly around a campfire, because what else was there to do on a deserted island? Henry was sitting on a log, brooding like a good Gold. "I'm getting really sick of my ingrate relatives sulking just because I tear them from their loved ones and mentally abuse them constantly," Pan growled. "Snap out of it and come play whatever the hell we're playing."

"My mom doesn't approve of me playing with anyone but her," said Henry sullenly.

"That's a lame excuse. You're never going to save me—uh, the universe and stuff, with that attitude." He blew a tune on his pipe. "Now sing with me! I don't wanna grow up! Eleven years of life was enough!"

Henry couldn't hear anything. "What gives, is that an elaborate dog whistle or something?"

"You mean you don't have abandonment issues?" Pan's jaw dropped. "Are you sure you're Bae and Emma's kid?"

Felix arrived on the scene. "Honey, I'm home!"

"Stop saying that!" Pan barked, shoving Henry aside. "Well, for the first time ever, you don't have that creepy leer on your face, so something must have gone wrong."

"Bingo. Bae's reconnected with Rumplestiltskin, and they're in grave danger of healing your family's cycle of abuse."

"Over my dead body!" cried Pan.

Emma had abandoned all pretenses of respect for the dead and was reading Baelfire's diary aloud to a man who had ruined his life. "Day 53,277: Dear Diary, holy crap this is taking forever. I've been working to get off this damn island for close to two hundred years, and still no progress. I blame my little buddy Gilligan. Every time I get close to escaping, he finds a way to screw things up. Maybe I should just kill him."

Hook smiled tenderly. "He gets it from his mother. She liked to throw her loved ones under the bus in order to improve her own standard of living, too."

Emma noticed a half-melted candle in a coconut shell. "Hey, this looks important. Let's all take a moment to focus on it pointedly." Everyone stared. "Okay, moving on...Hook, let's bond for a second."

"No, wait," said Mary Margaret. "I don't approve of this relationship—let's go back to the coconut shell."

Emma pouted. "Spoilsport." She picked up the other half of the shell, which was riddled with holes
and sat it down on top of the candle. "Look at that, Bae made a sophisticated star map out of coconuts. Considering how so many of us have dual identities, I wonder if this means he's the Professor?"

Just in case all the mindless jumping and screaming hadn't made it clear that they were turning feral, the Lost Boys had started barking and howling for no apparent reason. A wave of magic washed over them, and they keeled over unconscious. "Hm. Maybe I should consider administering rabies vaccines while they're tranquilized," Pan mused.

A pair of hands shoved a reluctant Mr. Gold out of the bushes. He was dressed in a grass skirt and lei, and holding a baked ham. "I won't say it!" he snarled.

"Just do it!" Neal's voice hissed from the shadows.

Gold sighed and started swaying his hips. "If you're hungry for a hunk of fat and juicy meat, eat my buddy Pumbaa here because he is a treat—"

"Give it up—I'm not stupid enough to fall for that!" Pan studied his son's painted face. "And wash that off. You look ridiculous." The boy shook his head sadly. "Oh, Rumple. Sacrificing your life for your family? Have I taught you nothing?" He turned to Neal. "And as for you, Baelfire, I thought you had better taste in allies than this."

"I'm not Baelfire, I'm Neal."

"Jeez, I never thought I'd meet someone who was more in denial about his past than I am, but here you are," Pan sniggered. "This is a real family reunion." He stiffened nervously. "Uh, I mean, for you guys, not me."

"Papa, have you had enough mental abuse?" said Neal.

"I think so."

"Me too. Can we stop bantering and shoot him, already?"

"Whatever makes you happy, sport."

"Nealfire SMASH!" he cried with glee, opening fire.

Pan caught the bolt by its ink-soaked shaft and froze on the spot. "That was so clever of you both. Maybe I should be proud." Then he laughed the thought away. "Nah."

"Quick, Bae—grab Henry, while I take off this stupid costume!" Gold whispered urgently, tearing off the flowers and stomping on them repeatedly. He pointed. "I think that's him over there."

Neal picked up the child in question. "This isn't Henry. This is a crash test dummy."

"Eh, like anyone's going to notice. Just toss him on your back and try to keep his face away from the camera."

Pan looked on, perplexed. "Uh…aren't you going to kill me so I don't hunt you down and murder you all when this wears off?"

"Nah, you deserve a second chance," said Gold cheerfully, patting him on the shoulder.

"No I don't!" Pan snapped.
"Fine, then I'm just too spineless."

"You idiots deserve this next dose of mental abuse," the boy scoffed. "Hey Bae, are you aware your dad had second thoughts about embracing certain death for the sake of some kid he barely knows?"

"NOOOOO!" Neal cried. "No, I won't listen!"

"Yes you will," Pan sniggered. "Everyone always does, despite the fact that they should really know better."

"Bae, what part of 'I'm going to lay my life on the line for some kid I barely know if it's the last thing I do' did you not understand?" Gold sighed.

"I choose not to notice that!"

"That does it—I'm officially no longer shipping Swanfire! That Emma's been a bad influence on you!" Gold roared.

Neal ignored him, smacking his son's face gently. "Hey Henry, wake up. I need help hooking up with my long-lost love, and David and Mary Margaret tell me you're the man to see about that."

"Aw, come on, let the poor kid have a breather from scheming for just a few hours," Gold urged.

"Fine, whatever, let's get back to arguing. You expressed an intention to do the right thing and save my child. That sounds fishy."

Gold rolled his eyes. "Bae, you have plenty of very good reasons to hate me. You don't need to make up a lame one like this."

"It's Neal, dirtbag!"

"Your mother picked your name—what the hell do I care if you change it?"

"Don't change the subject!"

"Okay, okay, I'll tell you the truth. I'm a bit rusty at truth, so forgive me if I stutter a little." Gold cleared his throat awkwardly. "There was a prophecy that some kid would be my undoing, whatever the hell that means, and since Henry is the only kid I've met in centuries, I naturally assumed it was him."

"Wait a minute. You thought you could kill him and cheat the prophecy? Cheat a prophecy?" Neal facepalmed. "Haven't you ever read Oedipus Rex? Jeez, Dad, I thought you were smarter than this!"

"Uh…my bad?"

Neal decked him. "You're a bastard!"

"Well…yeah, but I'm trying to quit. That makes it okay, right?"

"Hell no!"

Gold pouted. "I was wrong. You're nothing like your stepmom."

"Sorry, Dad, but I'm not buying the reform act. Pan says you're lying, and he's certainly never given me any reason to distrust him."
Pan was dancing circles around Rumplestiltskin. "Nobody loves you! Nobody loves you! You're damaged and lonely! Nobody loves you—"

The Dark One sniffled sadly. "I need a cuddle so bad!" He glomped his son. "Come on, Bae, let's blow this joint and go grab some Zoloft cupcakes." He snapped his fingers and poofed them home.

"Hey, I wasn't through demeaning you yet!" Pan yelled angrily.

"Can't stand to see me bonding with someone besides you, huh?" Bae tore free of his arms in disgust. "This is a very painful position you've put me in. I hope my own children never have to go through it."

"Hey, I did you a favor! You don't know who that sicko is!"

Bae was unsympathetic. "You know, you could just tell me."

"No I can't. It would spoil the big reveal."

"Uh…okay, whatever. But whoever he is, he can't be any worse than you!"

"I know it's hard to imagine, but he is, a little bit."

"You're are so full of it! I know about the deal he offered you, and I would have chosen to come with you."

"You would? Why? Are you nuts?"

"We both know I'm not going anywhere until the Blue Fairy tells me to," Bae sulked. "But until that day, I'm giving you the silent treatment!" He grabbed his coat and headed for the door. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going down to the pub to cruise for sexy girl pirates."

"Come on, Neal!" Gold was wheedling. "Love me again and I'll buy you a pony!"

"I don't want a pony. I want your dagger."

"I don't have it. I hid it with a friend."

"You don't have any friends."

"Well you don't have to rub it in!" Gold sniffled. "You sound just like your mother."

"Hey, I don't deserve that kind of an insult!" Neal growled.

"Come on, Bae! I haven't murdered anyone in over a day!" Gold protested. "It's my all-time record! Surely that counts for something?"

"You haven't lost your flair for the dramatic, but we both know you're not going to die for Henry. Rumbelle's too popular a ship to end after just two seasons."

"Come on, Neal—do you really think any Disney princess worth her tiara would date a guy who murdered his adorable grandchild?"

"Hm, good point—I'll give you that one." He took his father's hand. "You know, I have
abandonment issues."

"Well, of course you do. This is *Once Upon a Time.*"

"I know, I was just trying to distract you while I screwed you over." He pulled away, revealing an ink smudge on Gold's palm.

"Damn it, Neal! Has the Neverland Anti-Intelligence Field gotten to you, too?" said Gold, freezing in his tracks. "I might have bad intentions, but Pan definitely does. And you're not even armed anymore—at least take the freaking crossbow! What are you going to do when he catches up with you? Hit him over the head with your son?"

"Hey, that's not a bad idea." Neal scooped up his little crash test dummy and hit the road. "Come on, little buddy—let's go find you a helmet."

Tears poured down Gold's face, making a mess of his warpaint. "Man, I really do need to wash this stuff off. It wasn't one of my better ideas."

Mary Margaret looked up at the projection and closed her eyes. "Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight—"

David cut her off. "I don't think that's going to work this time, honey."

"I taught Baelfire how to navigate for a few days before I betrayed him to certain doom," said Hook. "I guess he remembered our friendship fondly for some unfathomable reason."

"So you can read the map?"

"No, sorry, but that would be too easy."

"I really hate you!" Emma ran outside, sobbing, her parents hot on her trail. "All these years of pining for Neal, and now he's gone and I'm stuck with Hook, of all people, as a love interest!" She fled into the jungle, chainsaw in hand, to take out her frustrations on some innocent apple trees.

"Er, maybe we should stop her before she gets a splinter," Mary Margaret suggested mildly.

"Eh, she'll be okay. Neal's bound to be back from the dead soon, and then all will be well again."

"Well, it's a good thing, because living without a love interest is no life at all."

David squirmed nervously. "Uh…"

"Why, if anything ever happened to you, I'd roll over and die!"

"Not necessarily—"

"I'm afraid it's one of the cardinal laws of epic romance. You lose your true love, and you have to kill yourself in the most messy and painful manner available to you. Jamming a dagger in your heart, throwing yourself under a train…"

"Aw hell."

"…Sticking your hand in a cobra's mouth, starving yourself to death…"

"Okay, I get it!"
"…Jumping in front of a musket ball…"

"Enough, already!"

Neal got five steps down the road before Pan and his minions descended on him. "Not that it's any of my business, but you really ought to listen to your old man more often," the boy chided smugly.

"Uh…uh…hiii-YA!" Neal took Henry by the ankles and swung him in an arc, taking down several enemies.

"Hey, don't bruise the merchandise!" Felix snapped, grabbing the crash test dummy.

"Okay, I guess this was a pretty stupid plan," Neal admitted, "but I'm usually a lot better than this. Watch your back next week!"

"Bah, you don't scare me. You couldn't even get off this island without my help."

"I did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"This argument is unwinnable. I quit." Pan took Henry and left.

"Well, I guess there's only one thing left to say." Neal cleared his throat theatrically. "I will find you, Henry! I will always find you!"

Belle found her boyfriend hugging his dolly and sobbing again. "Rumple, I'm trying to remain attracted to you, but you're not making it easy for me."

Gold sniffled. "Sorry, baby."

"It's not your fault. Neal needs to be more gullible, like me."

"Eh, don't blame him. I am kind of a scumbag."

"Well, you'll always have the Dearies and their faithful queen." She pointed at herself. "So, what are you crying for? Trying to get in touch with your feminine side?"

"No, I'm upset because my son thinks I'm evil and I'm probably going to prove him right." The Dark One sighed sadly.

"Damn right you will, and don't you forget it," said Belle sternly.

"What?"

"I…uh…" Belle glanced at her watch nervously. "Oh, will you look at the time? Gotta jet, baby-book club!" With that, she faded into thin air.
Back at Pan's camp, Henry came to, rubbing the crown of his head. "Ow. Have you guys been hitting each other over the head with me?"

"Yeah, sure, why not?" Pan fibbed.

"You know, when I was asleep, I could have sword I heard my dad plagiarizing my grandpa's favorite line." Henry laughed it off. "But he'd never be that stupid. Gramps would knock him into next week if he ever found out."

"Don't worry. As soon as you start betraying your loved ones, everything will fall into place. It worked out great for me. I mean, I've got one friend, a patch of dirt to sleep in, and rocks to throw at people when I get bored. What more could any man ask for?"

"Uh, it sounds like a great life, but abandoning my family would be completely out of character for me."

"Do it anyway."

"All right, you've convinced me." Henry joined the other boys in their pointless barking.
The Lost Boys dragged Neal's unconscious body through the jungle, straining under the weight. "This is why we told you not to grow up, Bae!" one of them groaned, donning a gaitbelt.

"Throw him in my pookie's tackle box with the rest of the bait," Felix ordered. "This is going to be our best round of mental abuse yet."

The biggest brat since Cinderella poked Henry in the back with a spear. "If you're trying to kill me, it never works, so you should stop wasting your time."

"No, I'm bullying you into a fight."

Henry cowered. "Will you please stop?"

The brat laughed. "You haven't done this before, have you?"

"No, but I've observed it closely." Henry whacked him with a stick. "Henry SMASH!"

Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "He gets it from my side of the family," he bragged. "Well, Henry, all that's left for you to do is conjure up a chainsaw and make your transition to angry loner complete."

"I can conjure up chainsaws at will?"

"You can conjure up anything you want."

Henry closed his eyes and held out his hand. "I wish I had another magic bean."

"That's cheating!" Pan snatched the legume from his palm. "We're doing this my way."

"Killjoy." Pouting, Henry conjured up a chainsaw and advanced on his opponent.

Pan cleared his throat loudly, and the Lost Boys started egging Henry on halfheartedly. "Yahoo. Death to that guy. Kill the bastard, and so forth."

"Whatever, you're still better at encouraging me than Mom-Slash-Great-Grandma." Henry took a swing, nicking the biggest brat since Cinderella on the cheek.

"Not the face!" the brat wailed. "A young man should save his first facial scar for his True Love!"

Pan patted his great-grandson on the back. "Well, you've got the cruelty down. Now all we need to do is work on your creepy leer."

Emma examined Bae's old bed thoughtfully. "Where the hell did he get a pristine white feather mattress in the middle of the jungle?"

"Uh…maybe unlike everyone else on this island, he realized he could get anything he wanted by thinking about it?" Hook guessed.

"Then why the hell didn't he just think himself another magic bean? And for that matter, why don't we?"
"Stop with the logic!" Hook hissed. "You're going to ruin this whole story arc!"

"Fine, I'll go back to wallowing in my own angst." Emma burst into tears. "Neal's childhood sucked, and so did mine, and so will Henry's!"

"Comfort mode," said David.

Emma's eyes lit up. "That's it! We need to give Henry a dose of comfort mode so he won't lose hope."

"It's not a bad idea, but I'm contractually obligated to oppose the use of the Charming Family Charm at every available opportunity," said Regina. "Don't do it, it will never work—you know the drill," she droned halfheartedly.

Mary Margaret raised her hand. "I have an idea." Everyone gasped. "I know, it's been a while, hasn't it?" She headed for the door. "Come on, everybody follow your long-lost protagonist!"

Hook held Emma back. "I enjoy wallowing in my own angst, too. Can we wallow together for a minute?"

"Are you trying to pick me up?"

"Constantly, but for once that's not what this is about."

"I'm not buying it."

Hook sighed. "Yeah, I probably wouldn't either if I was you."

She stormed off and David appeared behind the pirate with a shotgun. "You're wasting your time. My daughter's never going to fall in love with a hardened criminal who has tried to kill her on multiple occasions. She doesn't take after me at all."

---

Leftenant Killian Jones swaggered aboard the not-yet-jolly Roger to inspect the crew. "Man, I didn't think it was humanly possible, but I'm even sexier in uniform," he mused, pausing to admire himself in a mirror. "Bosun, take a picture of this for posterity!" He flashed a smile for the camera, then turned to another crewman. "And as for you, is that rum you've brought aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"AAAAAAAH!" Killian swatted it overboard, trembling like a leaf.

"Sorry, sir, I forgot about your phobia."

"Never mind my phobia, drinking on an ocean voyage is a bad idea in any case. Men who drink get drunk, and men who get drunk get beaten to death in a jealous rage by their own clones." The men stared at him in confused silence. "Just trust me on this one. And get the damn ship clean before my big brother gets here. He says if I don't get my share of the work done on this voyage, he'll tell Mom on me."

"Damn right I will," Captain Liam Jones barked, walking up the gangplank. "You're finally learning."

"My dear brother!" Killian embraced him warmly. "I'm so glad you're here, I have a very important question to ask you. Didn't we used to have an abusive father of some sort?"
"I dunno. Maybe."

"But Liam, this doesn't make any—"

Lacking any kind of answer for his brother, Liam held up a brightly-wrapped package to distract him. "Who wants a present?"

"I do! I do!" He tore into the package excitedly, frowning at the contents. "Liam, this is a sextant."

"So?"

"So these weren't even invented until the late eighteenth century, and this is supposed to be a medieval setting."

"I choose not to notice that and so should you."

"Okay, but these constellations engraved on it don't look very inviting." He pointed. "Look, this one seems to show a little boy dancing on a grave, and this one appears to spell out the words 'mental abuse,' with a little exclamation point at the end."

"I choose not to notice that and so should you."

"It's not easy being the responsible one," Killian lamented. "Maybe I should give it up and try being a violent hothead for a while."

"Okay, but wait until we get back from this mission. It's going to win us fame, fortune, and most importantly, the admiration of hot blondes everywhere."

"Damn it, you know I can never resist risking death and misery for one of those." Killian sighed defeatedly. "All right, I'm in."

The Nevengers had taken a brief break from wandering aimlessly around the jungle to braid some rope and listen to Mary Margaret's first idea of the season. "Okay, so here's the plan. We make a net, trap one of the Lost Boys in it, then insult him and hit him with a rock until he develops a crush on us."

"Hm, not bad," said Emma.

"Just make sure you don't end up trapping Felix," Hook cautioned. "His heart is clearly spoken for."

"Innocently discussing the mission with my daughter?" David produced that pesky shotgun again. "I will not tolerate this kind of indecent behavior!" He hauled the pirate into the jungle.

"If you're going to kill him, try to make it look like an accident. I'm still a cop," Emma yelled after them.

Hook swatted the gun's barrel aside. "David, you've got hours to live. Do you really think ensuring your daughter is alone and unloved is a productive way to spend them?"

"Hey, I'm just trying to help my family, and that's something a guy with two conflicting family backgrounds could never understand," David snapped.

"What if I told you there was a way I could save your life? And we wouldn't even have to kiss."

"Screw that! The best way I can show my love for Henry is to willfully rob him of his beloved
"Uh-oh. It sounds like the poison has reached your brain. We don't have much time!"

"The poison has not reached my banana pudding, you lying two-headed alien," David drooled incoherently.

"Hey, there's no need for name calling. I'm here to help for a change."

"I thought you were here to impress Emma."

"Wait, I thought I was here to honor Baelfire's memory?" Hook frowned.

"Well, whatever you're doing, she seems to find it attractive, so knock it off!" David threw a punch. "Charming SMASH!"

"That's not me you're attacking. It's a tree stump."

But the delirious quasi-prince was past listening to reason. "Take that, you firm-bodied scumbag!" he yelled, smashing his fists on the innocent hunk of wood.

Shaking his head sadly, Hook dragged him off it. "Stop this, I don't fight invalids."

Mr. Gold popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Since when?"

"Since I met a girl who doesn't find it attractive!"

"Pfft. You're almost as whipped as I am." Gold disappeared.

Hook poured a flask of absinthe he'd swiped from Tinkerbell down David's throat. "Wake up! You've already suffered two comas. We don't need to see that plot device again."

David blinked. "Why am I sleeping in your arms? Did our bromance finally turn slashy?"

"That's ridiculous. Now take off your shirt for me." Hook examined the quasi-prince's mottled chest with dismay. "Ew. I hope you have good life insurance."

"I do, but I'm pretty sure my lawful wife Kathryn is the beneficiary."

"Well, that settles it—you've got to survive. Mary Margaret hasn't had an actual job in weeks—she needs your income." He fumbled in his pocket, then cleared his throat loudly. "Say, David, you look a little tired. Maybe you should relax those neck muscles and hang your head for a few seconds."

"Okay."

"No, don't close your eyes when you do it!" Hook yelped.

"Uh…all right." David spotted a flower on the ground. "Ooh, pretty. Hey, could you ask my wife to plant some of these on my grave?"

"Oh, for the love of Poseidon!" Hook snatched the flower and crushed it under his boot, then shoved David's head down again. "See anything else?"

"Do you mean this military insignia with the name Jones on it?" David held up a leather patch.

"If you say so, mate." He examined it theatrically. "This belonged—uh, must have belonged to my
never-before-mentioned brother Liam. The unfortunate sap journeyed to this island long ago and was killed by some unfortunate sap. Hapless as he was, though, he may have given me an idea for how to get out of Neverland."

"First you want to save my life, now you want to put an end to our eternity of torment on this hellish island?" David sneered in disgust. "Bah, that's just the sort of vile thinking I expect from you, loser!"

"Grrrr..." Hook took a deep breath to quell his homicidal urges. "Hey David? Don't listen to my idea. It's way too dangerous and has no hope of working."

David's face softened. "On second thought, maybe I should listen to your idea. It can't be that dangerous, and I'm sure it has a good chance of working."

"No, no, don't be ridiculous," said Hook. "I'm clearly irredeemably evil and stupid."

"Maybe you're not as irredeemably evil and stupid as I thought." He put an arm around the pirate's shoulders. "Come on, let's hear what you've got."

"Well, my brother had a magic sextant that could navigate the way out Neverland...

"A sextant? But those weren't invented until the late Enlightenment, and this is supposed to be—"

"Do you want my help or not?" Hook yelled.

"Sorry."

"Anyway, must still be up there at the top of Dead Man's Peak." He gestured at the mountain looming about them.

"Dead Man's Peak? Man, I'm a fairytale prince. Why don't I ever get to go somewhere pleasant, like Sugarcandy Mountain?" David griped.

Liam handed his brother a book of star charts. "I've never seen these constellations before," said Killian.

"No one has."

"Then who the hell made these charts?"

"I choose not to notice that and so should you."

Talking to Liam was making Killian's head hurt, so he scanned the horizon for something else to focus his attention on. "Enemy ships. Phew, thank the gods. This conversation's over!" He crossed the deck to address the crew. "Hey, before you guys kill them, can you find out who they are and why we're at war with them? I'm dying of curiosity, here."

"I'm afraid you won't be getting any answers today," Liam apologized. "Deploy the Pegasus!" A sail crafted from what appeared to be the skins of a thousand dead Muppets dropped from the foremast. "This sail was made from the last remaining feathers of the great horse Pegasus."

"That horse must have been the size of a dragon," said Killian, taking in the size of the thing.

"That's a story for another day. The only thing that matters now is that we're going to fly... without standing in a security line for two hours first!"
"No!" Killian gasped. "That's impossible!

"Watch and learn, little brother!" The ship lifted off. "All right, men-to be on the safe side, you're all under orders to think happy thoughts."

The ship broke through the clouds, and Killian started gasping. "Uh, Liam..." he wheezed... "I think the air at this altitude might be a little too thin for humans...urk!" He reached for his inhaler. "You've...cough...made your point, can we go back down to the troposphere now?"

"Hey, I'm in charge here." Liam snatched the inhaler and handed him the sextant in its place. "Stop hyperventilating and chart us a course!"

"Why the hell should we listen to the advice of a black-hearted villain who isn't me?" Regina scoffed when she heard Hook's plan.

"Well, we could always go back to wandering aimlessly through the jungle, but that didn't seem to have a lot of success," Hook reminded her.

"Maybe I should come with," Emma suggested. "You seem to be a lot more heroic when I'm watching."

"Tempting...but no. You need to get that message to Henry, before he succumbs to the Gold half of his heritage and starts whacking people at random."

"Hook's right," said David.

"That didn't sound like sarcasm." Mary Margaret reached up to check her husband for fever. "Honeymuffin, are you feeling okay?"

"What?" David recoiled. "Wh-why would you even ask me that?" he squeaked. "Are you accusing me of lying to you in my final hours?! Because that's completely ridiculous and insulting!" He backed away nervously. "Emma, when I inexplicably disappear on you without so much as a goodbye for the second time, try not to take it as abandonment."

"Uh...okay."

"And tell Henry that depriving him of his only remaining father figure was intended as an act of love, not suicide." He hugged her.

Emma recoiled. "David, you know how I feel about you showing your love for me."

"Sorry, pumpkin." He turned to his wife. "And Mary Margaret, if anything should happen to me, I want you to know you have my blessing to remarry anybody but Whale."

The biggest brat since Cinderella didn't realize that he could simply wish for a plate of bacon to appear, so he was out hunting a boar. "Leave my buddy Pumbaa alone, scumbag!" Mary Margaret roared, unleashing her trap on the kid.

The boy wriggled out from under the net, chuckling. "If you're trying make Pan angry with you, you're wasting your time. He already hates every human being except for Marilyn Manson."

Regina approached the boy with an Apollo Bar in hand, shooting her comrades a dirty look. "Ugh, I can't believe you put me in charge of comforting a frightened child. What in my history or personality
makes you think I'd be capable of such a feat?" She held out the candy nervously. "Here, kid, take this thing before I get back in character and poison it."

"This is weak," the boy scoffed.

"Comfort mode," Emma tried.

"Hm. Better," he conceded.

"Look, we don't want to hurt you. We simply want you to risk incurring the wrath of the most powerful being in this dimension."

"What's in it for me?"

"We can get you back home. There's bound to be another of those supposedly-extinct beans around Storybrooke somewhere."

Meanwhile, Regina's free hand was edging toward the chocolate bar with a bottle of arsenic, trembling violently. "For the love of God, someone take this thing!"

The boy snatched it. "Mm. I haven't seen one of these things since Hurley ate my stash in the hatch."

And then it finally hit him. "But wait. I'm a Lost Boy. If I want chocolate, all I have to do is wish for some, so why am I wasting my time on you people?" He shut his eyes. "I wish I had a ray gun!"

One appeared in his hands. "Heh heh—eat plasma, suckers!"

"That's cheating!" Emma roundhouse-kicked the weapon out of his grasp. "Come on, why are you protecting this abusive guy anyway?" She indicated the cut on his cheek. "There are support groups for people like you, you know."

"Actually, Pan prefers mental abuse. Lately, he's been subcontracting the physical stuff to Henry."

"Are you dead yet?" Hook inquired idly.

"No, will you stop asking me that?" David growled.

"Do you even care that when you die, of a poison I have used in previous murder attempts, with me as the only witness, anyone with a brain is going to assume I'm responsible?"

"Nope. But don't worry, it won't spoil your chances with Emma. Despite my best efforts, she's never been all that attached to me." He groaned. "Speaking of which, could you tell her I love her after I'm dead? She seems to be more comfortable admitting her feelings to dead people than live ones."

"Why should I?"

"Well, aside from the obvious chance it will give you to make a move on her while she's emotionally vulnerable, you kind of owe us one for making this whole stupid story arc necessary in the first place."

"Oh, will you stop whining? At least you got the chance to say goodbye, which is more than you gave poor Medusa."

David grew suspicious. "Nobody cares about her feelings. She was ugly. This is about you, isn't it? You lost someone."

"Actually, I lost two someones, but everyone hates the second one, so let's just focus on my brother."
"Okay. You know, I had a brother too. An evil twin."

Hook started laughing hysterically. "Dude, seriously?"

"Hey, I don't write this stuff."

As the Jones brothers rowed ashore in their longboat, Killian cleared his throat softly. "Hey Liam? Seeing as how we're embarking into the depths of an uncharted wilderness, maybe we should bring a few support troops with us. Or at least a freaking gun."

"I choose not to notice that and so should you."

Killian groaned. "What are we even here for? Did the king send you on a quest to find a brain?"

"No, he sent us to find a supernatural plant." He unrolled an illustration of some dreamshade. "It will bring us fortune and fame, love and money and instant acclaim."

Killian looked worried. "Liam, I've seen Little Shop of Horrors, and I really can't condone this course of action. What if it decides to eat us?"

"Relax, it's a simple healing herb. Covered in hideous, cruel thorns. That drips caustic black ooze. I'm sure there's nothing suspicious about that, is there?"

Peter Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "If you guys are here to apply to Lost Boys, I'm afraid we're looking for someone a little younger. Thanks for your interest, though."

"Who the hell are you?"

"My name is Peter Pan, and anyone who says otherwise is a lying bastard."

"Fair enough. I'm Captain Jones."

Pan frowned. "Aren't you supposed to have tentacles on your face and a giant pet squid?"

"The other Captain Jones." Liam patted his little brother on the back. "And this is yet another Captain Jones. We belong to the military of some kingdom, and we were sent here by the order of some king." He held out a drawing. "We're trying to find this magical plant that will solve all our problems."

Pan laughed. "Haven't you clowns ever seen Little Shop of Horrors?"

"Told you," Killian gloated.

"This plant is a poison," Pan continued. "Don't you get it? Using this plant, your king intends to have his military kill the enemy!"

The Jones brothers gasped. "That's absurd!"

"He would never!"

"That's not what being a soldier's all about!"

"Given my track record, I understand and even commend your reluctance to believe me, but it's the truth," said Pan.
"Liam, I'm not sure if we have an international community or what their stance on chemical weapons is," Killian whispered. "But this kid is seriously creepy, and if abandoning our mission is what it takes to shut him up, I'm willing to do it."

"Relax, he's obviously playing mind games with us."

"Naturally," said Pan cheerfully, "but just this once, they happen to involve painful truths instead of vicious lies."

Liam shoved past the boy and led his brother onward. "I choose not to notice that, and so should you."

Hook was at the top of a cliff, mentally searching for an excuse to remove his shirt while he hoisted David up after him, when Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "You're wasting your time. Emma's not here to see."

"Oh yeah. Wait a minute, AH!" He backed away from the child, making a cross with his index fingers.

"Relax, I just came to offer you a deal. You worked for me at one point—"

"I did?"

"You'll just have to take my word for it. Anyway, I want you to do it again. Or possibly still."

"No offense, but I've seen how you treat your employees." He gestured at Greg's mangled carcass, which was hanging from a nearby tree. "And I hear the benefits are crap, too."

"Ah, but I do provide my employees with complimentary wine baskets." He produced one and presented it to the pirate. "And a free vacation to anywhere but here." He held up a pair of plane tickets. "You could offer to take Emma to Tallahassee. I hear she's a real sucker for that."

"But what about her son?"

"Yeah, what about him?" Pan laughed. "I thought that seeing a woman cruelly abandon her child was one of your greatest turn-ons."

"True," Hook conceded. "What do you want me to do in return? Say I'm a codfish?"

"No, nothing so brutal. I just want you to kill our friend Honeymuffin."

"What? Why?"

"He's the only person on this island who isn't a psychological wreck, and we don't take kindly to that sort around here."

"But he's going to die anyway. This seems like a waste of a perfectly good favor. Wouldn't you rather I bought you and your friends some beer instead?"

"Tempting, but I'm afraid I can't let the opportunity to simultaneously mentally abuse you, Emma, and Snow go to waste." Leering, Pan hid his face against Hook's neck and began to whisper breathlessly. "I want to see your hook inside his body."

"Um…are you coming on to me?"
"No, it's supposed to be intimidating!" Pan smacked him. "Don't try my patience. You remember what happened the last time you didn't obey me?"

"For the last time, no!"

"Me neither," Pan admitted, "but knowing me, it was probably pretty bad. Watch your back, my apparent homie!"

As the boy flew away, David dragged himself over the edge of the cliff and spotted the wine basket in Hook's hand. "You have booze and you didn't offer to share? Shame on you!"

"Sorry, mate, that was pretty low of me."

"Never mind," David grumbled, "let's just get to the summit before the next round of mental abuse starts."

"About that...do you think you could stop presenting your unarmored back to me so often?"

"Absolutely not."

"Damn, I hate you."

As his brother approached a patch of dreamshade, Killian hung back nervously. "Liam, is it just me, or are the leaves on that plant shaped exactly like the letters e, v, i, and l?"

"I choose not to notice that..."

"...And so should I, yeah, I get it," Killian muttered wearily.

"Come on, Killian. How can you possibly believe that a feudal monarch, of all people, could be capable of using violence against his enemies?"

"Well, why would the kid have lied to us?"

"For his own sadistic pleasure?"

Killian remembered the creepy leer on Pan's face. "Okay, maybe you're on to something. But if we're wrong, this poison will be used to obliterate an entire race!"

"What race?"

"I don't know. Those omnipresent ogres, maybe?"

"But if it's monsters we're at war with, why were we attacked by those three ships full of humans on our way here?"

"I choose not to notice that and so should you!"

"Why should I?"

"Because I'm your captain, and this is the military, not a focus group!"

Killian stuck out his tongue. "I choose not to notice that."

"I've taught you too well," said Liam darkly, tearing one of the thorny vines loose. "Well, maybe this will convince you."
"Uh, don't you think maybe we should test it on an animal or something first?" Killian suggested.

"Hehe, YOLO!" Liam giggled, slitting his wrist. "There, you see? I can't believe you were dumb enough to believe the government could be capable of lying…" He suddenly turned grey and fell over. "Oops."

"Wow, that was quick. I thought it would take several days of ethical turmoil before the poison killed you." Killian took his brother in his arms. "Liam, speak to me!"

"Thanks for not saying 'I told you so,'" the captain gurgled, eyes rolling back into his head. "You're a good sport, kiddo."

"You're wasting your time! Henry isn't your son anymore! He's a homicidal maniac who runs around waving a chainsaw!" the biggest brat since Cinderella informed Emma and Regina smugly.

"You take that back!" Emma roared, holding her chainsaw to his throat.

"Let me get into comfort mode—it's all the writers seem to think I'm good for anymore," sighed Mary Margaret, wrapping her daughter in her arms.

"Good news, I'm still technically evil!" Regina boasted, shoving past them.

"I thought I asked you to stop that!" Mary Margaret lectured.

"Shut up or I'll kill you again!" Regina barked.

Mary Margaret reached for her weapons, but found they'd mysteriously disappeared. "It appears I've temporarily lost my awesome. Emma, defend me!"

"Sorry Mom, but I seem to be experiencing my first youthful rebellion." Emma decked her. "Whee, this is fun!"

"You're growing on me, Swan." Regina plunged her hand into the boy's chest and tore out his heart. "Bwa hah hah!"

Mary Margaret came to and found her daughter holding an ice pack to her bruised temple. "Sorry about that. I guess I just got caught up in the moment," Emma apologized sheepishly. "But in my defense, Regina's violent streak is kind of the whole reason we brought her."

"And what about your violent streak?"

"It's coming along nicely, but at least I never shot my innocent boyfriend."

"Shut up."

Regina approached, her latest slave in tow. "Still clinging to morality, ladies?"

"Yes," Mary Margaret replied proudly.

"Well knock it off and let's brainwash this chump." Because she wasn't about to let a little thing like being shipwrecked in an otherworldly jungle get in the way of her trademark eye makeup, she had brought along a couple of mirrors. "All we need is a little help from my seldom-seen admirer Sidney."
David and Hook finally reached the tangle of dreamshade at the summit of Dead Man's Peak. "Given the name of this peak and this show's penchant for irony, I hope you'll understand my desire to avoid dangerous situations while we're up here," said Hook, shrinking away from the deadly foliage.

David drew his sword and held it to the pirate's throat. "I've decided to step out of my cursed persona and become intelligent again. I know you're plotting to kill me!"

"Why should that frighten you? I was also plotting to kill Emma, and look how that turned out."

"Are you saying we're going to end up in love?" Horrified, David tightened his grip on the sword. "That clinches it—you must die!"

"Hey, what ever happened to your steadfast opposition to the death penalty?" the pirate choked out.

"I suddenly remembered I'm the product of a feudal society!"

"Oh crap."

"I'm glad you understand the severity of the situation," David seethed. "Now take me to the sextant!"

"No can do, I made the whole thing up, thought I suppose you could always just imagine one if your need is that dire."

"You lied to me?" David was aghast. "I can't believe that a professional criminal who tried to murder my family not a month ago would do such a thing!"

"I'm trying to help you, you moron!" Hook screamed, exasperated. "Jeez, if this is the thanks I get for trying to do a good deed, maybe I should just go back to being evil."

"I choose not to notice that!" David raved deliriously, collapsing on the ground and punching him viciously in the shins. "Take that, you damn leprechaun! I'll never surrender my Lucky Charms!"

Killian shook his brother frantically. "Liam, please don't die! Your loss might transform my entire personality, and the one I have is so adorable." He smiled adorably.

Peter Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I tried to tell the truth and just look what happened. I sure as hell won't ever be doing that again."

"Please help him!" Killian sobbed. "He's my brother, and our parents may or may not be devastated by his death."

"It's your own fault. You repeatedly told him the plant was dangerous and begged him not to use it."

Killian blinked. "Huh? What kind of twisted sense does that make?"

"Hm, you're a lot smarter than the kindergarteners I'm accustomed to mentally abusing," said Pan. "I came to this island to avoid having my intellect challenged, so I'm going to do whatever it takes to get rid of you. Even if that means..." he shuddered. "Doing a good deed." He magicked the tangle of dreamshade aside, revealing a pristine pool of water. "This is the Heart of the Island. Drinking from its waters can cure any ill, and provide your body with a variety of essential vitamins and minerals. However, there are some nasty side effects. For one thing, if you drink too much, you might accidentally transform yourself into the new Jacob."

Killian considered his words thoughtfully. "In that case, maybe I'll just go home and get him some
water from Lake Nostos instead. It does the same thing, but without any nasty side effects."

"Like hell you will!" Pan conjured up a ray gun and aimed it at his head. "I'm getting my mental abuse, one way or another, you hear?! Now go over to the damn spring and cure your damn brother, before I lose my patience!"

"Y-yes sir." Killian meekly held his canteen under the healing waters. Pan breathed a sigh of relief and vanished.

Killian placed the canteen to his brother's lips and poured. Liam sat up groggily. "Killian, you were right about the government conspiracy, you were right about our lives being in danger, and you just brought my clueless butt back from the dead. If I had half a brain, I'd hand command over to you, but unfortunately that's not the case." He swung a riding crop threateningly. "Polish my boots, underling —we've got a long walk ahead of us."

Henry was doodling in the dirt because simply wishing for some crayons hadn't occurred to him. The biggest brat since Cinderella tapped him on the shoulder, and he reached for his chainsaw. "Please don't make me smash you again," Henry pleaded. "My hypocritical moms wouldn't like it."

"Speaking of your hypocritical moms, they're here to pick you up."

"Liar. You're probably just here to mentally abuse me like everyone else."

"Henry, listen to this boy, or so help me, I'll show your new friends those baby pictures I took of you on your potty chair!" the boy ranted.

"Ah!" Henry yelped. "Mom-Slash-Great-Grandma, is that you in there?"

"Yeah, and she must really love you to give up one of her few remaining makeup accessories." The boy handed him a mirror.

He looked into the glass and Emma, Mary Margaret, and Regina waved back at him. "Mom? And Mom? And Mom's mom with whom I share a mom?"

Regina squinted. "Honey, have you had a growth spurt during these past few days?"

"I don't buy this," Henry scoffed. "If you were really my relatives, you'd be trying to strangle other, not smiling and hugging."

"You didn't see us five minutes ago," Mary Margaret grumbled, rubbing her bruised head.

"Comfort mode!" Emma cried in desperation.

"Okay, maybe I should give you a chance," Henry suddenly decided. Then he glanced up. "Uh oh, Pan's here. It must be time for my hourly dose of mental abuse." He threw the mirror to the ground and stomped on it vigorously. "No way am I going to risk you guys showing him those pictures."

As the not-yet-jolly Roger soared through the air, Liam took a long drag on his oxygen mask.

"Feeling okay?" asked Killian.

"Yeah."

"You're welcome."
"Okay, okay, I can tell you're too classy to say this yourself, so I'll do it for you." Liam smiled sheepishly. "You told me so."

"And how. So, what are we going to do about this whole government conspiracy? Start a website?"

"Nah, nobody ever reads those things anyway. What we need to do is rebel. It's the morally correct course of action, plus chicks dig rebellious types."

"I like, I like," said Killian.

"Attention passengers," a pleasant female voice from above called. "We will be landing soon, so please keep your seats back and your tray tables in their upright and locked positions. Oh wait, we don't have any of those things. Well, then just curl up in the fetal position and pray nothing too heavy lands on you."

The Jones brothers did as instructed, and were both struck on the head by Liam's sea chest as the ship touched down. Liam groaned. "Hey man, you don't look so good," Killian observed. "Did that thing give you a concussion? I knew that using an ocean vessel for air travel was a bad idea."

"No, stupid, it's the dreamshade!" Liam wheezed with his final breath.

"Aw nuts!" Killian sobbed, gathering his brother's lifeless body in his arms. "I've lost my only family twice in one day? Man, that's got to be some sort of angst world record.

Hook sullenly hacked his way through the thicket of deadly poison. "My love for Emma has endangered my life so many times," he griped, "but it still beats being with Milah." The pirate shuddered, placing his canteen under the healing waters.

He shook David awake. "Hey mate, I think you've spent enough of your life in a coma. Get up."

David smacked him feebly. "Why are you trying to kill me? Is it because I'm better-looking than you?"

"In your dreams. I'm actually trying to save you." He held out the water.

"Why didn't you just tell me so?"

"Because I know how much you enjoy committing suicide." Hook patted him gently on the shoulder. "You should really get some professional help with that, by the way."

"Noted." David reached for the water, but Hook held it back. "What, are you going to make me hand over my wallet in exchange?" He reached into his pocket. "Fine. It's almost a relief. This new nice-guy persona of yours has been kind of weirding me out."

"No, no, I just wanted to warn you. You may be shocked to hear it, but this magic comes with a price."

"We're back to that old line again, huh?" David sighed.

"Fraid so. If you drink this water, you can never leave Neverland."

"I have to spend the rest of my life in a tropical paradise of eternal youth and beauty? I'm sure I'll learn to cope somehow." He grabbed the water and chugged it eagerly. Looking down at his hands, the quasi-prince beamed. "I'm pretty again! Now all I've got to do is find a white horse of some sort, and I'm back in the game!"
"Can I have Emma's hand in marriage yet?" Hook asked impatiently.

"Hell no."

"All right!" the pirate cheered. "You didn't punch me in the face before you turned me down! This is progress."

"I'm sorry I doubted your methods, Emma," Mary Margaret apologized. "It's just that I was adapted from a thirties-era stereotype of the ideal woman, and it's made me a little softhearted."

"I'll say," Regina grumbled.

David and Hook popped out of nowhere, and the ladies all screamed and drew their weapons. Hook snickered. "You know, I'm finally starting to see why Pan and Rumplestiltskin enjoy that gag so much. It's hilarious."

David tackled his wife, pinned her to the ground, and kissed her enthusiastically. Regina made a face. "Guys, come on, this is a family show." She covered her eyes and stumbled over to Hook. "Did you find the sextant?"

"What sextant? Oh, uh, I mean, my dog ate it," Hook saved.

Mary Margaret shoved her husband off her and reached for her inhaler. "Um, I love you too," she panted.

"Now can I kill them?" Regina pleaded.

"Okay," Emma agreed queasily.

"All right, all right, we'll change the subject," David reluctantly gave in, prying himself out of his wife's arms. "Hook saved my life." He glanced down at his wife. "Uh, from some space ninjas."

"Don't thank me, it was just part of my insanely elaborate plan to score with Emma," Hook demurred.

"Give us a share of that wine basket you got from Pan and we'll call it even," said David.

David and Mary Margaret each grabbed a bottle, while Regina went off to forage for some poison to spike it with, while Hook hung back with Emma. "So, on one hand, I only saved him in order to score with you, but on the other hand, I thought scoring with you was worth risking death for. You've got to admit, that's pretty cute," Hook reminded her coyly.

"Okay, you've got me there." She grabbed him by the collar and hauled him in for a kiss.

Hook slid into a puddle on the ground. "Guh?"

"I do not want to marry you and have your babies! You take that back!" Emma roared. Taking a deep breath to compose herself, she stepped over his prone body. "I have to go find a body of ice water and stick my head in it." She shoved her gun into his hand. "You stay here and dispose of those damn Swan Captain shippers who have been videotaping this from the bushes."

"As you wish."

"Hey, I've seen The Princess Bride and I know what that really means!" Emma warned him.
With Liam's death, his ship had grown less jolly than ever. One of the ship's officers tossed the body overboard. "This doesn't seem like a proper end for our beloved commander. Shouldn't we be shoving the carcass in a rum barrel, as nautical tradition demands?"

"You know how I feel about rum," said Killian.

"Whatever. Since you may or may not be his only living relative, you might as well take this." The officer handed him the sextant.

"What are you talking about? It's already mine. He gave it to me before we left." Killian snatched the case irritably. "But I appreciate the gesture just the same." The new captain shed a single manly tear. "I'll never forget you, brother, though I may refrain from mentioning your name for the next three centuries. Nothing personal, I just don't want the fangirls to see me cry."

"Don't worry, we'll only love you more!" several swooning girls called from the brig.

Killian chucked a bottle at them. "Quiet, I'm emotionally evolving, here!" Bowing his head and trying recapture the angst, he took up a torch. "I don't know about you guys, but when I joined the military, I had no idea my duties would involve killing our nation's enemies!" The horrified crew gasped. "Nor did I ever imagine that it was possible to die in the line of duty." The crew broke down sobbing. A few men fainted.

Killian climbed up the rigging, torch in hand. "I say we go into piracy! It'll be much safer, more moral work, don't you think?" The men, still reeling from the effects of the Neverland Anti-Intelligence Field, shouted their assent. "Excellent, so, now that we're going rogue, pitting this vessel against the world, I think the only sensible thing to do is to torch its most valuable feature!" The sail went up in smoke.

"Aw, man, we could have used that thing to drop water balloons on the capitol!" one of his officers sulked.

"Shut up, I'm not done evolving!" Killian barked. "Go down to the arts and crafts closet and fetch me some paint! We're renaming this pirate ship the Jolly Roger, because I have no imagination whatsoever!"

"Jolly Rancher?" one of the men repeated.

"No! Roger!"

"I like Jolly Rancher better."

"That does it, you walk the plank!"

Hook was still sprawled on the ground where Emma had left him, giggling uncontrollably, when Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "Stop enjoying yourself, damn it! That isn't what Neverland is all about!" He smacked the pirate over the head.

"Ah, Pan, even more of your disturbing quasi-flirting can't get me down right now. I knew she'd never be able to resist me. I didn't think it was possible, but my noble side is even sexier than my wicked side." The pirate smoldered aimlessly, as usual.

"Uh, have you told her how you sold the man she loved to me, of all people? And tried to murder an unarmed girl chained to a wall? And picked fights with crippled beggars? And had horrible, horrible taste in women?"
Hook shrugged. "I left her and her mother for dead last month, and she seems to have forgiven me for that. I don't think the other stuff is going to be much of a problem."

Pan couldn't argue with that. "Good point, but what about Baelfire?"

"Baelfire's dead. That was my whole reason for coming here, once upon a time."

"No, he's alive again for a while."

"Damn! Uh, damn good."

"Save it for Emma, man. Or don't. Either way is going to be hilarious." The boy giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Captain Swan versus Swanfire! The ship-to-ship battle of the century!" He pranced off into the bushes, waving over his shoulder. "Good luck with the morality thing! I give it a day."

Meanwhile, Neal was still lying unconscious in his cage. "I can't believe I went to acting school for this," he mumbled groggily.

"Quiet, you!" Pan gave the cage a kick, then turned to Felix. "How is he?"

"Alone, in pain, confused, and without hope."

Pan giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Well, that's two of my descendants down, one to go. Hang him up next to the mystery box, please."
In the heart of the Enchanted Forest of British Columbia, Snow White examined her growing waistline with dismay. "I badly need a workout. One of my trademark crazy chase scenes should do the trick." She tapped a couple of the Queen's evil henchmen on the shoulder. "Come and get me, boys!"

"Hey, did you hear-slash-feel something?" Evil Henchman #27593 asked his partner.

"Well, now that you mention it…no," Evil Henchman #27594 replied, shutting his eyes and leaning back to resume his nap.

"You guys are the worst bounty hunters since the Huntsman!" Snow griped, tweaking their noses and smacking them in the face.

Evil Henchman #27594 squinted long and hard. "On second thought, maybe—just maybe—you're on to something."

"Jeez, finally." Snow took off running, the henchmen in hot pursuit, until she reached the same ocean-side cliff all fugitives eventually do.

"Did you really think you could hide from the Queen in the forest?" her pursuers scoffed. "You've tried that three times and she's found you three times. You really ought to come up with a new gag."

"My concealment skills may be sub-par, but at least I do a mean Pocahontas impression!" That being said, the princess dove off the cliff and into the sea below, leaves swirling in the breeze all around her.

"Show-off," Evil Henchman #27593 grumbled.

"Oh crap, I just remembered how unrealistic this stunt is!" Snow screamed, hitting the water like a ton of rocks and falling unconscious.

A red-headed mermaid fluttered on to the scene and examined the fallen body excitedly. "Drowning? Check! Royal? Check! Male?" She took a closer look. "Rats. Well, I guess I might as well save her anyway. Flounder and Sebastian both seem to be dead, so I'll be needing a sidekick." She hauled the princess to the surface.

Snow blinked the saltwater from her eyes, looking up. "Wow. The Queen's henchman are gone already? They sure do give up easily. No wonder she's always killing the idiots."

"Please don't jump off any more cliffs, honey," Ariel pleaded. "Despite what you may have seen in the Twilight series, it doesn't usually end well."

"Noted." Snow noticed the mermaid's tail. "Uh…are you a mermaid?"

"Yeah."

"Aren't you guys supposed to be evil and violent in this universe?"

"Well, I did some stalking at one point. Is that enough to keep me in character?"

Snow sighed. "I suppose it'll have to do."
Regina hovered over Emma's shoulder as the latter tried her hand at conjuring some special effects. "Stop sucking!"

"I'm trying, I'm trying!" the savior snapped. "These magic lessons seem superfluous. Can't I just go back to hitting things with chainsaws and occasionally dispensing kisses? It seemed to do the trick against you."

Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "Come on, Emma! Anger is the key to successful spells, and you once beat a toaster to smithereens for no reason. You should be blowing up entire countries by now!"

"I don't think hate is the answer," said Mary Margaret, pirouetting around the camp with a bunny on her shoulder. "Couldn't we just hug Pan until he realizes that murdering children is mean?"

"Isn't there some kind of middle ground I can take?" Emma pleaded. "Frankly, you both frighten and annoy me."

"I didn't want to resort to this, but you leave me no choice." Regina took a deep breath. "Emma, remember how I raped your boyfriend every night for three decades and then murdered him right before your eyes?"

"Oh yeah. On second thought, screw pacifism." Emma fired a lightning bolt at her.

The former queen smoothed down her static-mangled hair, beaming. "One-point-twenty-one gigawatts of pure hatred. Atta girl!" She mussed her fellow mom's hair affectionately. "Now let me teach you how to seduce genies."

"This is wrong on so many levels," Mary Margaret groaned, shooing Thumper off her shoulder and plopping down next to her husband.

"Eh, Emma will be okay. It's not like she has wickedness in her blood or anything." His wife glared at him. "Oh right, James and Eva. Well…uh…comfort mode!" He hugged her.

"Could you two please stop hugging for once in your lives and listen to me?" Hook whispered, emerging from the bushes where he'd gone to cry several hours earlier. "Pan told me Bae's alive here in Neverland, and used reverse psychology to make me spread the word."

"But Neal got shot. He fell into a portal."

"So what else is new?"

"Hm, good point," David conceded. "But why would he tell you?"

"Mental abuse."

Mary Margaret pointed to some tracks in the dirt. "Either the Lost Boys have been taking large doses of growth hormones, or these belong to a man." She stared at her husband in disbelief. "Dear gods, I think Hook is being honest with us."

"Ah! Hold me!" He jumped into her lap.

Hook pried them apart. "Guys, stay with me! The point is, we can't tell Emma because I need to pretend I have a chance with her for just a few beautiful hours longer." The pirate sobbed brokenly into a handkerchief. Then he noticed the Charmings staring at him. "Oh, and protect her feelings, too," he sniffled weakly.
"I owe Hook one for all those unprovoked sucker punches I threw at him last week while he tried to save my life, so I'm going to have to agree with him," said David apologetically.

"Aw, come on, David! Our daughter already hates us, and I have a feeling deceiving her is just going to make it worse."

"Like she's ever needed a reason before," David scoffed.

"True, but I don't know if I can do this. I have that lying impediment."

"She's right. We're doomed," David said grimly.

Ariel dragged her new friend onto a nearby beach. "Here we go, safe and sound. Do you need me to sing and stroke your hair?"

"Nah, I'm good," Snow replied uneasily.

"Your loss. So, why'd you jump? Was it a suicide attempt? Should I call Tinkerbell?"

"No, I'm hiding from an evil queen, and it's not nearly as simple as the Grimms made it sound. So, what's your story? Are you on the run from Captain Ahab?"

"Is that a crack about my weight?" Ariel scowled. "Well, in any case, you're wrong. I'm stalking a handsome prince."

"Really? I think we're going to be friends." Snow draped an arm around the mermaid's shoulders. "So, how'd you meet this prince? Did you swipe his wallet and beat him unconscious with a rock?"

"No, nothing quite that romantic. I saved him from a shipwreck. He was unconscious and we never spoke, but cut me some slack. I'm the first princess of the animation renaissance. There were bound to be a few corny holdovers from the classic Disney formula, and love at first sight is one of them."

"We have so much in common it's not even funny." Snow's eyes narrowed. "Are you planning on stealing my dancing-with-bluebirds gag, too?" She unshouldered her bow and aimed an arrow at the mermaid. "Because I'm afraid that's where I draw the line."

"Relax." She held up a discarded ad that someone had thoughtfully laminated for her. "My only plan is to go to this ball and enjoy the company of the prince I love for one magical night."

Cinderella stepped out of the forest, waving a club. "Hey, I'm watching you!"

Snow shoved the orphan aside and turned back to Ariel. "Ariel, I don't know if you've noticed, but you're a fish."

"We prefer the term terrestrially-challenged, and at any rate, it's not going to be a problem." She swung her tail onto dry land and found herself standing on a pair of human feet. "AAAAAH!" she screamed in pain.

"What? What's happening?" Snow yelped.

"Just a little Hans Christian Andersen nod."

"No, I meant your sudden and unsolicited transformation into a human. Whatever happened to all magic coming with a price?"
"Haven't you ever read any mermaid mythology?"

"Read?" Snow blinked. "Of course not, do I look like Belle?"

Ariel rolled her eyes. "Well, if you were even marginally literate, you would know that Ursula, a sea goddess who may or may not be my auntie, grants merpeople the ability to walk on dry land for one night a year."

"One night? That's longer than Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty had with their princes, but compared to a normal, healthy relationship, it's not that great. Why don't you ask Ursula for a little more time? Or just go to Rumplestiltskin for help like everyone else does?"

"I'm not stupid enough to deal with that psycho." Snow slapped her. "Ow!" Ariel cried. "What was that for?"

"Sorry, sorry, I'm just having a bad day. Let me make it up to you by helping you find your prince." She sniffled sadly. "At least one of us might as well."

"That's very kind of you, but can you keep a secret?"

"Hell no."

"Aw, come on!"

Snow sighed. "Fine, I'll try my best, but don't expect it to last long."

"Excellent." The mermaid beckoned her new friend closer, lowering her voice. "I don't want Eric to know I'm a mermaid."

"I don't know, I think he's going to figure it out when you start spraying the floor with eggs on your wedding night."

"What, is that some kind of faux-pas among you humans?" asked Ariel curiously. "See, this is exactly why I need time to get some etiquette lessons before I spill the beans."

"Good point. Your secret's safe with me until I meet someone who I really want to tell it to."

"If we're going to lie to Emma, we need to beware her superpower," David told Mary Margaret and Hook gravely. They stared at him blankly. "Gotcha!" The quasi prince started giggling hysterically, swatting his wife on the shoulder. "Admit it, I had you going there for a minute."

Emma took a break from blasting Regina in the face with electricity to come over and see what all the fuss was about. "Where are you guys going?"

"Fight club," said Hook.

"Bereavement counseling," said David, cramming a gag into his wife's mouth.

Mary Margaret spat it out both figuratively and literally. "Neal's alive! And your middle name is Hortense! And your father and I once had sex on your desk!" David and Hook both glowered at her. "Hey, give me a break, I kept your secret for nearly six seconds. That's a new personal best."

Emma gaped at her mother. "Hortense? You've got to be kidding me. And wait, what's this about my man?"
"Okay, my previous strategies of wandering around the woods and crying to my dolly may not have been very effective," said a leather-clad Goldstiltskin, "but I just know sitting around with my eyes shut's going to get the job done!"

Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "I know I've told you this a thousand times before, but this time you deserve it: you're a useless moron."

"Ah, great, just when I thought I couldn't get any more depressed," Gold sighed. "I suppose you've come to mentally abuse me. Well, get on with it. I'm a busy man." He waved a hand impatiently.

Pan held out a plate. "I made you some eggs in a basket, and they're not even poisoned. See, I'm not such a bad guy. The little organ donor's obviously completely safe in my hands—you can leave with a clear conscience now." Gold tapped his watch. "Not buying it, huh? That's my boy. All right, on to the abuse then." Pan started pointing and laughing. "You're a worthless loser and everyone hates you, and always will! Especially your son! And your father!"

"I am so going to kill you as soon as I rediscover my spine," Gold growled.

"No you're not. You can't kill me without killing yourself."

Gold gave him a double-take. "Wait, what? When was this little plot-point decided? I don't ever remember hearing a reason for it."

Pan shrugged. "You see, this is why you should just go home. That way I'll never have to come up with an explanation and you can live happily ever after. Everybody wins, except for Henry."

"I may have murdered and enslaved people, created apocalyptic superweapons, and abandoned my own son, but even I have to draw the line at leaving an innocent child in your care." Gold shuddered. "I still haven't forgotten all those times you put me up as a poker bet."

"Hey, I stopped doing that after you got old enough to call CPS on me!" Pan defended. "Look, the point is, Neal or Bae or whoever is never going to forgive you. Have you forgiven your father?"

"You mean have I forgiven you?"

"Quiet!" Pan stuffed his son's mouth with egg, laughing nervously and looking over his shoulder. "Inside joke." He turned back to Gold. "Listen, son...uh, shine, a beautiful, intelligent, caring woman is in love with you for some yet-to-be-determined reason." He shook his son frantically. "For the love of God, don't let her get away!"

Gold was unmoved. "The Rumbellers put you up to this, didn't they?"

"Yes, but I think they may be on to something this time. If you two got married, you could have a new baby, name it Baelfire, and pretend none of this baggage ever happened. She looks fertile."

"You know, pickup lines like that are the reason you're a single parent."

"Well, I suppose this means filicide." Pan giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "Yay!"

Emma poured some gas into her chainsaw and revved it with glee. "All right, folks, time to #Save Neal!"

Regina raised her hand. "Excuse me, but what happened to #Saving Henry?"
"One kidnapped Gold boy at a time, Regina," said Emma.

"Do you really expect me to go along with this? I've never even met Neal, and frankly I have enough biological parents to compete for Henry's love with already. Good riddance, I say."

"Hey, come on! We took a break for your story arc with Tinkerbell!"

"Sorry, Emma, but if you really feel that walking into an obvious trap to rescue your lying ex-boyfriend is more important than saving your son, reasoning with you is clearly a waste of time." She stormed into the jungle. "I'm going to team up with Gold. That never backfires, right?"

"You know, it's a sad day for this family when Regina of all people is the only voice of reason," said Emma wearily. "What if she's right? What if this is just yet another round of mental abuse?"

Her mother hugged her reassuringly. "Comfort mode, pumpkin. Henry seemed to care about his old man's well being for the week or so that they knew each other. Plus, he's got that suicidal streak. He'd be more than okay with this."

"Oh please." Emma rolled her eyes. "You just want Neal back so I'll fall in love with him instead of the bad boy." She indicated Hook.

"I…" Mary Margaret opened her mouth to deny it, but her lying impediment caught up with her. "Okay, I may have ulterior motives, but what I said still goes."

As she followed Snow into a poorly-guarded ballroom, Ariel fidgeted uncomfortably in her corset. "This garment has got to be a violation of some international law."

"It's just a little harmless whalebone."

"AAAAH!" Ariel screamed, tearing at the offending garment. "I'm wearing a corpse! Get it off!"

"Shh, people are staring at you, and not in a good way!" Snow covered her mouth. "Just trust me on this. I'm a feudal princess, so ball gowns are pretty much the only thing I was allowed to think about for most of my life."

"You're a princess? What a coincidence, I'm pretty sure I am too."

"Excellent, then you should be a natural at this romantic stuff. Just remember what I taught you." Snow held up a fork. "What is this?"

"A dinglehopper! I've always wanted to see one of these!" Ariel delightedly ran the tines through her hair.

Snow facepalmed. "Just keep your mouth shut and try to look hot."

"Speaking of hotness, there's my oxygen-deprived Adonis now." The mermaid pointed, giggling. "If you think he's cute now, wait till you see him with blue skin."

"I also love animals and serenading women with my flute," said Eric, tossing his hair sultrily.

"Mm, if I wasn't already taken, I might challenge you to a catfight," a dazzled Snow whispered. "Go get him, tiger shark!" She shoved her friend unsubtly into the prince's arms.

"Um, hey baby. Love the new skin color," said Ariel breathlessly.
"Wow. You're beautiful and you know how to talk! You're everything I ever wanted in a woman," the prince sighed dreamily. "Name's Eric, but you can call me frequently." He slipped a business card into her pocket. "Want to dance?"

"I'd love to, but unfortunately, I suffer from a magical condition where dancing always feels like I'm dancing on knives..." Then he smiled, and she melted. "Eh, screw it, your charms are irresistible. Are you related to a shepherd named Honeymuffin, by any chance?"

"Could be. You never know," he said, leading her onto the floor. "Say, you look familiar."

"Really? That's the best line you can come up with?" Ariel's face fell. "Weak."

"No, I'm serious! You saved me from a shipwreck." Ariel knew that men liked to be the ones to do the rescuing, and feared that if he knew the truth, he'd never fall in love with her, so she decided to deny it. "Um...maybe it was a hallucination brought on by low oxygen levels in your brain? You were looking pretty blue in the face by the time I got you to sho—" She bit her tongue.

"Let's just say we walked together once upon a dream and leave it at that," Eric suggested brightly.

"We've been a couple for two minutes, and we're already learning to compromise." Ariel beamed. "This is a good start. Let's find some common interest to further strengthen our budding relationship."

"Okay. I've always wanted to see the world."

"Me too!" Belle piped up from the sidelines. "Mind if I cut in, Ariel?"

"Back off, I saw him first!" Ariel threw a starfish at her, then turned back to her prince. "Ditto, baby."

"Sweet. You know, I'm conveniently embarking on a mission of exploration in the morning. Want to come with?"

"Why Eric, run away with you?" Ariel giggled. "This is all so...so sudden."

"I know, but we're billed as guest stars, so we really need to get this pairing off the ground as quickly as possible. Tell you what, why don't you take a few hours to think it over and we can set sail in the morning?"

Ariel hesitated. "I don't know, that plan didn't work out very well for Dreamy and Nova."

Regina was spying on the party from her mirror, because her social life left much to be desired. "That's the woman who saved Snow White."

"Red Riding Hood?" asked Evil Henchman #27593.

"No, the new one." Regina unleashed her mighty Glare of Evil. "You failed your assassination attempt, and I already have a sex slave, so I'm afraid I have no further use for you." She hit him with a Force Choke and he went down like a pile of bricks.

"Eep," squeaked Evil Henchman #27594. "Uh, I mean well done, Your Majesty. You've punished the guilty party and there's no need for further violence. I've always admired your firm but fair approach to discipline. And your dark and alluring good looks."
"Oh, get your lips off my boot and go stand around looking creepy!" the Queen commanded brusquely. "It's the only thing you henchmen seem to be good for."

Pan and his adoring girlfriend were spying on the Nevengers from a distance. "Aw, isn't it cute how they think they stand a chance against me?" Pan giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron.

"If you say so, pookie," said Felix. "But what are we going to do about Neal? The guy's a career burglar with over two centuries of experience. Sooner or later, he's going to find a way past that crude latch we fashioned out of twigs and bubblegum."

"Put him in the Echo Cave. Our next round of mental abuse begins in five minutes."

"Can we make it three?"

"Ah, this is why I love you."

In order to drive home just how pathetic and lonely he was, Gold was crying on the shoulder of his imaginary girlfriend. "Damn it, Belle! Before I met you, I was perfectly happy and entertaining being a coldhearted bastard. Now look at me. I'm a sniveling, angst-spewing wreck."

"You're absolutely right!" said Belle eagerly. "If you want to stop all this pesky moralizing and come home, you have every right to."

"But what about my grandson?"

"Screw him. He didn't even bother to send you a Fathers' Day card. You owe the little brat nothing. And if you come home, you can start a new family with me. Third time's the charm, right?"

Gold frowned. "Since when do you want to settle down and have rugrats?"

"Since now, okay?!" She slapped him. "Just stop questioning everything and do as your f…uh, girlfriend tells you, you little punk!"

Regina arrived on the scene. "Gold, stop committing borderline incest with that thing and give me a hand. Henry's still in danger, and sad as it is, I think you're the only other person who cares at the moment."

"You again? Don't you ever get tired of coming between me and Belle?" Gold snapped.

"That's not Belle."

"I know it isn't."

"And you're still flirting with it?" Regina raised her eyebrows. "I'm pretty sure that counts as cheating on her." She hit the apparition with a Force Choke. "Time for me to take revenge for spurned women everywhere!"

"Rumple, help!" Belle wheezed, crumpling to the ground. "I may be shady as hell, but on the other hand, so is she!"

"Don't bother threatening to stop me, Gold," said Regina, turning her back on him. "We both know this island's turned you into a complete doormat."
The apparition dissolved, and Pan's shadow stood in Belle's place. "Once I ran to you, now I'll run from you, and this tainted love you've given!" the Shadow sang, zooming off into the night.

"Um…ew," said Gold.

As the Nevengers wandered aimlessly through the jungle for the two-hundred-and-eleventh consecutive hour, Emma took her mother aside. "Mother, forgive me for I have sinned! I sucked face with Hook so hard I'm surprised he has any lips left!"

"If you're telling me as your mom, you're grounded. If you're telling me as your girlfriend, ooh, dish!" she squealed. "Why'd you do it? Were you hoping your lips would kill him like they did Graham?"

"The thought crossed my mind, but it was mostly because he peer pressured me."

Mary Margaret frowned. "I'm going to have to call that boy's parents if he doesn't knock that off. Well, don't worry. Neal forced you to sit through breakfast with his freaking fiancée, so he's got no room to complain about borderline infidelity."

"Ugh, I'd nearly forgotten about that disaster. She shuddered. "If he turns out to be alive, remind me to yell at him."

"Stop with the ifs! You're a Charming now. Blind faith in happy endings is not optional!" Mary Margaret shook a finger at her daughter sternly. "This is your first formal warning."

"I met the man of my dreams, and he's as sweet as he is handsome, and he's crazy about me, and we're perfectly suited to each other!" Ariel bawled onto Snow's shoulder. "This is the worst day of my life!"

"Uh…what?"

"You heard the man! He wants to explore exotic new places and I have no legs!"

"So invite him to live under the sea with you. That's an exotic new place. Haven't you ever seen Splash?"

"That's actually not a bad idea, but what if he says no?"

"Blind faith in happy endings is not optional!" Snow hit her over the head. "This is your first formal warning!"

"But—"

"No buts! I fell in love, and even though it left me heartbroken, lonely, homeless, and jumping off cliffs…" Snow frowned. "Where was I going with this?"

"Love," Ariel reminded her.

"Right, go, love, live the dream."

Ariel knelt down on the beach to do some praying. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray, dear squid, my legs to keep." She cracked one eye open. "Hello? My inky lord, are you listening?" The mermaid stood up in disgust. "This is the lamest religion ever. Screw it, I'm converting to Zorastrianism."
As she turned to leave, the waves began to churn. "Hello, Ariel," a Caribbean-accented voice called out.

"Sebastian, you are alive!" the mermaid cried happily.

"No, it's me, Ursula." Regina surfaced, sporting enough tentacles to make the Kraken jealous. "Nonsensical accents are a dime a dozen in our land. You're going to have to learn to suspend disbelief."

Gold had summoned up a bottle of mouthwash and was rising his mouth frantically. "Still not clean! Still not clean!"

Regina snatched the bottle away. "As thrilled as I am by the knowledge that I am now officially smarter than you are, I feel obliged to scold you. What the hell is wrong with you? Some ghost turns up telling you that Pan is always right, and not only do you not strangle it, you don't even throw any clever taunts at it?" She eyed him suspiciously. "Are you sure you're Gold and not another apparition?"

"Cut me some slack, I'm emotionally compromised." He took another swig of Scope, looking haunted. "Maybe you should take over as the supreme puppetmaster for the rest of the season."

"Really?" She beamed. "Thanks, teach! I won't let you down! For my first order, I want you to help me save my son. Emma and her parents seem to care a lot more about saving yours, for some reason."

Gold gave her a double-take. "Wait, what's this about Bae? Maybe I should go and give them a hand."

"You put me in command and I'm ordering you to ignore your imperiled child and save mine!" she screeched, threatening him with a whip.

"Fine, jeez, but don't expect it to be easy," he cautioned. "To stop Pan, I have to die."

"Huh? Why?" she asked. Gold shrugged helplessly. "Well, it doesn't matter. You're not going to die, you're a fan favorite, and besides, together we'll be unstoppable. Like the Charmings and I would have been if we hadn't gotten all introspective and weepy."

"Don't underestimate Pan. He was powerful enough to defeat even me, a lone, unarmed little boy who was too busy crying to fight back."

"You did the right thing by putting me in charge, Gold." She patted his shoulder gently. "We don't have to kill him. We just need to lure him into a trap. Like Cinderella did to you, only for real."

"I know!" Gold's eyes sparkled. "We could turn him into a puppet, and then hire a cricket to follow him around and nag him about every move he makes."

Regina thought it over, then shook her head. "No, that's too evil even for us."

"Well, we could always trap him in a box like some sort of unholy mime, but I didn't bring one with me. I was really looking forward to my first murder-suicide."

Regina laughed. "Give me a break, you don't have the guts to kill yourself for the greater good and you never will. Anyway, we have Charming for that."
Ariel stared at her goddess in awe. "Of all the religions in the world, I can't believe the one that turned out to be true was the one that worships a giant talking squid."

"Yeah, well, life's funny like that. Mon," Regina added belatedly. "So, I understand you need some help with your love life, same as everyone else in the Enchanted Forest?"

"Yep." Ariel sighed wearily. "Are you going to tell me to stop lying before my nose quadruples in size, too? Because I get enough of that from Snow."

"Thou shalt not lie? What kind of ridiculous commandment is that? Thou shalt lie. And thou shalt covet thy friend's gorgeous legs, and thou shalt steal them! Or else!" She waved a lightning bolt menacingly.

Ariel was grinning like a piranha at a water park when she found Snow on the docks. "Snow, fabulous news! I got you an enchanted friendship bracelet!" She slapped the bracelet onto her one and only friend's wrist.

"Thanks, but encrusted-with-barnacles isn't my color—ah!" As the latch snapped into place, her feet fused into a tail. "What the hell?!"

"Isn't this great?" Ariel gushed. "Now I can keep your feet, you can start a wonderful new life under the sea, and best of all, you'll never have to shave your legs again!"

"And you didn't ask my opinion on the subject because…?"

"What, you're not happy?" Ariel blinked innocently. "Maybe this song will help. The seaweed is always greener in somebody else's lake. You dream about staying up here, but that is a big mistake—"

Snow slapped a hand over her mouth. "Stop that, I'm trying to have an intelligent conversation with you! Where did you get this bracelet?"

"From my god."

"I know this is politically-incorrect, but your god is stupid and fake."

"I'll say!" said Regina, barging in as usual.

Mary Margaret studied the tracks on the ground carefully. "Someone has drawn a giant arrow in the dirt, pointing to that cave, and written the name 'Neal' under it several times. You think he might be in there?"

"I hate my life," Hook groaned.

"What's wrong?"

"This is Echo Cave. I lost half my crew inside these rock walls. You see, it forces you to reveal your darkest secrets, and when Pegleg Pete discovered that Smee was the one who put that Kick Me sign on his back all those years ago, all hell broke loose." He shuddered. "It was the worst bloodbath I've ever seen, and I kill people for a living."

Emma was skeptical, as usual. "Forced to reveal our darkest secrets to a pile of rocks? This is the flimsiest plot vehicle I've ever heard of."
"Yeah, but what are ya gonna do?"

"And how do we know that Neal's still alive in there, and that this isn't just Pan's umpteenth round of mental abuse?"

"Those two things aren't mutually exclusive." Hook sighed, waving his companions onward. "Come on, character development awaits."

Snow tried to swim away, but then noticed that there were no lifeguards on duty. She couldn't bring herself to break such an important safety rule. "Damn! So close to escape!" she lamented.

"Oh, I've been a fool, though still much smarter than my Disney counterpart," said Ariel. "You manipulated me into accepting the aid of dark magic in order to further your own selfish ends?"

"Rumplestiltskin's going to be so proud of me," Regina bragged.

"You're mean!"

"Gee, you think?" Regina rolled her eyes, then turned to her stepdaughter. "I liked your last sweet and spunky, not quite human gal-pal better. Whatever happened to her?"

"I don't know, but I'm not going risk losing this one, too," said Snow bravely. "Ariel, run!"

"I can't. I'm too noble," Ariel apologized.

"Knock it off!" said Regina.

"Yes, knock it off, Ariel," Snow agreed. "I appreciate your concern, but it's really not so bad. The Queen can kill me, but she can never take away the fact that my boyfriend is hotter than her boyfriend." She laughed sarcastically. "Oops, my mistake. She doesn't have a boyfriend."

"Oh, that does it!" The Queen conjured up a filleting knife. "Time to make some fish sticks!"

"You'd better leave now, Ariel. This won't be pretty," said Snow.

"Eep!" Ariel covered her eyes and ran.

"Bwa hah hah!" the Queen cackled, advancing on her. "That was too easy!"

"Darn right it was!" roared Ariel, shoving past her, grabbing the hideous bracelet and pulling Snow into the ocean.

Neal was in a cage over a chasm inside the cave. His eyes focused on Emma's face, and then her ring finger. "Emma! Thank goodness you're safe and single! Just stay as far from the pirate as you can, and I'll be over to declare my love shortly!"

"Oh gods, it's true!" the savior moaned, burying her face in her hands. "He's alive. I'm the object of a love triangle." She started sobbing. "Damn it, I was a strong, independent woman who knew what she wanted out of life once!"

"You're beautiful when you're conflicted," said Hook adoringly.

Emma shot him a withering look. "You're not helping. Just shut up and find us a way across!"

"I told you, we have to reveal our deepest, darkest secrets."
"My middle name is Hortense," Emma tried.

"Darker, baby. Allow me to demonstrate." He cleared his throat. "I'm crazy in love with Emma."

Emma and her parents just looked bored. "Hook, that's not a secret," said Mary Margaret.

"Oh." He blushed. "Uh, I used to have a ponytail?" he tried. The Charmings screamed in horror, and a section of bridge extended over the chasm. "There we go. Eminem, you're up."

Mary Margaret faced her husband, taking a deep breath. "As everyone knows, our daughter is awesome, but she's way too heavy for piggyback rides, as my chiropractor can attest, and she refuses to wear the booties I knitted for her." She paused to glare at Emma.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, but mint green just isn't my color," said the savior.

"See? She's such an ingrate! I say we make a new one. We can name it Emma and pretend none of this baggage ever happened."

"Making babies with you is always a blast, honey," David said diplomatically, "but I can't."

"Sure you can. I stocked us up on Viagra before we left."

"No, I mean I can never leave the Island because my latest suicide attempt worked a little too well."

She slugged him. "You bastard!"

"Hey, I took a deadly arrow for you! Again! You're welcome, and I love you too!"

Emma ignored her parents, as usual, and crossed the now complete bridge to Neal's cage. "I told you so. I told you so. I told you so! I told you so! I told you so!" she screamed, swinging her sword at his cage repeatedly. "Why couldn't you just listen to my brilliant conspiracy theory?! Jeez, now I finally know how our poor son feels!"

"I was an idiot, and if you want to beat me up once I'm out of here, I won't resist," Neal conceded, "but first you have to spill the beans." He smiled reassuringly. "It's okay, honey. I just found out that my father wants to murder my eleven-year-old son. Whatever secrets you have are going to look positively tame in comparison."

"Yikes. Thanks for letting me know, that does make this easier." She smiled nervously. "My darling Neal, I…wish you were dead."

The cage's door dissolved, and Neal emerged indignantly. "Hey, I took a bullet and jumped into a portal for you! You're welcome, and I love you too!"

"Well, I guess we sure showed Pan," said Emma as they emerged triumphant from the cave. Hook sobbed, Mary Margaret took a huge bite out of a Zoloft cupcake she'd been saving for emergencies, and David banged his head repeatedly against a tree trunk.

Neal, desensitized to horrifying revelations after the last couple of seasons, just nodded politely. "Thanks for your help, Mary Margaret, David…" His eyes fell on Hook. "Wait a minute, aren't you supposed to be a pitiless, self-centered murderer?"

"Yeah, I'm not entirely sure what happened to that guy, either," said the new, improved Hook with a shrug. "Just go with it."
"Okay, thanks for your help, charming stranger." Neal patted him on the back.

Hook sighed. "Let's go find Tinkerbell and see if she has any leads on Henry, or at least some absinthe. I need a drink so badly it's not even funny."

As they set off, Emma held her baby-daddy back. "You know those horrible things I said to you just now? I meant every word, you worthless scumbag."

Neal took her abuse in stride. "Don't worry. I, of all people, can understand passionate, unrelenting grudges. I've been hauling this one against my parents around for like two hundred years. But I want you to know that I'm not going to stop fighting for you. You can spurn me, insult me, tell me I'm making you uncomfortable, but I have no intention of listening." He wrapped his arms around her, squeezing like a python. "You can take out a restraining order, you can plant poisoned ivy around your house to keep me from peeking in your windows, but I'll always be there, watching, waiting—"

"That's kind of a creepy approach to romance, but it worked wonders for my parents, so I guess I shouldn't be too quick to judge," Emma gasped, wriggling free.

"Hey, hold up!" Hook poked his head out of some shrubs at their feet. "You can't stalk Emma! I'm stalking Emma!"

"No fair, I saw her first!"

Emma stormed away from them in disgust. "This is going to be the longest season of my life."

Meanwhile, Mary Margaret's head was in imminent danger of exploding, so David took steps to diffuse the situation. "Comfort mode?" he ventured meekly. She looked up at him, and he discovered the hard way that she'd been taking glaring lessons from Regina. "Gah! It burns!" he screamed, shielding his eyes.

Ariel escorted Snow ashore victoriously. "Boy, we sure are lucky Regina can't swim and has no magic that would allow her to travel through water," Snow coughed.

"But...she does. She came from under the sea the first time I met her."

"Huh. Maybe she just doesn't want to capture me. Maybe some part of her enjoys the thrill of the chase," Snow theorized. "But this is no time to be examining the workings of the criminal mind. You're late for a very important date."

Ariel hesitated. "I don't know about this. What reason do I have to believe Eric will ever accept me as I am?"

"Well, Regina said he wouldn't, and the opposite of what she says is usually true."

The mermaid beamed. "Snow, that's brilliant! You should write a book!"

"Glad I could help. Now get out of here. I have zero, one, or seven friends I've got to go meet up with, depending on where exactly we are in the timeline."

Eric stared out at the ocean in disbelief. "I've been stood up? But I'm a gorgeous, adorable prince!"

"Maybe we should stop at Prince Charming's house when we pass through his kingdom," Eric's companion-at-arms suggested. "He may or may not know exactly how you feel, depending on where
exactly we are in the timeline."

Waterskiing on a pair of dolphins, Ariel had managed to reach her true love's palace in the nick of time. "Eric, I'm here! Whatever you do, don't marry Vanessa!" she opened her mouth to say. But her lips moved in vain, and she looked up to find Regina standing on a nearby dock, pointing a remote control at her while pressing vigorously on the mute button.

"Bwa hah hah! I've come to gloat!" the Queen announced. "You may be wondering why I'm wasting my time getting revenge on a brief acquaintance of my archenemy. Well, Snow reminded me earlier that I don't have a boyfriend, and I've decided that if I can't, no one else can, either." She summoned a fireball. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got some dating agencies to blow up."

The Queen arrived home several hours later, covered in soot and tears. "Time well spent," she sighed contentedly, peering into her mirror. "Hey homie, can you show me where to find a good facial scrub?"

A giant squid chick who had apparently held hands with Midas at some point appeared in the glass. "Boo!"

"AH!" Regina composed herself. "I mean, ah-some to meet a new friend. Who are you and what have you done with my yes-man?" The she rethought the question. "Actually, I don't particularly care what you've done with him, just tell me who you are."

"I'm Ursula."

"You mean, of all the religions in the world, the one that turned out to be true was the one that worships a giant talking squid?" Regina laughed. "Yeah, right. Great joke, Sid, you can come out now."

"LET'S MAKE A FEW THINGS CLEAR!" The squid roared, waving her trident menacingly. "I AM NOT A BENEVOLENT DEITY! PLAY GOD AGAIN AND SO HELP ME MYSELF, YOU'RE GOING TO BE SLEEPING WITH THE FISHES!"

Gold and Regina were skipping arm-in-arm down the beach. "Ya know I'm bad, I'm bad! Real, real bad!" they chanted.

Gold suddenly fell silent. "Wait a minute, why are you taking me for a moonlit walk on the beach? If this is your way of coming on to me, I'm sorry, but I've made a New Years' resolution not to date any more Mills women."

"Dream on, Skeletor. I just need to enlist the help of yet another enemy. Man, I'm screwed up," she sighed wistfully, conjuring a fishing pole, tying a fork to it, and casting like a pro.

Ariel was tangled in her line within seconds. "Curse my multicultural tendencies," the mermaid mouthed.

"Hey, Ariel, I need your help, so I've decided to remember you exist," the former queen greeted cordially.

"A mermaid? Aren't those supposed to be evil and violent?" Gold wondered.

"Hey, even if she is, who are we to judge?" said Regina. Ariel mouthed something that was probably
obscene at her. "I'll make you a deal. Clean up your language and I'll give you back your voice. There could be children listening." Ariel nodded sullenly, and Regina snapped her fingers.

"Why should I help you, you bi...g jerk? You ruined my life!"

Regina draped an arm around her mentor's shoulders. "We're supervillains, dear, we ruin everybody's life. Try not to take offense."

Ariel was unmoved. "Screw you! What's in it for me?"

Gold giggled evilly, which should have been an oxymoron. "I like this girl."

"Shut up, you!" She swatted him on the arm and turned back to Ariel. "I can give you legs that don't feel like they're being stabbed with knives when you walk on them, and send you to a place where you can find your prince. Eventually. When we have a few seconds of airtime to spare."

As a bit character, Ariel knew that was the best deal she could expect, so she accepted. "And what is this place you're sending me to?"

"One guess."
Belle and Gold were on the docks saying their goodbyes when a strange voice thundered from the sky. "Previously on Once Upon a Time!"

Belle jumped into her boyfriend's arms. "What the hell was that?!!"

"I don't know, and there's no time to investigate. I've got a ship to catch." He tapped his watch. "Now where were we?"

"Well, we're together and in love—I guess that's your cue to screw it up somehow?"

"You know me so well." He smiled at her adoringly. "I have to go, and you have to stay here."

"But I want to help save Henry!"

"Belle, have you ever even met Henry?"

"Uh…"

He handed her a scroll. "Here, take this cloaking spell I have on hand for some reason and use it to keep the town from getting invaded by nerds."

She raised her eyebrows. "Since when do you care about Storybrooke's well-being?"

"Since it has hot babes living in it." He ran his eyes over her body appreciatively.

"Aw, go on!" Belle giggled, then sobered. "But I don't want character development. I already tried that with Lacey and it was a disaster. I want fluff!"

"Honey, it's for the best. The freaky blind kid told me I'm going to die saving my grandson, and spending my final days with the woman I love would make no logical sense."

Belle rolled her eyes. "Rumple, the freaky blind kid also said you'd ride a cow into battle! I'd think you'd be smart enough not to listen to her anymore!" She kissed him. "Don't worry, we're obviously going to see each other again."

The Jolly Rancher swirled into the portal with a mighty flush, leaving Belle alone on the docks. "I wonder if I have any books on coping with loss? I bet I do."

The rest of the B-list caught up with her a few minutes later. "They saved us yet again! Oh, I'm so happy I'm going to break character!" squealed Leroy, smiling for a change.

"Leroy, you know how I once told you that love was bliss? I was wrong!" Belle wailed, sobbing into his shoulder.

Leroy glanced around, confused. "Where are the Charmings? Shouldn't they be monopolizing all the airtime?"

"No. Tamara kidnapped Henry, and Baelfire obviously won't be dating her after that, so they decided to go create a new love triangle."

"Why didn't you go with your boyfriend? Did you finally realize what a jerk he is?"
"No, not just yet." She showed them the scroll Gold had left with her.

The Mother Superior examined it closely. "This is a recipe for meat pies. A very tearstained recipe for meat pies." Then she turned it over. "Ah, here we go, a cloaking spell. But why?"

"Rumple says Storybrooke's about to be invaded by nerds." Everyone except Belle and Archie screamed in utter terror.

Storybrooke's B-List followed their gallant leader down to the mines. "So what kind of nerds are these?" Leroy asked her. "Cosplayers? Fanfic authors? Science geeks?"

"Worse. They're SCIENCEx geeks."

"Ah no, not again!" the dwarves groaned, taking up their axes.

"Comfort mode?" Archie squeaked fearfully.

"Yes, comfort mode," Belle echoed. "My manipulative Satanic weirdo said this spell would keep us safe, and it's not like he's ever lied to me before." They all started weeping in despair. "Knock that off, it's going to work!"

"It might," Mother Superior agreed grudgingly. "Fairy dust runs through these walls, since my lazy slaves keep finding better things to do than mine it out." She glared at the dwarves, who hung their heads in shame.

"You heard Massa Blue, boys—time to get swinging!" Leroy and his brothers dug hard and fast in an effort to avoid the lash.

Belle hung back nervously. "I don't know about this. I've never cast a spell before."

"Yes you did. Remember the yaoguai?"

"…No." Belle offered the potion to the Mother Superior. "Isn't performing light magic for the good of everyone supposed to be your thing? Come to think of it, why haven't you cast a protection spell on us already?"

"Cut me some slack, I've been really busy lately following Leroy around to make sure he doesn't get any more stupid ideas about deserving to be loved." Then she noticed the look on Belle's face and decided to break character and help. "Come on, Belle. You have a chance to be something besides Rumplesstiltskin's conscience for once in your life. Don't screw it up." Then she patted Archie on the shoulder. "No disrespect to you, of course. It's fine work for those who enjoy it."

Belle couldn't argue with the fairy's logic, so she uncorked the vial and poured the potion onto the rocks. A blast of magic shot through the entire town. "Well, it's not purple. That's a good sign."

As a magical barrier descended over the town, two nerds who were attempting to disguise their status with a Ferrari were hurtling toward the town line. The driver stepped on the gas, the shield closing in on them. His companion cringed. "Bro, do you really think Wendy's worth all this? I mean, this whole mess is her own damn fault in the first place."

"Quiet! I'm the smart one, and I say we're going in!"

He floored it and they squeezed in with the back half of their car missing. His companion looked
back incredulously. "In a normal world, that would have ruined the car and possibly exploded it. Pan was right. Magic really does happen in this town.

Gold drew two lines in the dirt and called it a map of Storybrooke, art not being his strong suit. "Can you get there?"

"Sure, what are plot vehicles for?" Ariel replied cheerfully.

"If the Blue Fairy, or more likely, Belle, did her duty, the town should be surrounded by a protection spell. When you arrive, surface close to the beach, and no stopping to cuddle with injured sailors," Gold instructed. "We're in a hurry."

Ariel pouted. "Fine. And just what is it that we're playing fetch with?"

"A thing."

"Is it bigger than a bread box?"

"Who says it's a box? Did Pan tell you?! Are you a spy?!" Gold roared, conjuring his old cane up and raising it over her head.

"Ah!" Ariel ducked under a rock.

Gold blinked dazedly. "Sorry, I think this island's giving me PTSD." He tossed the stick aside. "I can't tell you the details because my old man is even nosier than Belle's."

Ariel glanced at Regina. "I didn't think it could happen, but working with him is actually making me miss working with you."

"Just find a woman named Belle. She'll probably either be at the library or tied to the railroad tracks. Either way, you'll need to cut her bonds and give her this." Gold handed her a sand dollar.

Ariel looked at it blankly. "But aren't Beauty and the Beast supposed to communicate through a magic hand mirror when they're apart?"

"I'm afraid I've already copyrighted that gimmick," said Regina. "Now shoo."

"But what about my man?"

"Well, you could simply check the yellow pages when you get to Storybrooke, but since you probably lack the initiative, I'll tell you when you get back."

Meanwhile, over at the child abuse capitol of the world, Pan inhaled sharply. Felix gave him a comforting hug. "Are you having another asthma attack, pookie? Shall I fetch your inhaler?"

"Dude, will you give it a rest?!" Pan shoved him aside. "I just noticed that someone's left the island."

"And yet you never noticed when that someone arrive on the island."

Pan gave him a dirty look. "A man…I mean, a pre-adolescent boy, is entitled to an occasional slip-up. Now get off my back and go put our loyal SCIENCE! geeks on alert. It's time to start mentally abusing Henry extra hard."
"So…your plan is to trap Peter Pan's shadow in a magic coconut and fly to safety?" Emma stared at her baby-daddy incredulously. "I'm not sure which part of that sentence is less credible."

"Emma, you're the daughter of Snow White, I'm the son of Rumplestiltskin, and we're trapped in Never-Neverland together after a long estrangement brought on by the evil Pinocchio."

Emma wearily picked up her chainsaw. "Tallyho, the hunt is on."

Hook darted out of the bushes, an ear trumpet and a pair of binoculars around his neck and a set of handcuffs attacked to one of his wrists. He slapped the other cuff around Emma's wrist, then gasped theatrically. "Whoops, clumsy me. I guess now I'll have to come with you. Sorry, I…heh heh…hope I'm not intruding on anything."

"Can't we just go get the key?" said Emma quizzically.

Hook took it out of his pocket, shoved it in his mouth, and swallowed. "Whoops, clumsy me."

Mary Margaret and David rose. "Sorry, Emma, but this latest love triangle of yours is simply too painful for us to watch anymore," said the quasi-prince. "I'd rather spend the next few hours hiking in uncomfortable silence with your mother. We'll meet you at Tink's and we can all numb our humiliation with some absinthe."

Having somehow given their cruel overseer the slip, the dwarves were sitting on the beach enjoying a meal. "As much as I love Snow and Charming," said Happy, "you've got to admit we're all a lot better-developed without them around. This is the first line actual line I've had in like two years."

"Ditto," said Doc. "Let's do something really wild with this time we've been given. We could mention Ruby again!"

"No, we should take this opportunity to ask Archie's feelings about his recent and horrible near-death experience," Sneezy suggested.

"Now now, if you start getting the idea that our puny lives matter, you're gonna be in for a rude awakening," scolded Leroy. "Besides, if anybody's going to get an episode, it should be m…" He trailed off, spotting a giant fish tail waving just offshore. He glanced down at his food uneasily. "What the hell has Granny been lacing this with?"

"Why is everyone always mistaking me for a hallucination?" Ariel poked her head out of the water and donned the bracelet. The dwarves watched raptly as she walked ashore, but when they saw that she'd somehow grown clothes, their interest waned and everyone but Leroy left. "Can you show me to the railroad tracks?"

"Railroad tracks? Oh, you must be looking for Belle. Right this way."

The invading nerds had been watching this scene through a spyglass. "Aw man, she somehow grew clothes! Well, there's nothing more to see here, so we might as well get Pan's stupid scheme underway."

Belle sat on a barstool at the only diner in town, too depressed to even take a bite out of her complimentary Zoloft cupcake. "Come on, give it a try. My recipe's gotten rave reviews from all the Charmings," said Granny.
Archie put an arm around her and smiled knowingly. "You miss Gold for some unfathomable reason, don't you?"

"Dude, you sold me out to Hook!" Belle punched him in the face. "I was shot in the back and erased from existence because of your cowardice! You didn't even bother to visit me in the hospital! And you're not even going to apologize? Not only that, but you still think you have the right to give me moral advice?!"

The former cricket clutched his bleeding nose sheepishly. "Sorry, it's just that Gold tells me you're the ridiculously forgiving type, so…"

"It's true, I am." Belle sighed. "You're not a monster, shall we make out now?" she offered halfheartedly

"No, if your boyfriend survives, he'll exterminate me. I just want to know why you're so down in the dumps. You should be on top of the world. You finally got to do something."

"Did I? Did I really?" said Belle. "Archie, the man I love is trying to spare me the agony of watching him die! It's a total insult!"

"Uh…what?"

"And those Charmings! Did they even notice how long it took them to find Hook's ship compared to how long it took me? If they'd had the sense to take me with them, we could all home by now!" Belle was furious, or as close to it as she ever got. "Now all the good characters are gone and I'm stuck here with the likes of you!"

"Hey!"

Belle ignored him. "I want Mulan back! She's the only person who ever lets me do anything cool!"

Leroy appeared in the doorway. "Mulan's busy right now, but I did find another Disney Princess who's interested in adventuring with you." He ushered Ariel inside.

"Wow, I never dreamed the 'No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service sign' would ever apply to a woman," said Granny, looking her over.

"If you're looking for the bait shop, it's two blocks that way." Belle pointed.

"No, your boyfriend sent me."

"He's alive? Everyone but me is going to be so disappointed. But screw them. Yippee!" Belle cheered. "Rumple's okay! Karma fails again!"

They headed back to the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, where Ariel presented Belle with a sand dollar. "I don't get it. Does Rumple want me to bribe a dolphin with this?"

"Don't ask me. I'm just a bit character."

"Hmm. Let's try smashing it and seeing if there's anything inside. That's what they usually do in the movies."

Belle sat the sand dollar on Gold's workbench, but before she could find a hammer, an image of her beloved beamed forth. "Hey baby. I sure hope you cast the protection spell, because we both know the Blue Fairy's not going to do it. Besides, I'm really not ready for you to meet my parents yet, and
trust me, neither are you. Blech. Anyway, you were right, as usual, and the freaky blind kid was wrong, as usual. I can defeat Peter Pan—that's who we're fighting, by the way—and live. I won't get to dance on his grave like I wanted to, but we've all got to make sacrifices. What I need you to do is find me an object from the shop. The only hint I can give you is this: 'All you'll have is an empty heart and a blank blank.'"

"Phew. For a minute there, I was afraid he was going to say something really stupid and vague, like 'you'll find it through the power of our love' or something," said Ariel.

Tears of joy streamed down Belle's face. "My true love's going to live, he's giving me plot relevance, and best of all, he's wearing leather pants again!" She threw herself into the mermaid's arms. "This is the happiest day of my life!"

Mary Margaret had seized her daughter's chainsaw and started smashing stuff at random. "Baby, this is just a hunch, but are you mad?" David asked tentatively. She pressed the blade against his throat. "Is that a yes?"

Emma took her mother aside. "You two really shouldn't be fighting in front of your kid. I could end up even more emotionally damaged than I already am."

"Are you taking his side?"

"Making me choose between the two of you is also horrible parenting," said Emma. "I'm starting to think that maybe growing up without you was for the best. You know, my child has been kidnapped and I've got a guy who tried to kill me and a guy who's supposed to be dead hitting on me. Don't you think maybe a little motherly advice is in order? Comfort? Anything?"

"Sorry, pumpkin, but I'm too wrapped up in myself right now."

"You're really coming off like a jerk in this scene."

"Fine, fine. Be careful and stuff," Mary Margaret advised halfheartedly.

Meanwhile, back at the child abuse capitol of the world, Pan was prancing around with a creepy leer, as usual. He clapped Henry on the back. "Hey little buddy, I made us an appointment to get your chest cavity measured, so if you'll just come this way—"

Henry shoved him away. "Not so fast! I think I'm finally starting to notice how creepy you are!"

"You stop that right now!" Pan ordered.

"No way! I know all my relatives are here on Neverland. For the first time ever, none of them are trying to kill each other, and you won't let me be there to witness the miracle!"

"I assure you, some of your relatives are, in fact, still trying to kill each other." He patted the hilt of his sword, smirking. "You're not missing anything unusual. Besides, if they love you so much, why haven't they come for you? You know perfectly well that Emma still thinks you're kind of creepy, and your grandpa's only in it to spite me, and your mom only wants you so Emma can't have you, and your dad is…erm, still dead, and Hook's only in it to score with Emma."

"Who's Hook?"

"Never mind!"
Henry wasn't impressed. "You really think you can put one over on me? I successfully kidnapped my own mother, defeated an evil queen, and came back from the dead!" He stormed off to rig up an interdimensional portal out of some bedsheets.

"Don't take it too hard, pookie. He just doesn't know you like I do," said Felix soothingly.

Pan shook him off. "I notice the boy's voice seems to be changing. He must have hit puberty, which means we can probably sway him with a cute girl. Stop flirting with me and go get Wendy, Felix."

Neal took Emma back to his bachelor pad to put the moves on her, but then remembered that she was still cuffed to Hook. "Okay, first things first." He snatched Emma's chainsaw and hacked through the chain.

"Thank you," said Emma. Hook pouted.

"Now then, to work. I'll be needing my coconut." He headed to the nest room to find it.

"No! Don't leave me alone with him!" Emma yelped, indicating Hook.

"Okay, come with me then."

"No! Don't leave me alone with him!" Emma begged Hook.

"Uh, okay, we'll stay here and you go," Neal offered.

"No, don't leave me alone with him!" Hook pleaded. Emma ignored him.

Neal raised his eyebrows. "What's with you?"

"I'm just feeling a little awkward around you since I made out with your baby mama. And your mama, for that matter."

"WHAT?!"

"You didn't know? How the hell did you manage to avoid hearing me when I yelled it in Echo Cave?"

"I guess I just chose not to notice that," said Neal stiffly. "Clearly Emma and I were made for each other."

"Oh yeah? Well, Emma and I both like to wear cool leather jackets. Clearly we were made for each other," Hook retorted back at him.

"Well, Emma and I both hate our parents! Present company included!" Neal looked pointedly at Hook.

"We both have severe anger management issues!"

"We both enjoy playing Slugbug!"

"We both hate and fear Jello!"

"We have a child!"

"By that logic, she should marry Regina!" Hook retorted.
"Yay!" squealed a gang of Swan Queen shippers, who had tagged along to sabotage both sides of the love triangle.

"You shoo!" said Emma, waving her chainsaw at the fangirls, who scattered frantically. "And as for you two, aren't you supposed to be loving each other as father and son?"

"We choose not to notice that," Neal and Hook both grated.

"Sigh." She held up the coconut. "Let's do whatever it is we're doing with this thing so I can go home and ditch you."

"We're going to trap Pan's shadow inside," said Neal. "All we need is some disposable little boy to lure it in with."

"A magic coconut? That doesn't make any sense at all," scoffed Hook. "Let's use this instead." He took a jar of dirt out of his pocket.

Neal smashed it. "I said we're using the coconut! Now get your flashlights ready, we're going to Dark Hollow."

"Jeez, the landmarks on this island all sound like they were named by a sadistic four-hundred-year-old sociopath," said Emma. "Or one of those creepy Goth people."

"Trust me, Pan wasn't just being melodramatic with Dark Hollow. If anything, the name is rather understated," said Hook.

"Whatever," said Emma. "Let's just get this mission accomplished before Regina and Gold beat us to the punch."

"Look at this stuff. Isn't it neat? Wouldn't you think his collection's complete?" Ariel marveled, twirling happily around the Little Pawnshop of Horrors.

"Aw nuts, not another hoarder," Belle groaned. "I have enough of those in my life, thank you."

Ariel picked up an ornate button. "Hey, I know what this is. It's all I had to remember my boyfriend Eric by, back in our land, because he was too cheap to buy me flowers."

Belle patted her on the back. "I hear ya, sister. My man was too cheap to buy me flowers, too. The only token I have of his love is a stupid piece of broken crockery, and he never even technically gave it to me. I had to break in and rifle through his stuff like some kind of Emma-Wait a minute, that's it!"

"Chip, I need you!"

"How dare you ask for my help? You smashed me to smithereens for absolutely no reason! Do you have any idea how many reconstructive surgeries I had to go through?" Chip cried indignantly.

"What gives?" said Ariel.

"Rumplestiltskin and I keep accidentally putting this teacup through hell, kind of like each other," Belle explained. "Rumple used to keep it hidden under his creepy puppets to scare off thieves, but I'm too scared to touch them, so let's just put it here," she suggested, sitting it in the china cupboard, on the only saucer to survive her boyfriend's various tantrums over the years. A hole opened up under their feet.

Ariel jumped back. "Is that where he sends his enemies?"
"No, I think it's a hiding place." Belle reached in and came up with a box labeled "Property of Pandora."

"Ooh, a jack-in-the-box!" Ariel looked it over excitedly. "I never thought I'd get the chance to see one of these! Where's the crank?"

"No, this is Pandora's Box. The trope codifier for Sealed Evil in a Can," Belle explained.

"Do you really think it's ethical to take something so evil and powerful to the most dangerous place in the world and deliver it into the hands of a manipulative Satanic weirdo and his friend the unrepentant mass-murderer?"

"My man is strutting around in leather pants and I'm not there to see it!" Belle shook the mermaid in desperation. "I have to do something!"

"Well, I of all people can certainly understand doing anything to get your man," Ariel conceded. "So what exactly is the sealed evil in this can? Hiatus?"

"Nah, that's too evil for even Rumple to contemplate using. Maybe it's the Jabberwocky again."

"Finally doing something besides fall in love, are you, ladies?" The interlopers appeared in the doorway, guns at the ready. "I'm afraid we can't have that!"

"Oh no! Nerds!" Ariel screamed, hiding behind Belle.

Belle was the last person to fear nerds, but the rope in their hands was a different story. "Oh gods, am I about to be locked up a seventh time?" The beauty trembled. "Please, anything but that! I'm so close to developing chronic claustrophobia that it's not even funny!"

"When my boyfriend finds out about this, he's going to turn you into dog food and give you to Ruby! And I'm not going to stop him this time!" Belle ranted as the interlopers tied her to Ariel.

The nerds looked wounded. "But we were told you like violent criminals who lock you up."

"Pfft. You wannabes aren't fit to oil Rumple's pants," Belle scoffed.

"Why do we keep doing what they tell us?" Ariel whispered.

"Because they'll kill us if we don't, and we don't have boyfriends to kiss us back to life at the moment."

"What is this thing?" the older of the nerds demanded. "A jack-in-the-box?"

"No, it's magic," said Belle. "Which, by the way, I usually hate too, so stop preaching to the choir."

"We don't hate magic. We'd like to, but Pan won't let us." The nerd pouted.

Belle looked at them with new respect. "You're a lot smarter than Greg and Tamara, though to be fair, so are some species of fungi."

"Greg and Tamara were idiots. They got us into a world of trouble with Pan for our low hiring standards," he sighed. "But unlike them, we are aware of our real mission, which is seeing that your Rumple fails for absolutely the first time ever."
Over at the child abuse capitol of the world, Pan looked over his shoulder to make sure Henry was creeping on him like a good Charming. "Excellent. Hey Felix!" he screamed at the top of his lungs. "Take these supplies to the other end of the island, and whatever you do, don't let Henry see!"

Felix, who was standing mere inches away, flinched. "Pookie, I'm right here."

Pan smacked him. "Just go, quick, before he frees himself from my clutches somehow like Bae did!"

He set off through the jungle, Henry on his heels. At one point, he lost the boy for a few seconds, and stopped to twiddle his thumbs idly. "I'm over here, under the banana tree! Not that anyone cares, of course!" he yelled.

As David and Mary Margaret hiked through the jungle in uncomfortable silence, the quasi-prince chuckled. "Giving me the silent treatment, my darling blabbermouth? That's the most ill-conceived revenge I've ever heard of. I give it five minutes."

"We're going to need to cut through this, and Emma's chainsaw's out of gas," Neal observed, faced with an impenetrable tangle of foliage.

"Here, you might as well take this. I'm surprisingly terrible at swordplay, considering my heritage." Emma offered him his old cutlass. "Hook gave it to me."

"WHAT?!" Neal raged, turning the blade on Hook.

"She means the cutlass! I gave her the cutlass!" Hook yelped.

"Oh." Neal relaxed slightly, slinking into the bushes. "You're off the hook for now then, no pun intended."

"What's with him?" said Emma.

"I told him we made out."

"But a gentleman never tells!"

"I'm not a gentleman. I used to be, but I got over it." The pirate sniggered. Emma whacked him over the head with her unpowered chainsaw. "Ow! Okay, what was your plan? Wait and tell him about it on your wedding day? Or ours?" He waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

"Hook, I know this is going to crush our many shippers, but I'm not marrying you. I will, however, acknowledge that you didn't sell out Neal when you had the chance. That was sweet, if OOC, of you."

"Aw, don't thank me. I just did it to spite Pan. He wanted to see if I'd screw Baelfire over in order to score with a woman. Again. But of course, that would have been dishonest and just plain cruel."

Emma shook her head incredulously. "Okay, who the hell are you and what have you done with the real Hook?" He opened his mouth to answer, but she stopped him. "On second thought, I don't want to know, I like the new guy better."

"Emma, I think my motives make perfect sense. I don't want to win the girl through trickery, like pretending I raped her to death."

"You're not helping your case."
"Stop playing hard-to-get! You're going to have to choose between Bae and me sooner or later!"

"No I won't. You see, there's this thing called being single."

"Never heard of it," said Hook curtly.

"Guys, quit bantering and come here! Henry is still in mortal peril, you know!" Neal yelled back at them.

"Oh, right, that guy." Emma left the pirate in the dust. "What's up, Bachelor Number One?"

"I think I found it." Neal pushed aside some branches to reveal a clearing overrun with shadowy black specters.

"Dementors!" Emma picked up a stick and pointed it at them. "Well, I remember how to deal with your kind! *Expecto Patronum!*" A wispy silver swan attacked the creatures, but they didn't seem affected.

"No, they're not dementors; they're the victims of Pan's shadow," said Neal, setting his…oy vey… magic coconut aside. "Before we get started, I'm just going to see if I can identify and hurt Greg real quick, so if you'll just give me a minute…"

Back at the Little Pawnshop of Horrors, Belle was still bound and helpless, as usual. "I'm starting to think it's long past time I got myself a gun," she grumbled, squirming sullenly.

"Don't lose hope, or I'll be forced to break into song," Ariel warned her.

"Sorry, it's just that my dreams of being a feminist hero have gone absolutely nowhere. I mean, Emma got to slay dragons, Snow got to mug travelers and brawl with trolls, Ruby got to learn cool superpowers, and what have I ever gotten to do? Make out with my boyfriend and sprinkle various magical substances!" She broke down weeping. "I once got tied to a railroad track, Ariel! A literal railroad track! Do you have any idea how insulting that is?" The beauty took a deep breath, trying to compose herself. "But enough about me. I'm sorry you'll never get the chance to reunite with your long-lost love like everyone else has."

"No worries, I'll find him. I will always find him. Even if the magic wears off this bracelet, I can always try that yellow pages thing Regina mentioned."

"Don't say that where Snow and Charming can hear—wait, what's this about a bracelet? That's what turned your tail into legs?"

"That and the magic of CGI."

"Yes!" Belle laughed hysterically. "I'm finally going to do it! I'm going to free myself without a big strong man's help!" She reached back, snatched the bracelet, and wriggled free. "Quick, let's go get that box back before the writers pointlessly strike me with amnesia again!"

"Where do you think they took it? Back to Prometheus?"

"No, my rare superpower called logic tells me they're at the mines."

As he and his wife wandered aimlessly through the jungle for the two hundred and forty-fifth consecutive hour, David smiled tentatively. "So, uh, how about that local sports team?" She shot him
a glare that would have frightened even Regina, and he withered. "Come on, baby. With all the awkward silences and suspicious glances, our marriage is becoming disturbingly similar to my relationship with Kathryn."

"I'm afraid I can't make small talk because it's taking all my willpower and concentration to keep from shooting you again," Mary Margaret seethed. "Did you really think I wouldn't stay here with you, you idiot? It's the first chance we've had to be alone in...well, ever!"

"You'd really leave Storybrooke forever? But what about our beloved daughter and her crippling abandonment issues?"

Mary Margaret waved her hand dismissively. "Eh, Emma's going to hate us no matter what we do, so there's no point in trying to spare her feelings."

Back in the unimaginatively-named Dark Hollow, Emma was staring skeptically at the...oy vey...magic coconut. "Neal, are you going to offer even a token explanation for this stupid thing?"

"Well, it's sort of like a magic bug zapper. The shadow gets drawn to the light, and somehow this hole-riddled lid holds it in."

Emma sighed. "If you say so, baby."

"It sounds like an idiotic plan, and that's not just my jealousy talking," scoffed Hook. "How are we going to light that thing?" Neal produced a cigarette lighter. "What the hell? You don't even smoke."

"I know, but the morning I got flushed down that last portal, I found out about Greg and Tamara. I was on my way to set fire to his house when Emma roped me into helping her." Neal clicked the lighter, but apparently Neverland's anti-technology field had remembered to exist again, because it didn't work.

"Hah, I'm going to start calling you Baelfire-retardant!" sneered Hook, snatching the lighter.

Neal grabbed it back. "Hey, first you steal my mom, and then you steal my girlfriend, and then you steal my lighter?!"

"I'm not your girlfriend, or anybody's," said Emma, looking tired.

They ignored her. "I also stole your cutlass at some point," said Hook smugly.

"Oh, that's the last straw!" Neal decked him.

"That's it—you just earned yourself a spanking, young man!" roared Hook, taking off his belt.

"You can't punish me—you're not my real dad!" Neal retorted sullenly.

Meanwhile, Pan's shadow had arrived with two backup singers. "I don't want you here and I don't need you! Don't bother to resist or I'll beat you!"

Emma tapped her unsolicited boyfriends on the shoulder. "Um, I'm sorry to interrupt you gentlemen, but we're all gonna die—"

But it was no use. Neal was busy slapping rather ineffectively at Hook. "I saw her first!"

Hook swatted girlishly back at Neal with his good hand. "Maybe in certain chronologies, punk!"
"Yep, that thing called being single is definitely starting to look good," said Emma ruefully. She reached for her chainsaw, but remembered it was out of gas, and was forced to resort to magic. "Emma SCORCH!" she roared, hurling a ball of fire at the…oy vey…magic coconut, sucking the shadow inside and slamming the lid on him.

"Aw, come on! Won't you please make way for a very special guy?" it whined, beating on the roof of its new prison.

Hook and Neal gaped at her. "Since when are you a sorceress?"

"Why, is magic one of your turn-offs?"

"No," they both replied.

"Damn."

Ariel followed Belle into the mines with trepidation. "Are you sure we should be down here, Belle?"

She indicated the railway. "What if you get tied to the tracks again?"

"Then you'll kill me and put me out of my misery, like any good friend would."

"Okay, fair enough," Ariel whispered, "but shouldn't we have stopped to pick up that gun you wanted?"

"This is the first chance I've had to show off in close to a year. I want to see if I can beat them without it," Belle replied.

They finally caught up with the nerds, who were about to give the box the axe. "Hey, do you think the boss would want us to bring him this priceless artifact of dark power, instead of carelessly wasting it?"

"Nah, just smash it."

"Freeze, dirtbags!" yelled Belle.

"Excuse me, but we're armed and you're not! You're the one who should be freezing!" The older of the two nerds flashed his gun.

"You think you can scare me? I was dragged from my home by a psychotic torture monkey and forgotten in a dungeon for thirty years, and it doesn't appear to have traumatized me in the least, so what hope do you have?" Belle scoffed. "Besides, I have something much more powerful than a gun." She widened her eyes and let them fill with tears.

"Ah! The pleading eyes!"

"Holy crap, they're even worse than the Charming Family Charm!" the nerds screamed.

"I'm so disappointed in you," said Belle with a quaver in her voice. "I know you can be better people than this."

"We're sorry, ma'am! We'll try harder!" one of the nerds sobbed guiltily.

"Please, just give us another chance!" The other nerd blinked. "Wait a minute, what the hell are we doing?" He smacked his brother and seized the gun. "Stop messing with our heads, lady! Bae would be furious if we shot his stepmom, but we'll do it if you make us!"
"Well, if you're going to be pigheaded about this, then I'm afraid we have no choice." Belle and Ariel linked arms and grabbed a couple of axes. "GIRL POWER!" they screamed, lighting into the nerds and seizing the box.

"Ow. Can you girls please stop defeating us so easily? You're making us look bad."

"Why should I?" Belle fired back at them. "You're trying to destroy magic, and it's a very important part of my sex life with Rumple!"

"Okay, TMI," said one of the nerds queasily.

"Lady, while we question your taste, we have no interest in destroying magic," said his brother. "We're just trying to save our sister."

"She's Pan's prisoner." The older of the nerds pointed at his brother accusingly. "It's all his fault."

"I was three!"

"You trusted a snarling demon over your own foster brother! Hell, even Greg and Tamara were smarter enough to be scared of the thing!"

"Comparing me to Greg and Tamara? That's a low blow!"

"Look, this isn't going to help," Belle interjected, "but my boyfriend might, if I flirt with him a little."

"That's not necessary. Pan says he'll set our sister free if we do his bidding for an unspecified amount of time, and he's certainly never given us any reason to distrust him."

Belle patted the nerds on their backs gently. "Listen, guys, you've made a terrible mistake. You tried to accomplish something without Rumplestiltskin's help, and that's fundamentally impossible. It's not too late to set things right, though. Fortunately, you've stumbled into the one person in the universe he actually listens to." She indicated herself.

"Hm, you make a strong case. We're John and Michael Darling, by the way, in case by some miracle you haven't figured it out yet."

Pan opened the box he'd had Wendy stuffed in for the past century or two, and she glared at him. "I don't care what those sickos who ship us say, there's no way I'm dating you after this!"

"Relax. Unlike my son, I don't like to make a habit of falling in love with my captives," said Pan, while Felix breathed a sigh of relief in the background. "But while I have no romantic interest in you, I think I know someone who will."

On the beach back in Storybrooke, Belle pulled Ariel into a passionate kiss. "Give this to my boyfriend for me, and tell him there's more where that came from if he tracks down the kid."

"Gotcha, and don't forget to check your library for that yellow pages thing like you promised." Ariel pulled off the bracelet, jumped in the water, and did whatever the hell mermaids do that allows them to cross dimensions.

Aided by some bread crumbs Felix had inexplicably dropped along the trail, Henry finally stumbled onto his destination; an elaborate treehouse. "Cool! I had no idea Swiss Family Robinson was part of our universe!" He scrambled up the ladder eagerly. "Hi, I'm Henry! Can I see your tiger?"
But all he found inside was a girl holding a thermometer above a candle. When she saw him, she hastily shoved it into her mouth and climbed into bed. "Cough cough, sneeze sneeze."

"Hey, you're not my family," Henry realized.

"Actually, I kind of am, but Pan told me not to mention it, so keep it under wraps." Wendy touched a finger to her lips.

Henry was so used to encountering long-lost relatives he didn't bat an eye. "Okay. So, who are you? My daughter?"

"No, I'm your Auntie Wendy, and I'm dying." She held up her thermometer. "See? I've got a temperature of over two hundred degrees."

"Why?"

"Because Neverland's power is fading."

"So why doesn't Pan just send you away from Neverland?"

"Because...because...because...!" Panicking, Wendy slumped back against her pillows. "Whoops, slipping into a coma—can't talk anymore." The girl started snoring theatrically.

"Wow, you're so cute when you're comatose," Henry marveled. "I guess that's my cue to imitate Grandpa and save you." He leaped heroically out the door. "L'il Charming away!"

Pan popped out of nowhere, as usual. "You know, if you ever get tired of being a damsel in distress, I think you could have an amazing career in the field of mental abuse."

"Aw, but I'm sick of mental abuse, and I really think poor little Henry has already had more than enough of that for one lifetime," Wendy protested.

"Just shut up and go back to rotting in your cage," snapped Pan. "I don't want you to start getting the idea that you're good for anything else, like that Belle chick did."

Gold was looking longingly out at the ocean, singing a very loud and off-key rendition of "Candle on the Water," while Regina stood in the background covering her ears. "Knock it off, already!"

"Sorry, you're right, this is bad for my image. I'll pine silently."

"Do you really think Belle can do this?"

"I think Belle could do lots of cool stuff if you'd stop locking her up and brainwashing her for five minutes."

"Hmph, look who's talking." Regina snorted.

"You're just jealous because I didn't have to use mind control to get her to sleep with me," Gold taunted. Regina broke down crying.

Before they could express their emotional pain by trying to kill each other, as usual, Ariel surfaced at their feet. "Here's your merchandise, now fork over the legs and my man's phone number."

Regina waved her hand over the mermaid's bracelet. "This should take care of the legs, but I don't really feel like telling you where Eric is anymore. Figure it out yourself."
"Hey, no fair!" Ariel pouted. "Looks like Belle and her yellow pages are my only hope. Oh, and speaking of Belle—" She jumped up and hauled Gold down for a passionate kiss. "She wanted me to give you that and tell you there's plenty more where it came from if you save a little girl named Wendy."

"Save a child who doesn't belong to me? Hmph, that's the most preposterous thing I've ever heard," scoffed Regina.

Ariel ignored her. "Belle also wanted me to tell you that if you don't like it, good luck finding another young, beautiful, intelligent girl with a fetish for moldy-mouthed old loons who killed all their previous lovers."

Gold considered her words. "Well, when you put it that way… tell Belle I said yes dear, you're right and always have been, would you care for a foot massage?"

"You both suck!" Emma screamed at her unsolicited boyfriends.

"Agreed," they replied sheepishly.

"I can't believe I even have to say this, but I'm not putting some guy I just met and some guy I just reunited with over my only child's welfare!"

"Wow, you're nothing like my last girlfriend," said Hook. Neal punched him in the face.

Emma pulled them apart. "Seriously, knock that off, or I'll hook up with Archie just to spite you!"

Tinkerbell groaned at the sight of the Charmings on her doorstep. "If you're going to play that stupid 'I wuv you more' game again, can you please find somewhere else to do it?"

"Trust me, we won't be playing that game again anytime soon." Mary Margaret gave her husband a sidelong glare. "We're here because we, meaning Neal, found a way off the island. We, meaning Emma, are going to capture Pan's shadow."

"How?"

"With a magic coconut."

Tink rolled her eyes. "Do you really expect me to buy that?"

Neal arrived on the scene, coconut held high. "All right, we, meaning Emma, trapped Pan's shadow in the magic coconut."

Tinkerbell glanced from his face, to Mary Margaret's, to the…oy vey…magic coconut. "Okay, whatever." She gave Neal a double-take. "Baelfire, it's you! Remember all those wacky adventures we used to have here in Neverland?"

"Now Tink, it's not fair to tease the audience with flashbacks you know they'll never get," Neal chided.

"Fair enough. Shall we go pick up your kid now?"

"Yes, please." As the rest of the Nevengers headed upstairs for one last glass of absinthe, Neal took Emma aside. "Hey Emma? Before we get underway, I just wanted to say… yes dear, you were right about Henry and always have been, would you care for a foot massage?"
"No thanks, but I appreciate the sentiment."

Neal smiled to himself as she walked away. "Well, I may have struck out with Emma, but least I can take comfort in knowing I'm nothing like my father."

Back at the child abuse capitol of the world, Pan skipped up to Henry with glee. "Why so glum, chum? Did all that mental abuse finally kick in?"

"No, I found my long-lost auntie Wendy."

"I know—I mean, I know I should have told you she was dying, but I didn't want to depress you." Pan saved.

"I'm not depressed because she's dying. I'm depressed because she's beautiful and comatose, and I'm a Charming, so I'm therefore obligated to go on some stupid quest to save her."

Smirking, Pan swung an arm around his great-grandson's shoulders. "I'm glad we understand one another."

A/N: Props to IHeartFantasy for her help with this chapter :)