### Seeing is Believing

**by JayJ**

**Summary**

"Isn't that how the saying goes?"

**Notes**

Spoilers for 3x01
The woman was dead and gone.

Crushed heart, and warm ash, still lingered in Rumplestiltskin's open palm. But he makes no move to brush it off for he was far too concerned with savoring the sight of the corpse now lying at his feet.

"I can't say I didn't want to see that happen."

Dark eyes shoot up in surprise at the voice. Even more shocking to them was the lone figure standing there looking down at the body of the vile woman responsible for his son's death.

"Emma," he uttered, thoroughly confused by her sudden appearance.

"Yes, here I am." She said, gaze rising up to him slowly, green eyes glowing and cunningly bright. "Can you believe that?"

Perplexed, and in lieu of answering her sarcasm, Rumplestiltskin glances around the surrounding area; fully expecting—and dreading—to see the motley crew of incompetence that would surely have accompanied her presence here.

But he saw no one.

Looking back, he finds Emma staring at him quietly. He frowns, she smirks. It suddenly feels like role reversal.

"It's just me." She tells him. "None of them are here."

And so he quickly returns to form.

"Then I can only assume that the others have become so distracted bickering amongst themselves that you foolishly elected to go on ahead and venture off on your own."

But Emma says nothing to that, so he looks at her curiously.

"You must know that without you there to mediate the four of them may, for once, actually succeed in killing each other. Their lack of decorum is comically obvious. I'm rather surprised you've managed to make it this far so quickly."

Unexpectedly, she still doesn't bite back. She remains passive, and doesn't react despite his open mockery of the people she cared for. It was eerie, and unlike her, not to respond in defense of others.

She stayed silent, and just kept on staring at him.

So he does the same to her.

There is an uncommonly soft lightness to her pale features then that confuses him and which, unintentionally, begins to stir something inside him.

Like the warmth of a once forgotten memory.
It's odd, to see her like this; considering extenuating circumstances. She seemed, almost strangely, too calm and maybe a little playful in her demeanor.

"Something on your mind, Gold?" she asked, having caught notice of his off guarded attentiveness.

"Nothing that concerns you, dearie," he said, tone sharper than necessary. But Emma is unfazed by it. He wonders if she'd finally grown accustomed to its harsh and cutting sound.

"Funny, considering how much you had to say to me early about what you were thinking," She paused, steps over Tamara's corpse, and saunters just past him. Only to stop and remains near his side. She glances sidelong at him for a moment.

"Mostly of how little you thought of me."

She then looks away. He notes how purposefully and lax her stance becomes. He thinks she's waiting for his response, perhaps even expecting an apology.

He barely offers the former, "and that opinion still stands."

Then Rumplestiltskin claps his hands together sharply; the small burst of dust rises and swiftly catches in the winds. The ashy remains of his son's killer scatter and spill along the cold soil. The wind here is soft and sweeping, but there's not a sound to be heard.

"Though I will admit," he begins, after a mournful beat, to distract himself and also upon noticing Emma's muted stillness and continuously close proximity, "I am quite impressed you were able to find me."

He turns his gaze towards her slowly; aligns his eyes along the delicate angle of her face. He wants to read her expression even if it's only partially visible.

"Perhaps you may be more adept within the constructs of Neverland than you had initially appeared to be."

"And appearances are what matter most." Emma said, tilted her head back just a little for him to see, voice considering, "seeing is believing. Isn't that how the saying goes?"

His fingers twitch and curl at his side. He does not know why.

"So you're angry with me." He decides with a dismissive nod of acknowledgment, "for what I said to you on the ship."

"No," she shook her head, wisps of blonde glow along the moonlight, "you said exactly what I needed to hear."

The words linger heavily around them, over him mostly, and he thinks to say something back. But he can't seem to think of a single word to say.

"And that's what you do." She continues with a swift turn of her body; facing him once more, and looks at him like a puzzle solved, "try to help, guide me along in some form or manner, although it's usually in the most condescending and patronizing way possible."

She pauses, gives him another inscrutable look, inhales, and then finally said, "in spite of the cost to you, I really do think you want me to succeed in finding Henry."

Rumplestiltskin stilled, regarded her suspiciously and with anger.
"And what do you know of cost? Have I not already suffered the loss of my son? What more could I lose?"

She scoffed openly at his indignation. "You don't think I can't get inside your head Dark One? See what makes it turn, and go tick tock?"

She moves suddenly: steps once, then twice, and dispels much of the distance between them.

"You're a selfish man, first and foremost, Gold. So there's no way that this, you being here in Neverland, is just about you wanting to honor Neal's memory. There's something else going on, and it's why you went rogue the second we got here."

He leans into her; intimidating and close. "Careful there, dearie, you're treading on dangerous grounds."

"That's never stopped me before," she whispered back.

It's heated and evocative; the threat and challenge brewing between them. Like a wildfire; it burned unpredictably and nearly sears his cold control.

So for once, it's Rumplestiltskin who blinks first.

But only to catch a better look, "you're not real."

And with those words stripped and laid bare something tangible is left exposed; the silence becoming crisp and purposeful. And the gust of wind that follows is a heavy one; dancing against his flesh and through his bones as if's being guided along by another's skillful persuasion. He shivers, despite himself, then declares firmly; absolute in his conviction.

"You're not really Emma."

And the woman standing in front of him gives a smirk; softly twisted and turning.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! It's been a little while.

This was originally meant to be just a oneshot for my Golden Moments series but then I decided that it would be fun to break it up into a short multi-chapter fic instead. I began writing this after the premier last week, having finally found myself inspired to write again (spent the whole summer writing a whole lot of nothing) and I'm not too sure where or how far I'm gonna go with this yet but I hope you all enjoy what I have done so far and continue to read along.

Let me know what you think.
"I'm really, really not."

She confirmed with a lazy nod, then added, "yet here I am, as real as can be. Right here with you, Rumplestiltskin. Now that really says something, don't you think?"

"Only that you're a trick. And a poorly played one at that."

He moves back briskly, and studies the shadow wearing Emma Swan as its mask. She in turn does nothing. Stands there and waits.

She's letting him figure this all out.

It takes him no time at all.

"I thought Pan was better than this," he said surely; annoyed by this unforeseen, though not unexpected, turn of events, "thought he had real imagination. Sending a manifestation of you to manipulate me, did he really think that would work?"

"You tell me." The visage of Emma challenged. "This is your head, after all."

Tilting her own curiously at him Rumplestiltskin notes the now distinctly inhuman quality to her movement as she asked specifically.

"Why am I here?"

But he remains silent; choosing not to answer such a dangerously innocent sounding question. Yet his lack of response only gives her incentive to continue on and fill in those blanks for him.

"Maybe—just maybe—it's because I do matter." She begins, her gaze imploring but certain and insightful. "And that I may have mattered to you a little more than I should have."

She candidly begins to pace towards him. "At least, more than you'd ever care to admit or try to acknowledge anymore."

And he tries to not let it bother him; the things she's saying or the potential power they could have over him.

But then she steps in close, and is once more near him; her stance eloquent and still, and right there in front of him. And the calculating smile she bares for him in that moment is a simple one.

So he knows he needs to get away. Break this spell quickly. "I have no time for such childish tricks."

But she pointedly ignores him, and lowers her voice down as if telling him a deep and dark secret meant only for his ears.

"You've gone and repressed what you felt; buried it away deep inside. But now Peter Pan's found it, dug it all up, and brought me out to play this little game with you."

And as she makes her hushed declarations and intentions known Rumplestiltskin can barely contain
the anxious and gnawing rage at them, or refrain himself from lashing out against her for daring to say them to him so boldly.

Yet, just staring back at the face that was Emma's—but wasn't—seemingly has the same affect over him as her true counterpart's had.

It inexplicably made him stop.

So he directs his contempt into the next words he spoke.

"If that conniving little brat thinks for moment that he can get inside my head, and toy with my emotions, he should have been smart enough to at least conjure up an illusion of my beloved Belle."

"The heart of your goodness, and North Star?" the false Emma asked skeptically, as if she'd just heard the most absurd thing in the world. "Why would he do that when he could use your weakness, and darker nature, to entice you instead?

She gives a loud tisk and shakes her head with disapproval. "I thought you were better at these sorts of games."

Rumplestiltskin openly scoffed, his disbelief blatantly apparent. "you—he—truly believes that Emma Swan, of all people, is a weakness of mine? What could I possible desire from an emotionally stunted, strong headed, and infuriatingly disillusioned woman like her?"

She actually laughs. It's a crude and jarring little sound. And nothing at all how he'd once imaged her laughter would be like.

But he quickly forces that thought away.

"Such an interesting word choice there…desire. To wish for and strongly want some—"

"Enough." He snapped, turned around briskly, and began to walk away; determined to leave this place, and that woman behind, "we're done playing now."

"But why am I her?"

The sound of Emma's voice echoes behind him; as light and cool as the night air surrounding them, "why me?"

The implication stops him dead. He circles around, and looks back at her.

"Because of a kiss, I would think," she answers for herself, sighing gently and melodramatically; clearly a ploy to aggravate him. He sneers, but waits for her to elaborate further.

She does so, in a manner, but only after a deliberately prolonged beat.

"Back in Storybrooke, you must have asked yourself again and again; why hasn't it worked yet?"

He plays dumb, "what?"

"True love's kiss," she said, "you're still the Dark One. And Belle, well, the end of Lacey was just one of those magical—at the eleventh hour—sort of fixes."

Her voice then noticeably lightens up in tone; giving it a delighted and cruel sounding edge as she carried on. "That's what brought her back in the end since, as you may recall, your kiss fell pretty damn flat in that department."
And Rumplestiltskin can only feel his anger rising back up sharply with each word she spoke, even more so than the dread that seems to fill him.

So he tries to reason it all away, "magic is complicated and layered—like love—it functions differently in every world."

"But not true love," She contended, "Its power is the strongest magic of all and the only one capable of transcending worlds. And breaking any curse."

This Emma regarded him too perceptively, "you can't honestly believe that you and Belle are just the exception to that timeless and classic rule."

"There's no other explanation needed for it. It simply is the way it is," he said, "and I whole heartily believe in that."

She smiles, dark and knowingly, "liar, liar," she sang.

Chapter End Notes

So I definitely posted this chapter a bit sooner-and a little bit shorter in length-then I had originally planned to but I ended up having some free time to write and decided because its Turkey long weekend I'd give my readers a nice gift of thanks for taking a chance and reading this story. I'm glad you're liking this story so far and I hope you continue to do so.
"You are truly a horrible personification of Emma Swan." Rumplestiltskin frowned, irritably.

"Well whose fault is that?" She shot back childishy, "with our history together, you'd think you'd know me a bit better then this."

They leer at each other, but only for a split second. Because then she drifts off, and curiously wonders towards a stray beam of moonlight.

And it's a peculiar—though fascinating—sight to behold; watching as this skewed version of the savior becomes preoccupied with studying her own flesh and blood. Feeling it out and testing its motion before raising an arm up with distinct and inquisitive purpose to roam airily along the silvery light.

She appeared dazed but quite taken by what she was seeing and experiencing as she begins to engage her hand in simple but deliberate activities. Stretching, and clenching, and waving it around from side to side.

And Rumplestiltskin mindlessly observes her as she carries on for a short time.

But then she twiddles those long fingers of hers; does so in a manner too similar to his own for it to be anything but coincidental.

It immediately jars his attention, and sparks his notice and annoyance; for she's clearly amusing herself at his expense.

And now he's beginning to lose what little remains of his patience.

"And what is this really?" He asked bluntly; his growing frustration with her evident in the quick snap of his tone of voice.

"What could possible be Pan's objective with this little game of his?"

The question lurks in the darkness between them. Reluctantly, she lowers her arm back down into the shadows; her strange and childlike wonderment fading along with its decent.

She turns her fallen gaze to him once more as he tells her firmly, and too insistently.

"Intimidating me by using the knowledge of a short lived infatuation with a woman I could never have will provide him with no advantage against me."

Her stare ignites and flickers. She opens her mouth snappishly; a clever retort surely formed and ready to strike.

But then she stops and says nothing to him at all.

Instead, she angles her head to the side—ever so slightly—as if turning her ear up to catch on to the soft hum of a low whisper. Her lengthy hair gets swept up in a gust of wind while her eyes fall wayward and become dull as she listens for its sound.
Rumplestiltskin's own body grows tense with each passing heartbeat he feels stuttering within him. He's worried, and feels out of his element.

In fact, he knows that he is.

So he takes the quieted moment to promptly assess and consider his options.

And he knows without a doubt that fleeing from this place would be the obvious and most effective course of action. Especially with his blonde and artificial annoyance currently preoccupied. He can leave now without notice, or further conflict. And can simply be done with this.

No fuss, no muss.

But then, his crueler and much more vindictive side interjects, reminds Rumplestiltskin that he could just as easily destroy this feisty doppelganger with a flaming flick of his wrist before going about on his merry way.

He even deliberates briefly on whether to give her a quick and sudden death; which was a mercy he would grant so few who dared to challenge his affections for Belle.

His fingers dance at the tempting thought as a stroke of heat twists and turns along his opened palm.

But then Emma's distinct but shadowy green eyes snap back into focus, and the look she gives him is one of decisive pursuit and cause. Chilling his hand, and freezing it still.

He clenches it shut.

And all Rumplestiltskin can do then is ask, "What does he want?"

Chapter End Notes

A short update, but an update nonetheless. I actually wrote a little bit more for it but this honestly felt like the right place to end the chapter so I went with that instinct. Hopefully I can use what I have to get the next one completed and posted sooner.

As always, thank you all for reading.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

"What do you want, Gold?"

Emma asked him softly. And his grin falls loose and goes crooked against her; teasing and thoroughly delighted by her green eyed glare.

He licks his lip, opens his mouth, and said;

"Wouldn't you like to know."

Rumplestiltskin snaps back into the present moment; into the bleak darkness, and the cold shock, of the here and now.

He hastily blinks the past away, taken aback by its abrupt invasion, and muttered a simple, "what?"

But it's a shrilling sound that follows his inquiry; one of cracking bones. And there's a distinctly callow and jaded glower being directed solely on him.

This Emma is not amused anymore; her fingers curling at her sides at his blatant display of ignorance at her coy and sly frivolousness.

"I said…” The blonde, a stark and strange manifestation of the woman he thought he knew, repeated her words tersely, "Wouldn't you like to know."

He frowns curiously at her—at her choice words—but then observes the shuttered but daring gleam to her copycat eyes as she spoke them. He also catches onto the subtle difference to her demeanor and stance as the cool wind continues to blow and surround them; growing stronger with each passing moment that lingers unspoken between the two of them.

Something is changing—or was only beginning to change—or maybe it's changed already.

It's there—coming—coming back. He's sure of that. And a familiar sensation accompanies its steady presence and causes Rumpelstiltskin to experience an unwanted and escalating sense of trepidation.

He knew what—or who—this could be.

He thought he was ready for this. Now that it seems to have come, he's not so sure any more. But just as quickly as the realization—and that panic—dawned and took hold of him, the cold air inexplicitly stopped. Then altered, and began to drift differently.

It suddenly felt crisper—more refined—like a newly sharpened blade poised and ready to strike him down.

But it's Emma voice that responds to its menacing edge.

"I'm sorry," she said quickly—she says it sincerely, baffling Rumplestiltskin.

And then, "I know I'm doing this wrong. But it's funny in here, so hard to make proper sense of how she works. And what she does to him—he to her—whatever this is. It's making this pretty little head of mine spin round and round trying to get it all together in the right ways."
She starts to pull at her hair—wretched and sad—and looks positively fearful as she speaks her defense like a small child trying desperately to atone for her mistakes while being reprimanded for them; scolded by a parent for her ongoing and disappointingly poor behavior.

It was strange to watch her crumple and break down so completely in that instance and it disturbs him in a way to see it happening. Only because this was supposed to be Emma, and Emma didn't break down so easily, and never this dramatically.

But he also knows exactly who this poor imitation of his savior is speaking to—reasoning with, apparently—and why she would be terrified at the prospect of angering him.

He gets the feeling, only because deep down inside he was still very much afraid of him too.

"I can do better." She promised earnestly to the bleak emptiness all around her. But he sees that her nails have begun to dig into her palms; anxious and unsurely. Almost as if she was trying to tear away the stolen flesh from her shadowed self and with it the burden that came with having to be the one to wear its face.

"I just need time to figure her out is all," she gasps, and cries out pitifully, "maybe some real insight into her."

And with those words there's another abrupt change in the direction of the winds flow. Rumplestiltskin can feel it slipping back. And then it's gliding against his face softly, sweeps along—almost affectionately—and ruffles his hair. It's warmer, and then just as swiftly as it comes it's gone away.

Now the night is still once more.

He releases a deep and shaken breath. One he did not realize he'd been holding.

And she's coughing loudly. He sees her stumble on her feet briefly as the weight of whatever invisible force had befallen her is lifted. Her hands shoot up, one to her neck as the other rubs at her temple furiously. She tries to hide her face.

A determined and stubborn gesture is what that is, and one that is almost too familiar in its efforts and execution.

Rumplestiltskin wonders fleetingly if her doing it was a clever and intentional imitation, or if maybe, it was an instinctual reflex. Because, in his perspective, it's exactly what Emma would be doing under similar circumstances.

It's simple, and what she's always done when faced with uncertainty and an overwhelming and growing sense of fear; she tried to hide it, and make it go away.

She never did like letting her vulnerabilities show.

It's the first trait of the savior this fake incarnation has truly gotten spot on since its emergence. And so there's the slightest inclination inspired in him to go to her. The echo of the woman she was trying to be pulling at something left latent inside of him.

He remembers a time.

Remembers being quite fond of the idea of trying to see through the opened cracks, and drawing out those secrets laid deep inside—
Rumplestiltskin stopped himself.

And sternly pushes aside that particular stream of fond reminiscence. He really needed to stop doing that, and would have to make a point to be more careful with allowing his straying thoughts and memories to build up and fester onto the surface—such obscure, but deeply personal things were dangerous in a place like this.

In Neverland anything could be made into a weapon against you. He knew this; careless mistakes would only lead to his failure in saving his grandson.

And Emma's lost boy.

Her blonde head whips back up then, hair thrown back and coming down recklessly; skewing strands falling over her glazed eyes. She forces on her lips a small hint of a sweet smile; a show and an attempted suggestion of control regained once more.

She rises up further and stands tall, gives a little and playful shake of her body, her fraying nerves calmed and readjusting back into the places she wanted them to be.

It's just the two them once more. So he wonders what this twisted mockery of Emma would try to do next.

And it's not at all what he expects.

"Well it's been fun," she declared after a candid moment, tone overtly pleasant and obviously fake, "but it seems all things must..." she lets the saying fall flat, instead she gives a lazy wave of her hand in its place—a bland gesture as of to say 'you get where I'm going with this'—before she turns and starts to walk away.

"Where are you going?" he demanded at her retreating form, shocked by what appeared to be her anticlimactic departure. Despite his early intentions to see her gone he wasn't done with her yet. Not after what he had just seen transpire.

He wanted answers. And Rumplestiltskin was going to get them from her.

So he marches forward, his pace hastened and purposeful. By the time she turns around—to answer him in her now usual and snarky manner—he was already upon her, and his hand moves up against her viciously; seizing her by the throat.

She blink rapidly at first, having been taken by surprise by his sudden assault, but does not try to fight back. She only wraps her fingers around his wrist slowly—the one claiming her neck—but otherwise makes no move to wrench his grip off of her. She looked unfazed, and simply stared back at him without fear despite the firm hold he now held over her.

It was obvious to Rumplestiltskin that he was seen as the lesser of two evils between her. And he had to find a way to change that singular mindset she held towards him.

He needed her to be afraid of him. Wouldn't Emma be afraid of him now?

He thinks she would be. And her doppelganger should be no different to her in that regard. His grip tightens considerably, nails digging into vulnerable flesh; marring her pale and moonlit skin with crescent red marks.

Fingers press steadily against his wrist, brush heavily along his quicken pulse point, and her green eyes widening only a fraction.
But he sees it, and it's the slip he wanted, and now he knows he has her.

"What is this?" he asked; his stare beseeching and very, very dangerous. They glowed with the certainty of a dark promise held; that he would hurt her, if need be. And that he could hurt her despite the familiarity of the face she wore and openly taunted him with.

"Peter Pan doesn't want you as an enemy," she admitted finally, voice strained by the pressure he ruthlessly inflicted, "he'd rather play nice with you."

"He has a funny way of going about it."

She grins mirthlessly, despite the pain; all tooth and teases. "Well, daddy dearest always did have skewed sense of fair game. Isn't that right, laddie?"

Chapter End Notes

Finally, I managed to update! So sorry it took so long- but yay still, I hope.

I got a serious and sudden case of writer's block over the past few weeks when certain spoilers started popping up for the show (IE; Pan's identity). Made me re-think some things. And I started re-writing what I had originally written for this chapter, hence the long delay. But I hope it was worth the wait.

Feedback is great. I feel like there's a tonal shift here and I hope it still manages to flow well with the previous chapters.

xoxox
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

For BundyShoes, because I'm pretty sure I have you to thank for this update. Your Neverland story really got me thinking about my own again. And how much I missed writing it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s a momentary setback. A relapse of judgement, and with it comes that literal snap.

“...Don’t ask me to be your conscience ...”

Emma had said those haunting words to him, right before, and all that’s left now were the increasingly heavy burden and dead weight of them.

"Isn't that right, laddie?"

Rumplestiltskin’s still holding on; grip set firmly around its warm throat even as his body unintentionally begins to quiver and tremble with its own chilling awareness. Because, somehow, even like this, it disturbs him profoundly to bear witness to the dawning realization as it unfolds before his very eyes; of how capable, and so easily, he can actually break her down and hurt her.

*Of how fluidly the harsh words spoken to her in that one moment can pour out from him.*

And of how simply he can just snap the neck of a shadow wearing her pretty face, as twisted and as cruel as it may be.

*As necessary of an evil as they may be.*

He abruptly lets go, lets the shadow’s suddenly all too real body collapse to the ground. Watching it fall; limply and almost comically boneless as it crashes down to pieces like the exquisitely detailed but now irreversibly broken doll that it was. Limbs fallen askew on the dirt with its yellow and moon kissed hair pouring over its empty face in a morbid mockery of blood spilled against it.

He steps back quickly from the sight of it. Though his hazy and conflicted gaze never once deviate from the picture of a girl, of Emma Swan, lying dead at his feet.

*Staring up sadly as he speaks.*

Rumplestiltskin blinks back rapidly, trying desperately to rid the skewed images from his splintering mind. The literal one before him is more than enough and somehow too much for him to handle in itself. Despite the legitimacy of the kill and of his feelings for the creature playing a poor game of dress up he can’t seem to shake the growing horror that’s building in his chest as he looks down at its lifeless shell.

A part of him, so small but still there, had not thought himself capable of doing it, of doing what he had just done; follow through on his forceful and bold threat to the contrary.

And yet, he had. He'd actually gone and killed her.
He'd killed Emma.

His fingers flicker and a quick gust of wind burst forth across her face; blowing the lengthy hair away from it. He continues to stare openly at it until finally cold and brutal logic slowly manages to seep in, along with it his intrinsically darker nature, and attempts to console and assure him that what's done is done. That there was no need to wallow like that lost little boy he once was for a shadow wearing the wrong girls face. For there were more important matters at hand. And he was all grown up, and it was most certainly time to go.

Because this, this is what Pan wanted—it knew, he knew—and Rumplestiltskin won't dare give into him.

He won't play so nice with his daddy dearest this time.

But still, he can't seem to look away completely. Reconcile the fact of the matter. Of what he's done now, over what he'd done then. *It's so hard to leave her in the state that he has.*

*But he looks down at his cane anyway. And with one last glance he spins it instead.*

And then he's gone.

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As Rumplestiltskin reappears, once more emerging within the perpetual darkness that defined the cursed island, he finds himself lingering at the edge of the ocean bank.

He glances around and seeing that there was nothing in the immediate vicinity has a sense of calm descending upon his frayed nerves, one that washes over him as gently as the coming waves hit the shoreline.

Until, that is, he hears the distant echo of voices. A set of all too familiar voices.

Bickering amongst themselves, no less.

But one in particularly sets the rattle back into his bones. The feeling the sound of it brings to him is surprising difficult to decipher, and yet he find himself moving towards it regardless.

"It's time for all of us to believe. Not in magic, but in each other."

He hears Emma say as her voice carries to him, decisively reigning in over the escalating situation amongst the lot of them. She'd taken his advice to heart, clearly, but only to a degree it seems. Still, there's the briefest swell of pride in knowing that he was the one to inspire such determination. That firm resolve needed to survive and succeed against a monster as devious and cunning as Peter Pan would be.

'She's had a great of deal practice with that kind of beast, don't you think?' A twisted little voice twinkling inside his head reminds him all too sweetly. It's peculiar, and rather strange to Rumplestiltskin, how the same voice could possibly resonate so differently. Yet it swiftly reminds him of what he had done to elicit such a response from the desperate savior. And reminds him more so of what he'd just done to her, in a way..

'You are your father's son, after all...'

His pace quickens, the need to see the real deal of a girl he shouldn't care for any more becoming a sudden and cold-blooded necessity.
But something catches his notice, and stops him dead.

"...I'm not Belle..."

Green eyes—perfectly matched to another's but so wrong in tone—blinked back to life and willed away the memory that was hers by extension but wrong in angle and perspective right as raw pain invaded her completely and had her clawing away at her own throat as she pitifully gasped and gagged for air, before muttering,

"What a bastard."

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I don't really know where the heck this chapter came from. I'd been having the most frustrating time trying to figure out how I wanted to transition the plot forward. Then the other night it just came to me, inspiration had finally struck as I laid in bed, and the chapter really wrote itself from there.

Still, I hope you liked it. Sorry it's short. Thoughts, critiques, are always welcome.

xoxo

FYI, for those of you wondering...Chapter 58: Torment, of The Stories that Make Us by BundyShoes.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Rumplestiltskin watches her from a distance.

Chapter Notes

Well...this was unexpected.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rumplestiltskin watches her from a distance.

Always from a distance, it seems, these days. But after everything that’s already happened he really shouldn’t be going anywhere near her.

He does anyway.

“Did you have a happy childhood, Emma?” He asked her pointedly, curtly as he settled in close as the ship rocks around them gently. It was something he should know, he reasoned. In a place like this, in a place like Neverland, your upbringing could be an asset or your greatest weakness against you.

His would be the latter. Of that he was certain. In what way it would be used against him, Rumplestiltskin did not yet know. But there was no need for her to be privy to that particular can of worms. And truly hers was the only one that would matter, here and now. He tells himself these things. He’s not sure why.

Still, Emma looks at him strangely as she jumps down from her post, just a glance of confusion as she abandoned her work out simply to turn away from him.

“That’s a pretty odd thing to be asking me right now.” She said as she begun to busy herself with organizing some of the weaponry lain out across the cot while actively avoiding his gaze by doing so.

“It’s important,” He insisted, tone directed to a point, as he added, “I need to know.”

“Why?” She turns to him just as sharply. “It’s none of your damn business.”

Rumplestiltskin manages to repress the flinch at her harsh words, surprisingly. He did not expect that reaction to them. It unnerves him, suddenly, how swiftly she can just tear away at his flesh.

Still, he pushes forward. “Do not fool yourself into thinking you are in control here, Miss Swan. Neverland thrives on chaos, on our collected miseries, to use against each and every one of us at will. And those of our childhood are the ones it most delights in exploiting. If I am going to be of any help to you here then you need to be as truthful about your past as I require you to be. Otherwise I cannot help you in saving your son. So I ask you again; did you have a happy childhood?”
Emma just looks at him like he’s gone and asked the one question with the most obvious answer in
the world, “Of course I didn’t.”

It’s expected, but still the truth of it hurts a part of him he’d rather not dwell on.

He nods his head at her omission, as if contemplating it, then said, “There are things I may need to
do for you.” He looks at her face, studies it before amending, “for Henry. That may not be up to that
standard and heroic code of conduct your parents and you so ardently strive to live by. You need to
understand my limitations to what I can and cannot do because of it.”

He’s trying to be kind. Maybe he’s trying to prepare her. In the only way he thinks he can. But she
only stares back at him as if seeing something she’d rather not be looking at.

Finally, she said. “I’m not Belle.”

Rumplestiltskin recoils as if struck. Confusion ties a noose around his neck and suddenly he feels like
he can’t breathe.

“You’ve misunderstood my intent.” He barely manages to say.

But Emma simply shakes her head, steps away from him while crossing her arms. She’s
contemplating her next words. And despite a deep and very real desire not to do so; he wait for her
to speak them.

“I think you’re the one who’s confused Gold.” She said, “You didn’t coming here looking for a way
to help me. It was just the best excuse you could think of to come. What you’re looking for is a free
pass. A solid we have to try our best speech so that you can go back home and say you played nice
with the good guys; that your actions, whatever they may end up being, are somehow justified just
by you trying. But I’m telling you point blank; I’m not the one who’s going to be giving that to you.”

She looks him in the eye, really looks, “My answer is no. Don’t ask me to be your conscience. Or
expect me to be. I don’t care if you’re trying to be better. If you needed that type of moral hand
holding you should have brought Belle.” She steps closer, her resolve a fire that can nearly burn.
“No, I’m the one that’s going to tell you to get me my son back at any cost. And I don’t care what
you have to do—or who you need to be— to make sure that happens.”

And this is where the Emma he knows starts to break apart, where the mother in her begins to show.
Her eyes glistening like faded stars, “I can live with any of it as long I have Henry back. Do you
understand what I’m asking?”

And Rumplestiltskin hates her then because he does. Hates her for asking of him the one thing he
didn’t want to give her. The one thing he couldn’t.

He really should have kept his distance.

“You truly are just a lost little girl, aren’t you Miss Swan?” He sneered as he quickly slipped away.

Leaving Rumplestiltskin alone once more to clutch pitifully at his ragged childhood companion as
the memory drowns itself out and his mind becomes still in the deep sea of the present. He’s
watching over her. Distantly, he observes as the real Emma sits solemnly by the edge of the forest,
ocasionally surveying her surroundings to protect those closest to her. She looks exhausted, like she
could really use some company right now. But all he thinks to do is to try and try to stay away.

He holds on tighter to his once beloved doll as he tells himself this, warns himself against this foolish
and needy impulse that never seems to cease being. But his old friend offers him no reprieve or
comfort from it. Does not help at all to ease his turbulent heart as he crushes it’s little and worn body against his chest again and again.

No, it does nothing to stop him from wanting her near. “I'm lost too,” he finally confesses to the wind. Let’s the words fly free and drift towards her.

But Emma doesn’t hear their song.

Chapter End Notes

I can fully admit that had anyone asked me even a few days ago if I would ever update one of my Golden Swan stories I would have looked you in the eye, shook my head, and then declared "Nope!"

This all changed when the lovely The_Dark_One_Rises started leaving me wonderful comments for each and every one of my stories. And just the excitement of reading and wanting to respond to those comments got me re-reading those very stories (to refresh my mind for each reply) and something in the process of doing so just got me thinking 'hey maybe I wasn't so bad at this...and maybe I can write for them again...maybe I'll give it a try...' and lo and behold I wrote one of the fastest chapters I think I've ever written. Started it today, finished it today. Obviously, it's still rather short (I will never not be a as slow as sin writer) but this is good for me.

So I hope you enjoyed this little update that could. Sorry it took so long!!!

xoxox
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Pain is a bitch, most of all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Death is an end. To a means, that is. (For running away…this time it seems)

While life is a spark, reborn it flickers in the dark before it burns.

Neither is a particularly pleasant experience, in her humble opinion. But here she is once more.

“What is it that you want me to see so damn much?”

The question echoes inside and brushes against her ear like the sting of a kiss. The word returned, not her own—never her own—slips loose in a low whisper from lips it hadn’t even belonged to then, "Everything."

Pain is a bitch, most of all.

She decides then and there as she lies in the cold hard dirt staring up at stars that shine bright with their false promises. Rubbing at her sore throat irritably the lone shadow ponders the concept of memories and what place they could possibly have inside her head, especially when they weren’t really the right ones to begin with.

Something would need to be done about that, sooner than later.

It made her feel wrong in too many places because of it and that bothered her profoundly; making her far too contemplative on the whole matter and circumstances surrounding her abrupt and short-lived death.

She smirked bitterly at her own poor choice of wording.

Rumplestiltskin should not have been able to kill her like that, snap her neck like she was nothing—not with this face—and yet, he had. And the shadow, with all these elements of Emma Swan ingrained into her current nature and psyche, needed to understand how he could just do that.

Even if there was another piece within her, one that vibrates inside the surface with unhinged giggles, that thinks that maybe she should have seen it all coming.

After all, the Dark One has had quite the volatile history with heartbreak. Particularly with the women who wore the faces of his own. She was certainly not the first who’d fallen victim to him in that regard.

And she may not even be the last.

These skewed but perceptive thoughts tickle away at her borrowed flesh relentlessly, making it itchy
and irritated in uncomfortable and telling ways. And the most maddening part of it all is that she can’t seem to fully grasp the reasoning as to the why it would bother her—not her not Emma—but her—so bloody much.

She claws absently at her skull, fingers dragging coarsely through all too soft hair. This risky little game of Pan’s was losing it charm fast. It was just no fun when you weren’t in on the cheat any more.

The blonde exhaled her frustration out loudly, the abrupt thought of her maker—of his further disappointment in her—and of the consequences of such displeasure —adding a chilling weight to her already downtrodden and mercurial mood.

“Peter Pan is quite disappointed in you.”

A low voice hums, piercing into the lonely night air like prickly pins poking inside an old and torn up ragdoll causing her to stiffen and sit up straight like the good little puppet she was meant to be.

“And disappointing Pan is a very bad thing to do indeed.”

The lost boy simply known as Felix, Pan’s supposed second in command, lingered unseen in the bleak darkness of the wood like the sneaky boy soldier he was and would always be.

She wonders how long he’s been there, watching her—watching them—on Pan’s behalf. Making his presence here suddenly and acutely annoying to her. She’s not quite sure for what reason, but the sensation of it is still there to be felt none the less. So she rolls her hazy eyes because she can and wants to.

It occurs to her briefly that it probably shouldn’t.

“And yet here I am,” she said haughtily.

But the gnawing fear of his purpose here is there too, crawling up and down her spine.

“But why, I wonder.”

Her new companion considers aloud, surly and too smug, as he finally saunters into her sightline.

“Pan doesn’t offer second chances. And yet, here you are, as you so eloquently put it.”

She feels her fingers twitching with a dangerous anticipation as he appears and nears her, like doing so would cause—something—to happen, but she quickly puts a stop to the motion when she realizes what she’s doing.

Instead she said in return, “you don’t need to know any more than you do Felix. Don’t go poking your nose where is doesn’t belong.”

She made the remark pointedly, determined to push his buttons just enough so to wipe the churlish grin right off his face.

But her efforts were to no avail, “I could say the same for you, little shadow.”

Felix then steps in close and lowers into a purposeful crouch, studying the face she wore. His fingers rise up and trace along her jawline intently. She just manages to remain still as he does, the urge to slap them away are strong.

But they are not her own.
And after a small time of analyzing the allusion of Emma’s features he finally uttered out the conclusion he had come to by doing so.

“Perhaps the other one’s face would have sufficed better. Hers does inspire a certain gentleness that this one does not.”

Turning her head away enough to slip from his touch, the shadow of The Savior can only offer up a downward quirk of her lips at his naïve but honest assessment.

“No, it does not. Clearly,” she said with a light tap to her throat, “but Pan certainly has a plan for it.”

Felix tilts his head, eyes her curiously, “as do you?”

“I don’t think so, no” she said honestly with a curt shake of her head. The gesture hurts and a stray and unexpected thought blossomed in the dark because of it; that the dealings with children could be such a tedious endeavor.

Mindsets such as theirs were always too limited and narrowed to actually see the bigger picture at play. It was no wonder why Pan left his Lost Boys in a state of perpetual ignorance. Even those he claimed to hold closest to him were not above such simplicities and lowered expectations. They understood so little. They meant even less.

Not like them.

She flinched and pushed the belief away. That one didn’t belong in there either.

“So what are you going to do?” Felix asked rousing her from her odd musings. He stood back up leering down at her as he did. “You can’t stay here all night staring up at the sky. There’s still much to be done. And time is not ours to waste.”

The shadow returned the calculating and mischievous stare before rising up her hand for him to take hold of. He did, hauling her up to her feet with one firm pull. She gave a quick stretch once her balance was set.

Death had left her stiff to the bone.

“That you are right, my dear” she agreed with a resounding crack, her tone flushes and lifts with sudden purpose as her mind settle back into the places it should be. Her sights are fixed as she remembered now clearly.

Something did need to be done, sooner than later.

She flashed the lost boy a most pleasant and charming sort of grin, “It’s time to do the one thing that any good remake should do, especially if it wants to get it right.”

Felix raised an eyebrow as she began to walk away, “and that would be?” he asked.

“See the original.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m surprising myself.
Another update completed and posted. In less than a week :)

Hope you enjoy. Xoxox

Edit 4.23.2017: I literally just changed the last line of this chapter to better translate into the next one.
Chapter Summary

Now wasn’t she the prettiest little thing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She felt like a shadow of her former self.

Distracted and discarded, if was difficult to process. Harder, still, to even accept.

Emma Swan had taken a leap of faith; the results had proven inconclusive. A temporary solution to an ongoing problem, magic and make believe couldn’t just make you forget the fundamental core of your issues. No matter how much you’d like for them to do so otherwise.

Her mother felt cheated. And her father was apparently trapped. Things were not going well.

The Dark One was a liar. And Emma was beyond angry.

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Now wasn’t she the prettiest little thing.

And quite the sight to behold in the living flesh. Almost like a diamond. Not perfect, not yet, far from it really. Flawed, but still set apart from the rest; enough so to make for something truly special.

The woman, who happened to be wearing the exact same face as she was spying on, could see the appeal, could understand the inevitable and undeniable want that tempted and drew in even the darkest of creatures to its singular flicker of light.

She felt it in herself already, the need to slip in through the obvious and gaping cracks of the woman. Find out what made her tick.

A spinner’s delight really; to weave and make good the thread that defined the fraying pieces of the lost little girl who never got her fairytale life. A beautiful tragedy is what she was, and so tragically beautiful because of it.

Pan always did love those kinds of damaged souls the best.

The attraction was very real.

She sauntered and slipped in close to him then; settling herself next to the lone figure standing by idly within the sanctity of shadows still clutching away pathetically at that childhood trinket even as he secretly observed.

It seems The Dark One can’t keep himself away from The Savior for too long a time.

With good reason, she thought dryly.
Not allowing her the chance to voice her thoughts on the matter, nor sparing a glance her way despite the resurrection, Rumplestiltskin openly threatened the unwanted and resurfaced silhouette as she settled herself in too closely next to him for comfort.

“I won’t let you near her.”

The shadow took it in stride. Thought it rather bold of her murderer considering he was cradling away at his little toy doll like the cowardly child he was still at heart.

“You couldn’t kill me. And not for lack of trying,” she warned smugly, though the pain in her neck still made it slightly difficult to speak up. “What makes you think you could stop me now?”

Surprisingly, Rumplestiltskin doesn’t argue the point; having likely clued into the fact that he was not infallible here, not in Neverland, not in Pan’s domain.

“What purpose are you even trying to serve?” He asked instead; sounding genuinely curious, clearly settled with the loss.

It seemed his bones had been good and properly rattled by earlier proceedings. It had taken its toll on the long-standing debt collector. The weight of what he had done to her, of what he was likely still capable of doing, was showing. Maybe it was even breaking him down further; seeing her again like this while the real thing lingered nearby and within his reach.

There was a satisfaction in that. So she felt it in good sportsmanship to at least answer this question as honestly as she could. No need to draw this one out. Time was of the essence here.

For once, the Savior was alone.

“I am not who I’m supposed to be. I’m an unfinished puzzle; too disconnected from the source material. It’s bothersome, really, to feel so incomplete.” She explained watching her restless counterpart.

Adding evenly, “I’m just looking to self-actualize.”

Rumplestiltskin nodded, considering, unraveling the core of the matter at hand. “I should have seen those small inconsistencies in character for what they were from the start. You have the wrong perspective.”

He nods his head again, settling the final pieces into place.

“You’re not her. Not enough so. Just a concept then; made from faulty and immaterial bases and biases. My own, I’m guessing. Some of Pan's too.”

“Ding, ding. Give the man child a prize.” She declared snidely. “Would you like a lollipop for that? Or maybe you’d prefer another crappy doll to play with in the dark?”

He ignored her gibes. “You’ll never find the fragments you’re setting out to seek and rearrange yourself with. Not from her, she won’t let you get them. Hard to crack, that one is. I can tell you that from personal experience.”

“I’ll be the judge and jury on that.” She said dismissively as Rumplestiltskin finally turned his head and looked at her.

The shadow felt the burn of his stare but didn’t stray her sights away from the despairing woman wondering about a short distance away from where they stood. Instead she focused, honed in her
sights and senses.

It was a sweetly bitter sensation. “I can already feel her from here, you know. Feel the hurt, the confusion and all that anger.”

She taunted him gleefully, simply because it amused her to do so. To actively hurt him, the way he had hurt her.

Only then did she turn and look at him, drawing in for the kill this time.

“Would you like to know how she feels?”

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Emma wondered alone, just for a moment; to manage, to breathe.

It seemed like the thing to do, even as her parents persistently warned her against it. But she was their de facto leader; they would all abide by her wishes for the time being despite their protests.

The Echo Cave had been a devastating series of events and revelations, as it was obviously intended to be. Neal had been nothing more than a pipe dream. A trap; one that should have been glaringly obvious to anyone functioning on any sort of rationale and logical thought, instead of holding on so blindly to false hope.

The group would benefit from some much needed rest and recuperation; a mental revamp and breather was what was needed most at the moment. And Emma just wanted the downtime to take a break from everything and everyone.

Her mother’s words left her feeling haunted.

Not by them, not necessarily, but by the fact that Emma had seen them coming a mile away.

Of course Snow would regret not having had a chance to raise her child. She could relate to the feeling, to a degree; the only difference being that her lost son had been found while he was still a kid. Not a full grown, fully realized adult woman. Set in her ways.

She couldn’t fault her parents for wanting a second chance. But it didn’t make the blow of it being admitted out loud hurt any less.

“We all want the things we think we cannot have, an inherent flaw in our genetic disposition; naturally we crave the love and security of a family. We idolize what it represents, the hope that it can make us better. No one truly considers the damage caused when it doesn’t live up to those expectations, or when we fail to live up to ours in turn. At least not until it does.”

“You seem like you’re trying to give me some sage advice. Do I detect the bitter sound of personal experience?”

He only chuckled softly. It rang empty around her. “Trust me when I tell you that it’s easier to have never had than to have lost.”

“Let’s agree to disagree on that.”

He purred knowingly. ”You’ll see.”

Emma crushed her eyes shut not wanting to replay the memory any further than it had. She didn’t need the old resonance of his voice gloating in its subtly distinct way inside her head right now,
toying with her like he had from the very beginning. A liar who she suspected had always known the truth about the curse and who had manipulated her shamelessly with it and with his foreknowledge of coming events.

Gold had pushed her, had constantly been pushing her, using her to his own advantage. And still he was forcing he forward, driving her in ways she hadn’t let anyone get away with before.

Hell, she’d jumped off a damn boat to prove a point to the man.

And then Emma had— just as stupidly—gone and kissed Hook to try and prove one to herself.

She sighed, feeling an odd pit in her stomach. None of this was working out the way she wanted it to.

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“She’s not very fond of you, is she?”

Rumplestiltskin turns back to look at the ongoing topic of conversation.

His lost girl. “It’s a little more complicated than that.”

“You can say that again.” The shadow snorted.

“I’m actually starting to think it might be a family trait. Pan seems just as intrigued by her as you were, as your darling son Bea was. The pirate’s gotten swept up by the tide of that woman too, if you want to add that one to the mix. Your dead wife Milah’s old flame, if memory serves correctly. Which with me—it obviously does.”

She beamed all too cheekily, enjoying this a little too much. But she forced the taunting smile away just as quickly as it came. Best to be careful this time around or she was going to get her neck snapped all over again.

Still, it was hard to stop. Payback was a vindictive bitch.

So the shadow over-feigned some concern next, shaking her blonde head woefully. “That poor girl certainly has a knack for attracting the wrong sort of men to her, don’t you think?”

A sudden and sharp chill crept into Rumplestiltskin heart at the mention of his father. Regardless of all the other cruelties the lowly imitation was carelessly tossing his way that was by far the one that was sticking the pins and needles in his chest enough so to leave a mark.

The man—that was anything but—and not only in the physical sense of the word— was simply incapable of mere interest.

Whatever is was that had piqued Pan’s curiosity and attention towards the woman enough so to direct any of his focus her way meant nothing but trouble for anyone currently ensnared within the depths of this nefarious island. Any awareness or intentions with regards to Emma Swan could only mean she was in more danger than Rumplestiltskin had initially assumed her to be in.

It appeared her son was not the only one at risk here in Neverland. Pan was aiming to make some sort of direct play at the Savior herself.

And now he needed to find a way to keep the other from successfully doing so.

It was an unexpected complication.
Snow and Charming could not be depended on to protect their daughter when the time came. And Hook would likely become a problem, if he wasn’t one already. His father had a history with the pirate captain. Where his true allegiance lay could easily be put into question.

Regina was the only one in the poor lot who may have enough common sense and ingenuity to not screw this whole mess of a mission up completely. But could Rumplestiltskin rely solely on his former pupil to get the job done; to ensure the survival of the only thing worth protecting from the trappings of this godforsaken place when her focus right now was entirely directed on saving Henry?

He could not even count on Emma to put her own well-being over that of her son’s. She’d all too willingly drown herself if it meant ensuring Henry's survival against whatever it is Peter Pan had planned for him.

So for once in a very long time the Dark One did not know who he could invest his belief in. As the harrowing truth was he included himself amongst those that could not be trusted with her life. Not after what had happened with the shadow.

Still, something needed to be done quickly. Rumplestiltskin could see that Emma was struggling with something as he watched her pacing around aimlessly. Pan had already managed to inflict some sort of damage, it seemed. In what way precisely, he did not know. But it was enough to shake the strong-willed woman he had come to know so intimately for a time.

What he needed to know first and foremost is what it was about her specifically that had Pan setting his sights on her. Was it because she was Henry’s mother? Or that she was the Savior? Could it be because she was once an orphan like the rest of the children trapped in Neverland?

He was missing the key links to the chain his father held and bound them all here with.

There was an element that separated Emma from the rest of them, enough so to make her important to Pan and his schemes. But what could it be?

“Jealous?”

Rumple’s attention was promptly brought back by the specter currently glaring at him; the farce of the woman he wanted to protect and Peter Pan’s trouble-making shadow.

Quite the combination of characters she was.

And could be.

Looking at that particular face, knowing what lied beneath its surface, it occurs to Rumplestiltskin then that perhaps his best recourse at the moment was to find a way to actively alter the playing field. Balance the odds in whatever way he could, hopefully doing so in his favor.

And that maybe the way of achieving that advantage happened to be standing right here next to him.

The cogs in his mind began to turn. A terrible notion enlightens and inspires him forward; a dawning and dangerous proposition to be set into motion.

It begins and slips free from his lips. “Has the extent of my dear old dad’s power really diminished that greatly? That he sent a lowly shadow to find out what dirty little secrets the Savior has to exploit?”

The creature next him hummed, and then crossed her arms; inadvertently put-off and made a little defensive at the mere suggestion at a weakness in her creator and usual puppeteer.
“I don’t presume to know what Peter Pan has hidden up his sleeve.”

An idea was there though, lingering insistently since her rebirth, buzzing and trying so hard to be heard. She mentally tried to swat it away like the pesky little fly it was. No good could come out of it; of knowing too much of a plan that she was merely supposed to be a mindless pawn of.

Especially not while actively positioned by the Dark One’s side.

“You must have a clue. You wouldn’t be here if you didn’t,” He surmised, catching her further off guard by his line of reasoning. “I’d certainly like to know what it is. Wouldn’t you?”

She frowned and eyed her companion skeptically. Did he really think her that easy to fool?

“You actually want me to do it? Get inside that blonde head of hers?”

Apparently he did, shrugging vaguely. ”You said it yourself, dearie. Who am I to stop you?”

Oh there he was; the notorious Rumplestiltskin of lore and legend. Finally come out to play. The shadow was surprising pleased with him for finally rising up to the occasion, only just noticing that at some point in their conversation he had allowed the once cherished doll of his to finally fall and hang lifelessly at his side. Still holding it but no longer clinging to it like a lifeline to his sanity and restraint.

She turns her attention back to the real Emma Swan curiously but side-eyes him accordingly, “you’re up to something.”

"Aren’t we all?” He countered, flashing a deliberate grin her way to catch.

The kind of smile you give when you know you’ve forged the perfect opportunity for purposing a deal.

One your adversary may just consider taking you up on.

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Emma outwardly shivered, unable to shake off the growing sensation that something was off. Aware now that she had gotten herself completely lost in the dark.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” she murmured.

And then suddenly, she wasn’t so alone anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Uh oh...!!

The longest chapter yet. Hope you guys liked it :) Xoxo
“This is so uncomfortable.” The Shadow muttered to herself, crouched low in the bushes, a hair's breadth away from the most valuable piece in the puzzle she called One’s Self that was Miss Emma Swan.

Why she had agreed to this particular course of action, she hadn’t the foggiest idea (it was usually against her preset nature to tag along with the schemes and suggestions of her marks). But it did seem the easiest way to get inside her basepoint's head without having to run the risk of exposing her own existence just yet. The longer it took for Emma and crew to figure out that there was a shadowed doppleganger of the Savior running around doing Peter Pan’s bidding the better it would be for all those involved.

Whatever Rumplestiltskin was planning to do with her after syphoning what she wanted from the woman he allegedly didn’t (but like really, really did) care for was another matter to deal with entirely. She’ll eventually need to suss out his motives there, then figure out a way to turn the tables against him. But only after she’d gotten through this particular blonde haired hurdle first.

She hadn’t been born to multitask. She sure as heck wasn’t going to start trying to now. Neither was she ingrained with the virtue of patience, but some tendencies had to be put in check for the greater good. Or, in this case, whatever the opposite of 'good' was.

Really, what do you call an objective that would benefit someone solely for their own self interest but who was also the one person in total control of you and what they wanted was, quite frankly, the only thing that was supposed to matter?

Strange thoughts she was having these day, the Shadow mused wryly, drawing her attention back over to the mirror image of herself who was currently reeling from having just had the living bejesus scared out of her by the unexpected resurgence of the Dark One.

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“You nearly gave me a heart attack, you idiot.” Emma hissed, gripping at her pounding chest with one hand while the other balled up into a tight fist and swiftly collided with the culprit’s upper arm. “Why would you do that?”

Rumplestiltskin glanced down at his newly assaulted limb, which actually did sting a great deal with how hard she had hit it, before glaring back up at the blonde in turn.

“Really?” he asked, “was that a necessary reaction?”

“You scare a girl half to death, you get hit by that girl. Lesson 101 of things you don’t do to a person when you’re trapped together on a freaky ass island run by a teenager who gets his jollies off on
messing with people.”

He pursed his lips at that, unable to respond. Not much to argue with there.

Finally Emma asked, eyeing him suspiciously. “What are you even doing here?”

Then something shifted in her demeanor. “Did you find Henry?” she questioned eagerly, looking progressively hopeful at the notion. Naturally assuming the reason he would bother coming to find her after the stunt he had pulled on the Jolly Roger would be to inform her that he had in fact located her son and was here now to recruit her for the actual rescue.

It seemed nothing he did anymore would not inevitably lead to her being hurt and thoroughly disappointed by him.

“I’m afraid not.” he said.

Rumplestiltskin could actually see the bubble of hope inside of her burst, watch as her body visibly deflated from the news that her child was still lost and beyond her reach. She bowed her head slightly, enough so to intentionally make it difficult for him to witness her struggling with the realization that her son continued to remain in harm’s way.

He allowed her this moment of weakness, how could he not? He’s had his own fair share of trauma to deal with since stepping foot on to this cursed island. Lest not forget the all too familiar faced hellion’s exploits and his increasingly mortifying responses to some harsh truths and bait being thrown his way by it, and by extension, his papa. His worst impulses were being lured out and snared for whatever purpose required for his darling father’s budding schemes and manipulations.

He needed to tread very carefully.

Emma is blinking back the final few remnants of her frustration and disappointment when she raises her head back up; resolute on pulling herself back together again while Rumplestiltskin made a deliberate point not to show any outward acknowledgement of her momentary lapse into despair. Instead waiting for her to fully regain her focus and propel them back onto course. But it seemed, as she did, that any enthusiasm she may have felt for his sudden reappearance to her side was also being washed away from her form, as her posture grew even more taut and her eyes became equally rigid; set on guard against him.

Empty-handed that he was, she was now thoroughly displeased to see him.

“Did you come here to mock me then? Judge me again? Drive me to do something stupid, because that’s what you do?” she pried sharply, falling back into their established dynamic of misgivings and ulterior motives. “What do you want me to do this time for your ends? If it actually helps Henry, I might even consider doing it.”

“You immediately assume the worst of me.”

“Have you given me any reason not to?”

That’s fair. “Our end goals are the same this time.” To an extent, of course. “We both want to beat Peter Pan at his own game.”

She seems wholly unconvinced by his sincerity, having grown wise to his ways. “And, let me guess, you alone know the rules he’s playing by better than the rest of us do?”

“Something like that,” he said vaguely.
To be honest, Rumplestiltskin was grasping at straws here as much as she and the others were but she didn’t need to know that. Better to let her assume that he had some semblance of control and a deeper insight on the workings of a sinister man-child’s depraved playground.

Emma herself was conflicted, not wanting to trust him but seemingly out of options at this junction in the proverbial road they were all lost on. She had to be realistic; how was she going to lead this rescue mission any further than she already had? Things had been falling apart the second they had gotten into Neverland and nothing that she or any of them did seemed to be changing the actuality of that.

If Gold could actively do something that would help turn the tide in their favor, what right did she have as a leader—as a mother—to put her own personal feelings and vendetta against the man above the well-being of those she loved and wanted to protect the most?

For her son, for her family, she was stuck between a rock and a hard place, again.

It seemed that no matter how relentlessly she tried to play the part of the faithful heroine in the ever-expanding and fantastical story of her life now she continuously found herself being wedged between the whims and control of others, most notably the very man standing right in front of her. Oh how Emma wished she could rage against him, effectively put the elusive Mr. Gold in his place for once. If only to show him how it felt, how it really felt to have someone you had come to care for, who you thought might actually care about you too, do something so knowingly detrimental to you without batting an eye.

Just walk away and never look back.

She let out a heavy breath, dispelling the futile notion. “Should I be concerned?” she asked him softly instead.

The question itself resonates with Rumplestiltskin, stirs at the heartstrings in a way the echos inside his chest achingly. She had asked him that once before, not too long ago, as they sat in an old patrol car together in the wake of a particularly volatile night of emotional confrontation. He had not hesitated in his honesty then, a rare moment of brutal and frank clarity, and he finds himself equally compelled to show her the same level of sincerity now.

But only to a degree, “I don’t think we have much choice in the matter.”

Emma’s thrown by the answer, she can decipher some truth to his words but doesn’t know what to make of the statement as a whole; how it correlates to the circumstances surrounding the two of them and what it means to the here and now.

Which clearly meant that something was likely about to happen, something she wouldn’t be prepared for. Something she might not even necessarily want to get involved with willingly.

But what could it possibly be? What card did he have hidden up that reptilian sleeve of his this time?

The soft touch that follows was, admittingly, not the something she was expecting. But it does come, hesitant at first as if cautious not to frighten her away from it. Calloused fingertips rising up to linger wistfully along her cheek. Gold steps in closer, and Emma is acutely aware of his body readily penetrating the confines of her comfort zone. His thumb drawing tentatively along her jawline, more confident now that he has successfully bypassed her usual boundaries. His hand settles itself there, against the expense of her cheek and jaw while applying the subtlest of pressure, urging her to tilt her head back ever so slightly.
She is dangerously certain of his intention to kiss her.

But tonight, it appears, that she was making a whole lot of presumptuous and obvious mistakes.

Instead of leaning into her lips, as expected, he stills and his deep brown eyes began to drift elsewhere; leaving Emma dumbstruck and pondering his strange conduct as that heated stare moves away towards the darken space just behind her shoulder. She means to ask him flat out what he was up to, then warn him that this wasn’t a time for guessing games and side quests—or more sexually charged encounters with questionable choices in men (that one was for her alone)—that would only give Pan more fodder and opportunity to screw with their collective minds.

What if, she weighed the real possibility with swelling unease, the adolescent devil had already found a way to do a number on the older man still reeling from his own son’s death while he’d been off on a grand solo adventure and this little interlude in the woods was the direct result of a compromised headspace?

It dawns on Emma too late; the consequence of his actions, of the distraction they posed to her. That what he was doing was deliberate. That it had a purpose beyond confusing the hell out of her.

It was a signal.

Horrified by the realization, she tries to whip around to catch sight of what it was that was surely sneaking up on her only for Gold to use the hold he still held on her face to staunchly keep her in place; forcibly trapped forward, left unguarded and vulnerable to the monster now creeping out from the shadows to get her.

Rumplestiltskin can’t even bear to look her in the eye, coward that he was, not as the world shifted to an abrupt stop. Cold fingers prying it apart and taking it away from her.

“Let the fun times begin,” an oddly familiar voice declared to Emma triumphantly.

Chapter End Notes

I rushed over the last few days to get this update done before the series finale. I can't believe I actually did :) There's a good possibility I may tweak it in the future but I really wanted to get this out for any faithful readers as a celebratory offering before the last episode of the show airs tonight.

Hope you liked it. Xoxox

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