The Best Defense

by Accidental Ducky

Summary

"You're Milah's daughter." He felt rage boiling inside him at the fact that the pirate still had something to remember Milah by, but he couldn't bring himself to harm the girl. He wanted to, but something made him hold back. The girl reminded him of the son he had lost and some part of him wanted to protect this little Lost Girl from all the badness in the world. "Aveena Jones."
Chapter 1

Killian supposed it was a miracle that his daughter only began to cry after Rumpelstiltskin disappeared, but Killian was still heartbroken after Milah's murder. The baby, as though sensing that her father was growing depressed, reached up one of her little hands and rests it against his cheek, the stubble there not bothering her. Killian looks at her in slight surprise, Aveena's large blue eyes growing wide and filling with tears as her bottom lip began to tremble. "No, no, sweet girl," he murmurs, using his thumb to wipe away her tears," I've got you. No need to cry, Vee." With a little whimper, Aveena calms down again and begins to babble, her hand still pressed comfortingly against his cheek. "Mummy's gone, but we've still got each other and the crew."

"Bababababa," Vee says with a giggle, her hand moving to his mouth and playing with his lips. "Ababa."

"Oh yes?" Despite his sadness, Killian couldn't help the laugh that she caused. It never failed, his daughter could always cheer him up when no one else could. Vee shouts her next word, if you could call it that, and he laughed again. "I know, sweet girl. How would you like to help Daddy steer the ship?" Killian nods and his daughter mimics him more energetically. She should have been asleep by now, but he couldn't bring himself to let her go yet. Besides, she's still wide awake. He continues to talk softly to her as he walks to the wheel using his newly acquired hook to steer while he held the baby with his good hand. How was he supposed to do this by himself? He would definitely need a nurse maid, and not one of those strumpets that stay near the destitute inns and taverns that his men enjoy. No, he needed someone that could be considered respectable. Someone came to mind slowly, a woman Killian had known in childhood who had lost her newborn son just a few weeks after his birth. She was good with children, she was kind, she was shy, and she could protect herself from the crew if Killian was unable to help her at the time. Yes, she would be perfect for this job. He tried hard to remember where Trista was living at the moment; somewhere in the Enchanted Forest, but he didn't know where exactly. He supposed, until he found his old friend, Aveena could drink goat's milk. Milah had said something about trying out mashed bananas, but Killian would hold off on that until Trista approved it since the woman had more knowledge about babies than Killian did; she was, after all, a much sought-after midwife. "Captain?" The deep, accented voice draws Killian's attention back from the stars. His Bosun was standing a few feet away, hands clasped in front of him and a grim expression on his face. He wasn't large, but the way he moved spoke of his numerous skills and grace, and he would intimidate most men, but he's served on this ship before it was called the Jolly Roger and Killian trusted him more than any other person in the world.

"What is it, Norrington?"

"I was just wondering..." The man pauses, his dark green eyes landing briefly on Aveena, who was sound asleep now, before meeting Killian's eyes again. "I was wondering where we are headed now."

"We're taking on another passenger and then I'll decide where to go from there." Neverland, perhaps? He wouldn't age there and it would give him time to come up with a way to defeat the Dark One. There was magic there as well, so Vee wouldn't have to work so hard to absorb it, though the magic there was as dark as it gets. Would that make her sicker than she already is? She reacted well to Jafar's magic when they visited him a few weeks ago, so perhaps it doesn't matter whether the magic is light or not. "Get some sleep, Norrington, we have a long day ahead of us tomorrow."

"Yes, Captain." The other man was halfway down the steps and back to the deck when he pauses
and looks at Killian over his shoulder. "Shall I take the little one back to your cabin? The night air is not good for one so young."

"No, James, I'll retire soon. Have Barlow come up and take over for a shift."

"You need to rest, Killian." Killian lets out a long sigh, meeting his friend's worried gaze again. James Norrington was always worried about something, though Killian supposed that came from his time in the Navy when he was an Admiral before getting demoted to Bosun after helping a pirate to escape. It was nice to have someone worry over him, it made him remember the way his brother had fussed over every tiny detail until everything was perfect and he and his crew had a better chance at survival. James and Liam had grown up together, so James was always around the Jones household despite his father not holding any respect for them. "I'll make up a schedule for the men, so that they will work in shifts and you'll only have to take over tomorrow morning."

"Thank you."

"Of course, Killian." And then James was below deck and Killian could hear his commanding tone as he woke the men up to inform them of their duties for the rest of the night and tomorrow morning. Killian was grateful, he didn't know how he would survive without Norrington. Once the burly man named Barlow had taken hold of the wheel, Killian walks back to his cabin, the warmth comforting as he kicks off his boots, only laying Aveena down long enough to pull off his coat and jewelry before picking her back up and settling them both down on the bed he shared with Milah. He didn't want to risk that Crocodile coming back and killing Aveena in her crib without Killian noticing, and he didn't want to be by himself so soon after Milah's death. So, with the heavy blanket pulled over the both of them and with Killian holding his baby gently, the pair fell asleep and Killian allowed himself to dream of the lives they should have lived.

Killian was hesitant as he knocked on the door of the hut, hoping that this was Trista's home and he wasn't going to be greeted by an old crone that sold poisoned apples and then robbed the corpses. To his great relief, the door opened and a tentative woman stepped out and closed the door behind her, staring up at him in slight confusion. She was pretty with a tall lean figure and black hair that was up in a messy bun, her dark brown eyes had circles under them to show her lack of sleep and grief, and her complexion reminded him of the coffee Milah often enjoyed that was diluted by milk. This was Trista, almost exactly as he remembered her from when they were teenagers.

"Trista," he greets, lacking his usual confident grin and giving her a small smile instead. Trista takes him in quickly, her brows furrowing when her eyes land on the squirming baby in his arms.

"Please tell me you didn't steal that baby," she says in exasperation.

"I-I actually made this one." When she didn't look convinced, he steps closer and allows her to see the little girl more clearly. Anyone with eyes could tell this child was Killian's since she was his mirror image in girl form. "Do you believe me now?"

"I suppose I have no choice in the matter. Why are you here?"

"The woman I love was murdered yesterday evening and I need someone with experience to help me raise my daughter." Trista lowers her gaze to her shoes for a moment, her own grief plain on her face as she fights back tears. "Please, Trista. I can promise that you'll be completely safe aboard my ship."

"I'll do it." Not expecting her to agree so quickly since the woman he knew loved to argue, Killian continues to speak.
"You'll only have to help with the baby, there'll be no other chores, and you'll have a guard with you at all. Wait, you'll do it?" With a tiny smile of her own, Trista gives a nod and takes the baby from him, walking into the hut and leaving Killian to follow behind. The hut has one room that's cluttered with a small bed, a cradle, and a small table; the floor was hard-packed earth and a fire was burning in the fireplace across the room. Killian was forced to duck as he walked inside, but straightened out once he was over the thresh-hold.

"Let me get my things together and I'm bringing my cat whether you like it or not."

"Very well." Killian wasn't the type to like animals, but it seemed the women in his life enjoyed forcing him to live around them. Before Milah found out she was pregnant, she had found a stray puppy at the docks and had somehow convinced Killian that the mongrel was worth keeping, and now Trista was bringing her cat, Tom, aboard as well. Killian watches as Trista moves around the hut, throwing items in a bag while talking to Aveena at the same time about everything and nothing. Perhaps caring for another child will help her through her grief, or perhaps it will distract her at the least?

"What's the little beauty's name?"

"Aveena, but most of the crew has taken to calling her Vee." Trista's smile is big and real this time as she stares down at the child, one of her fingers brushing down the soft, dark brown hair that covered the top of Aveena's head. "Milah chose her name."

"It's a good name." Gently, Trista maneuvers until she had Aveena cradled in one arm and her cat held in the other. It was an old animal with graying fur and intelligent eyes, but they way he looked at Killian made the pirate think it definitely remembered the time Killian accidentally set its tail on fire when he was five. "My bag is on the bed, Killian." She looks smug as she steps back outside, Killian once more left to follow after her with her bag in his hand. "What happened to your hand?"

"A crocodile stole it from me." She cocks up an eyebrow at his strange answer, but doesn't question it when she sees something dark in his pale blue eyes. Nothing good would come from it and she was glad that the Dark One wasn't inspecting the lands today. Living just beyond his boundaries, Trista was often prone to looking over her shoulder at the forbidding castle that rose above the sloping hills and trees. "Who lives there?" Killian had noticed where her gaze was drawn to, taking in the dark castle with a frown.

"No one that you want to know."

The waters were calm that morning as Milah's body slid overboard, Killian staring down at the magical bean in his hand contemplatively while Trista comforted his crying daughter. The child didn't understand why her mummy was gone and never coming back, but at least they had Trista now. As Killian was ascending the stairs to the helm, the prisoner begins to shout for his attention, though a gag muffles the noise. "Allow him to speak," Killian demands, his words missing their usual snap as he faces the group of pirates surrounding the portly man.

"I want my bean," the man says fearlessly, walking right up to Killian once he was untied.

"Let me tell you how it works on my ship." He stares down at the shorter man, daring him to speak up like that again, but he doesn't miss Trista trying to walk over and Norrington stopping her with a hand on her shoulder. "I make the demands. You follow them. The bean's now mine."

"You have to give me something for it."
"Oh, I will." Killian's temper was rising, but he kept his tone firm and in control. There was no need to yell at this man when it was so obvious that the life of a pirate would help him rise above his previous station as a thief without purpose. "Your life. The chance to join my crew." This was normally the part where the person thanks Killian, but the man before him just continues to talk with an expression of disbelief on his face.

"So instead of the promise of eternal life, I get to scrub blood off your decks. How is that right?" Killian looks away from him and at his friends and daughter, knowing that he might lose his sense of control if he stared at the worthless man for too long.

"And what if I was to tell you I was about to set sail to a land where none of us will ever grow old?" He looks back at the man now, the intensity of his gaze making the prisoner fidget slightly. "Where I can discover how to get my revenge on Rumpelstiltskin?" He missed Trista flinching at the name, but James didn't and he intended to ask her about it after Aveena was put down for a nap.

"I'd say I could live with that," the man responds with a smile growing on his face.

"Good. What's your name, sailor?"

"William. William Smee." Smee looks over his shoulder at one of the crew members that was wearing a large red stocking hat, obviously a bit irritated about something. "Can I have my hat?" With a shrug, Killian gestures for the hat to be returned before speaking again, his tone taking on a note of authority and command again.

"Well, Mister Smee, welcome aboard." Smirking, Killian throws the bean out into the waters, a maelstrom forming there seconds afterwards; a portal that would take him back to the place he'd hoped never to visit again. "Harden up and get ready to set sail, mates! There's bumpy seas ahead." Killian moves skillfully to the helm, leaving Smee at the railing to watch the maelstrom. The crew immediately set to work, James ushering Trista up the stairs to stand near Killian.

"What's the name of the place we're heading, Cap'n?" Killian doesn't answer for a second, too busy fitting a silver hook into the holder fixed to his stump, then giving poor Smee a deviant smile as he takes over the wheel, steering them towards the portal. He could feel Trista huddled against his back, the baby held by James to ensure her absolute safety through the worst of the trip as Trista holds tightly with both hands to Killian's overcoat.

"Neverland!"
Chapter 2

It's been two months since the last time Killian Jones saw his daughter, two short yet agonizingly long months, and she still came running up to him with her arms outstretched and a grin on her face. He tosses his bag to James seconds before catching the four year old in his arms and spinning her around just to hear her laugh, the sound reminding him of bells and all things happy. Pan allowed him to leave the main part of Neverland every few months to visit little Vee in her little corner of the island where the magic didn't follow the rules and she was allowed to age—she was quickly learning how to bend the magic to her will and so Pan changed that small part of the island for Vee and her auntie Trista to keep her from unraveling all that he had created. "I missed you lots, Daddy," she tells him her face buried in the crook of his neck in a hug.

"I missed you too, sweet girl," he replies honestly, holding her a little tighter than usual. She's the reason he keeps coming back to this Godforsaken island and Pan knew he would do whatever it took to ensure his daughter's safety, so Pan had manipulated the magic just enough that only Pan could come and go as he so pleased, and Aveena could never pass through the bubble of magic. And so Killian continued to do Pan's bidding and his daughter lived a while longer. "Have you learned anything new?" He sets her down, letting her take his hand and pull him towards the cottage set on the beach. It was much nicer than the hut Trista used to live in, but it was obvious to all except Vee that she would have preferred to be back in a land she knew more about.

"Auntie Tris is teaching me to read like you do, Daddy! She says I'm as smart as you!"

"Oh, she does," James asks, joining Killian with a smile.

"Yeah, she says I'm a smart..." Vee comes to a stop long enough to open the door, looking as though she were struggling to remember the word. "Smart...Smart something, but I think it was a compliment."

"Smart ass?"

"Yeah!" James snorts, sending Killian a grin that said he agreed with Trista; Killian grins as well, knowing full well that Trista was right and his daughter shared an attitude similar to his and her mother's. At only fourteen months old, Aveena's first word hadn't been 'daddy', 'mummy', or even 'auntie.' No, it had been something none of the men, or Trista, had expected, but they all had a good laugh over it anyway; the first word of Aveena Jones had happened when she was looking right at Killian and said, "stupid" because he refused to give her his freshly sharpened dagger to play with.

"No cursing around Aveena," Trista says sternly, sending the two pirates a stern look from her spot in her chair. Silken material took up most of her lap and she was diligently sewing a new dress for Aveena to wear the next time Pan came to visit and train her. James smiles again, sitting on the wooden floor beside Trista's chair while Killian took up the chair opposite her and sat his daughter on his knee. "She's been very anxious these past few days, she knew you were late." Aveena nods solemnly, staring up at him with wide blue eyes. The last errand had taken longer than expected and another pirate had tried to steal the Jolly Roger, so a fight had broken out that had caused them to lose another few days due to repairs. He couldn't tell his daughter that, not when she thought he was just sailing to keep the island safe.

"Ah, there was a bad storm," Killian lies, avoiding Aveena's gaze and staring into the crackling flames instead. There was a cauldron hanging above the fire, the liquid inside bubbling and the smell of it nearly making his mouth water. They had run out of rations on the second day out, and they had been out for nine days, so anything that wasn't fish was welcome. "Has she behaved
"Of course she has, she's a good girl. Not like the three of us when we were her age, I'm certain." When they had been younger, Killian and Trista often found themselves planning some sort of mischief, as had James in his father's stately home, though James had never been caught while Killian and Trista were caught each time by Killian's older brother. If it had been a particularly good plan, Liam would join them, but he'd make it better to ensure none would be caught and punished for it. "She does have a talent for magic, she learns more about her gift each time you-know-who comes for a visit. He's kind to her, patient, gives her compliments, and the like. Everything a young girl her age could ask for without it being presents." Killian's jaw clenches at the thought of Pan being around Aveena without Killian there to watch the interaction. She was growing faster than Killian thought possible and would soon be a woman grown; she still retained his looks, and he was scared that one day Pan wouldn't see her as a little girl anymore.

"Do you like those lessons, Vee?"

"Mm-hm, I learn lots of fun stuff," Aveena says, tugging slightly on the skirt of her dress. It was a pale blue that matched her eyes and stopped around her ankles, the sleeves of the dress were short, and the material was light enough that the afternoon heat wouldn't cause her to get sick. She wore a necklace with a small sapphire hanging from it that matched the stone set into the ring that also hung around her neck—the wedding ring Killian had meant to give Milah—but there was a new piece of jewelry that caused Killian some concern: a silver cuff made to look like rope that wrapped around her left wrist.

"What's this?" He raises her hand so that the cuff caught the light of the fire. James' happy expression dims slightly upon seeing it and Trista dropped her gaze back to her task of sewing to avoid looking at the others. Killian knew what that bracelet meant, it meant Pan had staked his claim on Aveena and no one else may have her. Killian tries to tug the cuff off, but it wouldn't move an inch. "Vee, why are you wearing this?"

"Pan put it on me, he said it would keep me safe."

"Why don't you go play for a bit while I speak with your auntie?" Vee frowns at that, but doesn't argue when her father gives her a look that could rival Trista's, so she slides off his lap and goes back outside. She wouldn't stray far, his only fear was that she'd go out too far in the water and he wouldn't save her in time. Fearing the same thing as Killian, James rose and followed the child out hastily. "Why didn't you stop that demon from binding himself to my daughter?" His voice rose only slightly, he couldn't afford to frighten Aveena. "Why didn't you do something?"

"Don't you think I tried," Trista hisses, rising from her chair and letting the material fall to the ground. "The second I made a move to stop him, he used his magic to keep me in place. I was forced to watch as he slid the cuff on that baby's wrist and I couldn't even blink!" Killian rose as well, pacing back and forth and rubbing his jaw.

"There has to be a way to get that off of her."

"There's only one person powerful enough to do that, but how would you convince him to come here and smuggle him in?" Killian pauses at one of the windows, his gaze finding Vee and James sitting near where the waves crash against the sand, gathering wet sand to make a sand castle. She was too young to understand what Pan had done to her, but Killian understood only too well. Had Milah acted differently three and a half years ago, he was certain that Rumpelstiltskin would have bound her to him.

"Just tell me who it is and where I can find him."
"His name is Mozenrath, he rules over the Land of the Black Sands."

**Mozenrath—Four Days Later**

"Does it look like I have time to tend to your daughter," Mozenrath scowls at the pirate, his chin supported on his fist. His back was aching from occupying his throne, the Street Rat still had Mozenrath's Gauntlet locked away in Agrabah, and now this pirate broke into the citadel to demand help for his brat. "And even if I did have time, why would I want to help the man that broke my Mamluks?" His minions weren't fragile, but it seemed that nearly all of his enemies were able to dismember the creatures easily. But still, Mozenrath loved the desperation written all over the pirate's face, so he would allow him to grovel and maybe they would come to a deal.

"Please, my lord, I would do anything."

"Anything?" Mozenrath raises a brow at that, his lips twitching as he fights back a smirk. The pirate realized his word choice and furrowed his brow slightly before straightening up with a hardened look. He really would do whatever Mozenrath asked in exchange for help. He must love the brat more than Mozenrath's father had loved him.

"Anything within reason." Mozenrath nods, standing up and circles the pirate a few times at a languid pace. He wanted to enjoy this, to watch another man squirm since Mozenrath rarely got that opportunity. Aladdin didn't seem to fear anything, so Mozenrath never got the satisfaction of seeing fear in the Street Rat's chocolate brown eyes. "Please, I can't have my daughter bound to Peter Pan." The name causes Mozenrath to flinch involuntarily, memories of his time held hostage in Neverland coming back in vivid detail. Pan was worse than Destane, he played games with your head and seemed to anticipate every move you would make. That also sealed the deal, though Mozenrath would still need his Gauntlet if he was going to get anything productive done.

"Very well, Jones, I'll help you if you will help me." Mozenrath stops in front of the pirate, hating the fact that the man was taller than him. "You help me get my main power source out of the treasure vault in Agrabah, and I'll help you free your precious daughter."

"And how do you expect me to break into a palace with real guards?"

"A wedding will be taking place there in three days' time, we'll sneak inside while the guards are distracted."
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

That last part was from Ignorance is Bliss, but I felt it fit with the beginning of this chapter and I really liked the idea of Al using his "do you trust me" line on Mozey. I'll probably use a few flashback revolving around Killian and Pan from my other story in this one since it's following the same basic line of progression.

Aladdin's stomach was twisting harshly as he stood away from all the guests of the wedding, wringing his hat nervously in his hands as people continued to walk inside. He wasn't sure if it was from his nerves or not, but he felt like something bad was about to happen and nothing would be the same afterwards. Swallowing hard, he slowly moves to where his friends were standing, trying not to gain anymore unwanted attention from the nobles that had assembled for the wedding. Genie and Carpet were in the middle of a Monopoly game, the board floating in the air as Genie nervously rubbed the back of his neck.

"Hey, guys," he asks quietly, voice barely heard above the buzzing of people. Abu heard him though, and the little monkey climbed up on his shoulder to offer some of the old comfort. "Does anyone else feel a little weird about all of this?"

"About what," Iago asks, admiring his reflection in a solid gold serving platter, "you're gettin' some great stuff!" Aladdin rolls his eyes, knowing half of the gifts would end up in the bird's room by the end of the day. When the parrot finally glanced at Aladdin, his eyes gained a sympathetic light. "You look really bent out of shape. Maybe you should get yourself a drink to relax."

"Cold feet, kid," Genie asks, the game disappearing in a poof of smoke that was the same pale blue as the Genie.

"No, it's not that," Aladdin says for the third time that day. "I just... I have a bad feeling, I guess." Abu chatters softly, wrapping his little arms around Aladdin's neck in a hug. "I think I'm gonna go check on Mozenrath's Gauntlet after the wedding's over." He sets Abu down on the pile of gifts beside Iago and begins to walk again, this time towards the Sultan. Surely the shorter man knew a few tricks to get Aladdin's mind off his worries? While Aladdin was speaking to Jasmine's father, trouble was building up—the Forty Thieves were sneaking through the gates, past the less than intelligent guards, and closer to the palace. Mozenrath and Killian were already inside, Mozenrath using a small portion of his magic to darken his pale skin and lighten the colors of his clothes; Killian didn't have to do much except to remove the kohl around his eyes, straighten his clothing, and allow Mozenrath to put a glamour on the hook to make others see a hand there instead.

"Try not to draw attention to yourself," Mozenrath was saying, his dark eyes moving around them to study the crowd. The palace was full of strangers and the royal family couldn't possibly pick Mozenrath out, but that didn't stop him from being paranoid and taking extra precautions. "The treasure vault should be this way." He had a pretty good idea of where it was located after spending a few days inhabiting the Street Rat's body, but the details were a little fuzzy and he couldn't risk using up his energy on something complicated like a tracking spell. The further away from the banquet hall they got, the quieter their surroundings became, and Mozenrath found himself beginning to sweat from exertion and the sun coming in through the arched windows located every few feet. "It should be around the next corner." He kept his voice low, knowing
how noises echoed off the walls and grew louder.

He was just about to round the corner when Killian grabbed a fistful of his shirt and hauled him backwards. Mozenrath had opened his mouth with a list of painful things he could put the pirate through for having the gall to touch him when Killian covered Mozenrath's mouth with his only hand. He could hear it now, pacing footsteps too far away that signaled a guard had been left inside to ensure the safety of the treasure. Carefully, Mozenrath peeked beyond the corner at the guard pacing in front of the two large doors of the treasury. He was plump and dressed in the white and black colors of a palace guard, a sword was at his waist, and his beady eyes were moving continuously. With a mumbled curse, Mozenrath returns to his original position against the wall. How could he get them past that guard without using up more energy?

"Stay here and try not to get caught," Killian commands. His voice was too low for the guard to hear and his sarcasm seemed to drip from his words. Mozenrath scowls, peeking around the corner again as the pirate began stumbling towards the guard, singing merrily as he feigned drunkenness. "A beautiful afternoon for a wedding," he slurs, stretching his arms out. "Lesh join them, shall we?" The guard stood stock still, obviously conflicted about what to do. He wasn't supposed to leave his post, but he couldn't have a drunk guest wandering around the palace either. After a moment, the guard relaxed his stance and was outstretching a hand to place on Killian's shoulder when a jolt sent all of them to the ground.

"What in the name of Ra was that?" Mozenrath crawls to the nearest window, looking out just in time to see a stampede of elephants rushing inside wildly while guest scrambled to get out. A man that had no skill at planning would only see the chaos and panic, but Mozenrath saw a few people of obviously lower status sneaking inside with weapons drawn and eager smiles. They were here to steal something and Mozenrath wasn't going to take any chances when his Gauntlet was on the line.

"I thought I told you to stay put!" Killian hauled Mozenrath back to his feet before turning and sprinting into the treasure vault. Mozenrath followed as well as he could as the foundation gave another shake, the guard that had been pacing was unconscious just inside the room, a heavy gold vase lying beside him with a smidge of blood on the bottom. "Where is the bloody thing?!"

Knowing where they kept it last time, and knowing Aladdin wasn't the most clever man in the world, Mozenrath moved toward the trunk set apart from most of the treasure.

"Use your hook on this!" Killian crouched beside Mozenrath, bringing his hook back before slamming it hard against the padlock that kept the trunk closed. Hurriedly, Mozenrath opens the lid and snatches the brown glove out of the trunk, its familiar magic humming as the glove began to grow warm. Mozenrath slid the glove on after unwrapping the bandages from all that was left of his right arm. It felt nice to have his Gauntlet back after a month without it, his strength returning at a quick rate as he flexed his fingers. The two unlikely allies made it back to the banquet hall before they had to jump to the side to avoid being trampled by an elephant. His momentary lapse in concentration caused his magic to fade, his skin and clothes returning to their natural state just in time for Aladdin to round the corner.

"Mozenrath," the Street Rat shouted in anger, brown eyes flicking between the Necromancer and the man that had just assaulted him. A scream drew both their attentions to the alter where the Princess had been fighting against a burly man with golden claws covering his hand. She must have been distracted by Mozenrath's name being shouted or she just hadn't been strong enough because the golden claws were now buried in her stomach and she was bleeding out—already dead before the claws were removed from the wound. Aladdin appeared to be frozen, his tanned complexion resembling ash as he stared at the scene in horror. Something about Aladdin's shocked and horrified expression made Mozenrath sad as well, not because the Princess had been murdered, but because he knew exactly how Aladdin felt in that moment.
When he was just nine years old, Destane had murdered Mozenrath's older sister right in front of him and then forced Mozenrath to turn her into a Mamluk to guard the boundaries. Mozenrath fought to keep those horrible memories locked away, but his nightmares focused on the way she looked after her death, the way her dark eyes became dull once the life had left them, how gaunt she looked as one of the undead servants. Shaking and wide-eyed, Mozenrath stared at the Princess's dead body, but saw only Nefertari. She and Jasmine shared a few features and mannerisms, but his sister hadn't been the fighter that the Princess was. "Focus!" Mozenrath only snapped out of his state when Killian gave him a hard shake, coming back to the real world with a shuddering gasp. "We had a deal and I fulfilled my end of it," the pirate snarled at him. Still shaking, Mozenrath held his right hand out, palm up, and allowed a ball of magic to coalesce there—the magic resembling indigo and black flames.

"Press it against the bracelet and it will remove Pan's mark," Mozenrath instructs, gaining back some old confidence. "It might sting a little, but she'll feel no other pain through the process." With a nod of thanks, the pirate wrapped the raw magic in a scrap of cloth from his shirt and ran out while Mozenrath turned to face the men terrorizing Agrabah's high and mighty. Grumbling under his breath, he walked over to Aladdin and backhanded him hard enough to force the gutter rat back into reality. "It's no fun for me if someone else has the honor of tearing your life apart, Street Rat. Let's go kill some thieves!" Aladdin's eyes hardened, not pleased with the idea of teaming up with his enemy, but Mozenrath may be the only one strong enough to help him defeat these people and he would do this for Jasmine.

**Aladdin—Three and a Half Years Later**

It was almost exhilarating to be doing this despite the very real pain Jasmine's death left him with, almost like this was the thing he should have been doing all along. He could hear his heart pounding and his blood rushing in his ears, could hear the slapping sound his shoes made as they hit the hot tiled roofs, and the panting breaths of the man running beside him. For the first time in nearly four years, Aladdin felt alive again and not burdened by guilt or sorrow. The thieves were chasing them, not too far behind them, but far enough for Aladdin's worry to ease a bit. There was a gap rising ahead of them, wider than the last, and Aladdin speeds up to make the jump. He turns only when his feet are planted solidly on the next roof, but he immediately sees that his companion had stopped just short and was staring at the gaining men behind him.

"I can't do it," the other man cries out, his black hair hanging in his face. His pale cheeks were flushed a dark red and a sweat had broken out on his high forehead, his chest heaving from all the sprinting they had done. "Go, I'll hold them off!"

"No," Aladdin shakes his head," I'm not leaving you here when your magic is drained. You'll be pulled apart by those guys." The other man just shakes his head, giving a breathless laugh, no doubt remembering all the times that Aladdin might have killed him or locked him in a dungeon. "Jump and I'll help you!"

"No!" The thieves were getting closer now and Aladdin could make out the ugly face of Sa'Luk and the sun glinting off the golden claws the man had on one of his hands. *Those claws were the cause of Jasmine's death.* Aladdin shakes the thought out of his head, focusing again on the Necromancer. The man's hair was matted to his face in places and Aladdin could make out the panic in his dark eyes.

"You can't run forever, Street Rat," one of Sa'Luk's men taunts, a rotund man that seemed a bit on the simple side.

"Come on, you have to hurry," Aladdin shouts, voice going slightly high-pitched in his panic. After a second, the man leaps off the roof, Aladdin barely managing to grab onto his arm to keep
him from plummeting to the ground below. It would have been a hard fall and he doubted the weaker man could have made it without breaking his neck. Unfortunately for both men, Aladdin's grip was slipping and he wouldn't be able to pull the other man up. Aladdin's eyes move from his companions to the ropes of laundry and colorful awnings below before meeting his companion's gaze again. "Do you trust me?" The other man bit his plump bottom lip, following Aladdin's gaze before he clenched his jaw and gave a firm nod.

"I guess I kind of have to at this point," Mozenrath states with his usual scowl. With that, Aladdin lets go and then pushes himself off the roof to follow his companion down to the ground. After bouncing from one rope, getting his foot stuck in a tunic, and rolling off an awning to the hard ground, Aladdin decided that it was one of his more stupid escapes, but it definitely made the top ten in that Sa'Luk and his band of thugs didn't follow them. "Never again," the man moans, rolling onto his back before pushing himself up into a sitting position. Aladdin leans back against the sun-baked brick wall behind him, breathing hard and smiling all the same.

"Ah, come on, Moze," Aladdin says after catching his breath," you knew what you were in for when you tagged along." Mozenrath rolls his eyes, getting back to his feet with a grimace. "How bad are you hurt?"

"No worse than I was the last time we escaped." Aladdin stands as well, limping slightly as the two of them left to find a better shelter for the night; they couldn't stay in an inn because Sa'Luk would likely find them there and slit their throats during the night. Besides, a dead-end alley was easier to defend than a room cluttered with unneeded objects. As the pair stopped again for a small rest, Mozenrath did something neither were expecting—he lowered his head a few inches and pressed his lips against Aladdin's. The affection was foreign to both of them at this point, but Aladdin could feel himself relaxing and kissing the Necromancer back until they couldn't breathe.

"What was that for?" Mozenrath was blushing now, his cheeks growing hot under Aladdin's intense stare.

"Cause no one gets to call you Street Rat except me," he grumbles, stomping away as Aladdin begins to laugh.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I based the being that my version of Felix is on the creature called an Alp, they basically made people have horrible nightmares and then drank some of their blood. I got the idea from one of the Supernatural books called Night Terror by John Passarella—you guys should check it out if you can, it's one of my favorites and was fun to read about!

Neverland—Past

In a world protected by magic, a world made up only of water, a small island began to form in the center. To anybody who saw it happen, it would appear that sand was breaking off the bottom of the water and floating to the surface, hardening there in the sunlight and creating a small strip, but it was slowly growing larger and larger. It was an island forged by sleeping magic, seeping into the magical world from the dreams of children. Soon, the sand has grown into the full size that the island will be when it's first occupant arrives—a boy of no more than fourteen years old. A scar ran diagonally across his face, starting a few inches below his right eye, up across the top of his nose, and stopping at his forehead. It was dark red and fresh, no more than a few weeks old. He was tall for his age with pale blonde hair that fell in his eyes in unruly tangles.

The boy looks around him, rocks beginning to form from the sand, trees and bushes growing next. They were bright green like the trees you would see in the spring, reaching towards the sun and embracing its warmth. Like everything around him, the boy, too, has been crafted by the dream magic, though he came into being thanks to nightmares. He was everything people feared, a boy that could blend in and go unnoticed, a boy that most would pass off as normal as long as they couldn't see the dark thoughts bouncing around in his handsome head.

Those thoughts are what separated him from all the brightness of this new land, the thoughts that contained every child's fears. He looks down at his hands, hard with callouses and tanned a golden color even thought this was his human body's first day of life. His soul has been around for centuries, jumping from house to house and land to land, feeding off nightmares and making them grow in size. As an Alp, a rare species to find these days, he liked to think he was quite powerful. To test his abilities that have, until this moment, mostly been used to torment women and young children, he stretches out a hand and touches a nearby tree.

The pale brown bark turns almost black and the leaves change from bright green to a darker version—the stuff of nightmares. His magic spreads through the island, more trees growing to block out the sun and give the island a feeling of it always being night. He smiles, a dark and cruel smile that leant his face an eerie quality, and walks along a path, dark bushes and thorns growing behind him and taking over the trail. Some thorns are dark red, the color of blood, but not as harmful as the black thorns.

They oozed black poison, one simple drop enough to have a man dead in three days. As he walked he came to the edge of the island, finding a skull-shaped cave in the distance and a longboat dragged up on shore for his use. He ignores it, taking on his usual form of a shadow and flying across the dark waters and in through the socket to the top most room of the cave. A massive golden hour glass sits in the very center of the room, several golden skulls surrounding it.
and working as its base. Larger skulls are built into the walls and surround the room along the floor.

Inside the hour glass was sand from the island, trickling slowly from the top to the bottom half. He knew what it meant, now that he had an entire island to himself he would need to maintain his flow of nightmares. If he didn't get enough, he would starve and the island would disappear back into the sea. Though, how he would get to feed, he had no idea because he would have to stay here to make sure the island stayed stable enough and that could take anywhere from six days to six years.

Thinking quickly, he closes his eyes and separates his two forms, the human one would stay on the island and the shadow form would go for the dreams and blood. When he's stronger and knows the island would not sink while he was distracted, he would bring the more vulnerable children here to feed off of so that it would limit the trips he had to make to other lands. Magic still exists in some lands, he would start there and place suggestions in the children's heads that they would want to come here, that their parents no longer wanted them. But what would he call his new home? It had to have a name or the children would doubt that it truly existed. And then it came to him, the perfect name for an island such as this.

Neverland.

Neverland—Present

Killian held his daughter tightly against his chest, the burns on his hand from Mozenrath's magic stung, but he paid them no mind since his daughter was free of that damn bracelet. It had been late when he returned to Neverland with the magic and Pan's latest demand of the Book of Khartoum from Mozenrath's lab. The last part had been nearly impossible to get his hands on since the Necromancer's familiar often slept in the lab, but he had managed after pouring some rum on the eel's food. By the time Pan allowed Killian to visit Aveena, his daughter was sound asleep. She had slept through the task of removing the braided silver cuff on her wrist and he saw red marks that the silver had left behind that stood out against her lightly tanned skin.

He was just glad that it was done and she was no longer bound to the monster that rules over this island. "I've got you, Vee," he whispers when his daughter lets out a soft whimper. He rests his cheek against the top of her head, his eyes closed as he recalled all the times he'd sat just like this when his baby had been younger and he'd been around more. She still smelled like rain for some reason, though he supposed it might have something to do with her ability to bend magic to her will since his aunt smelled similar to that. "I'll always protect you, my sweet girl." She was the only he had left in this world and he would do anything in his power to keep her safe.

"Killian." He looks up at Trista's voice, finding the woman standing in the doorway. "Why didn't Mozenrath come with you?"

"Agrabah was attacked by a band of thieves," he explains," Mozenrath stayed to help the Prince get his revenge." Trista moves to sit beside Killian on Aveena's small bed, brushing some of her messy hair off her face. "Thank you for taking care of her when I can't."

"Don't thank me, Killy." He makes a face at his childhood nickname, but doesn't comment on it. She only ever calls him that when she's feeling especially loving. "The way I see it, she's my little girl too." They sit in silence for a few minutes, both of their gazes trained on the sleeping child. She was the center of their little group, the thing that kept them all bound to each other; there was nothing magical there, just the affection they had for Aveena. "James said that you'll be leaving soon."

"Yes, Pan wants us to rummage around Mozenrath's lab while the Necromancer's away. He said
there might be some sort of gem there that could help him travel between worlds without using too much of his own power. The Nevergem I think he called it." There was something different about Pan when he gave over the book, something softer and not quite as dark. It was almost like Killian was speaking to a completely different person, but he knew that couldn't be true. Who would pretend to be Peter Pan? "We leave tomorrow morning and I want to take you and Vee with us."

"Pan will never allow Aveena to leave this island, not when he can manipulate her into using her ability for his purposes." Killian's eyes squeeze shut at his friend's words, knowing them to be true. He should never have come here, he should have gone on to Arendelle or some other land with magical properties, but he was too selfish to think of what Pan might do. He hadn't realized that he'd started to cry until he felt Trista's calloused fingers wiping the moisture off his cheeks. "Don't do that, Killy, you'll make me start crying." Her voice cracked at the end and he felt her forehead against his shoulder, Killian freeing one arm to wrap around the woman.

"One day, I will get us all off this bloody island and we'll not have to take orders from Pan."

"I believe you, Daddy," Vee whispers groggily, snuggling closer to him. "You can do anything." That was all Killian needed to hear to have his confidence come back, the encouraging words of a child better than anything else in the world. "Can I lie down on my bed now?"

"Of course, Vee." Killian and Trista both rise from the bed, allowing Vee to lie down before Killian pulls the light blanket up to her chin. "I love you, sweetheart. I love you more than anything."

"Love you too." And then she was sound asleep again, breathing deeply and one of her arms hanging over the edge of the bed so that the tips of her fingers brushed the soft fur of Pup's head. Not wanting to leave her just yet, Killian sits beside Pup on the floor, his head resting against the soft mattress.

"Goodnight, Killian," Trista whispers, placing a light kiss on his forehead before leaving the room.

**Four Years Later**

At eight years old, Aveena was able create new things in her part of the island, things Pan never dreamed about doing at that age—creating small trees and flowers of all different colors, summoning trinkets from other worlds, and making the fluffy white clouds cover then sun so she could play outside longer without the worry of a sunburn. It was amazing to watch her do these things, the way her nose scrunched up as she concentrated. He ability wasn't a rare one, but he's never seen someone master it as quickly as Aveena has. Pan was never able to do much with his natural magic until he came to Neverland and Felix trained him. Even the Dark One struggled to keep control over him magic, and he's one of the strongest people in all the realms thanks to that dagger of his.

"Did I do good," the child asks, running up to Pan excitedly.

"You did very well," Pan smiles back, ruffling her hair. She would be pretty when she grew up, perhaps he would move her to the main body of Neverland when she reached seventeen or so just to keep her looks from fading away with age. "I've got a present for you, but to earn it, you have to summon something for me." Her pale eyes widen as she nods excitedly. "It's called the Nevergem; it's a crystal the size of a newborn's fist and a strange black color that you can partially see through. It hangs off a bronze chain and is cut into an oval shape." She nods, closing her eyes and holding out one hand with the palm up. He could tell she was trying very hard, but the experiment yielded nothing to show for it. It must be in a realm too far for Aveena to reach with her magic, but Pan would have that gem if it's the last thing he does.
"I'm sorry."

"That's alright, Aveena." He ruffles her hair again before he leaves her protected part of the island, the magic changing drastically once he's back in his domain. While the normal magic of Neverland was almost completely dark, Aveena's felt more pure and light, almost like she forced the magic to go through a sort of filter before releasing it back into the earth.
Chapter 5

Aveena was growing faster than Killian liked, the girl already seventeen when it seemed she was eight just yesterday. He was right that she retained his looks through her childhood, and they seemed to be enhanced as she lost the last of her baby fat—her hair fell down her back in soft curls like Milah's had, her form seemed stuck somewhere between skinny and chubby, her mouth was small like her nose, her skin was a healthy tan with a light smattering of freckles across her cheeks and nose, and she usually seemed to be smiling. As proud as he was about his daughter turning our normally despite the way she was raised, he was also terrified for her. Pan's attitude had shifted towards the younger Jones, he seemed to be around more than he used to be and found excuses to touch Vee—correcting her stance when using magic or something inconspicuous like that. Of course, the pair was never left alone for long, James had taken to staying behind to serve as a protector for both the women. Killian had a feeling that James would use any excuse to stay behind since he and Trista had grown incredibly close and were expecting their first child in seven months' time.

Tonight was one of the more hectic ones, Killian and the others were scrambling to get Aveena's things packed away and aboard the Jolly Roger before she and Pan returned from their evening walk. He wanted to be away from Neverland as soon as possible, but he couldn't risk interrupting their nightly stroll because Pan would get suspicious. A suspicious Pan wouldn't be good for any of them if they wanted to keep their lives. "Get Trista to her cabin," Killian demanded as his crew worked diligently around him," if anything should happen to her, I'll gut you." The sailor he spoke to was shaking in fear as he moved the pregnant woman through the magical barrier and up the gangplank to the deck of Killian's ship. "James, how long until we're finished?"

"Not long, Captain," James answers automatically, his arms filled with bags of clothing.

"Good, keep things moving. I'm going to get Vee." They should be on their way back by now and he didn't need Pan seeing the movement by the cottage. Fortunately, Killian greeting his daughter wouldn't be out of the ordinary, especially since it was her birthday. It was the one night of the year that Pan allowed Killian to take Vee out onto the water for an hour or so. He'd barely cleared the barrier when he spotted his daughter and Pan making their way through the trees, Aveena smiling up at Pan in a way Killian had never seen. Sure, he knew his daughter found Pan attractive, but the look on her face suggested she had deeper feelings for the bastard. "Vee, are you ready?"

"Yes, Daddy," she says, smiling at him now. "I had fun tonight." She was speaking to Pan now, her hands clasped nervously in front of her and a light blush lending color to her cheeks. The smile Pan gave her was different somehow, like the one Killian saw when Pan thought no one was watching, it was softer and looked like it belonged to a completely different person. Unknown to Killian, this actually was a different person than he was used to dealing with, this was the real Peter Pan instead of the Alp that often took the form of a boy named Felix. This Peter Pan was slightly less twisted by the darkness of Neverland, though he still had a cruel streak and a magic addiction.

"I did as well," Pan replied, brushing some of Aveena's dark hair behind her ear. "I look forward to tomorrow evening." Just as Killian thought things couldn't get any worse, Pan leaned down and pressed his lips against Aveena's in a chaste kiss, though it lasted far too long for Killian who was trying desperately not to bury his hook in the demon's face. "Goodnight, my darling."

"Night," Vee mumbles, looking dazed as the other teen walked back into the thick jungle. It wasn't until Killian had a hold of her upper arm and was leading her back through the barrier that
she came back to her senses. "H-he's never done that before."

"I gathered that much, thank you," Killian grumbles, wishing that his daughter had at least fought against the kiss, but she had leaned into it and seemed to enjoy it. That thought nearly made Killian lose his lunch. He'd never thought about his daughter being old enough to be courted, let alone courted by the most evil person—if you could call Pan that—he'd ever had the displeasure of meeting. He needed to get her away from here, somewhere she'd be safe and out of Pan's reach. Perhaps the Enchanted Forest again? She seemed to do well there, though there would be no happy memories for Killian since that was the realm where Milah was killed. Wanting to move faster in case Pan changed his mind, Killian pauses long enough to pick Vee up and carry her the rest of the way at a fast jog. The second their feet hit the deck, the sailors were moving and James was bellowing out orders.

"What's going on?" Of course Vee would know something was happening, his sailors were never this busy during their small outings.

"I'll tell you in a moment, Vee, but for now I need you to come with me." He takes her hand in his, leading her to the cabin she shared with Trista sixteen and a half years ago. "Trista, keep a close watch on her. Make sure she doesn't do anything..." He trailed off for a moment, trying to think of a good word and settling on the only one that popped into his head. "Stupid." He shut the door right as Vee threw something at him, the object crashing against the wood with a loud bang.

It was for calling her actions stupid, he knew that, but he was still bewildered that she threw something at him.

"Where to, Captain," James asks once they were a good distance away from the island. He had to pause for a moment, still leaning against the door of the cabin. Where could they go where Vee had a chance at a good life? Honestly, he hadn't a clue, but he did know someone that had control over magic.

"The Land of the Black Sands, the owner owes me a favor."

**The Land of the Black Sands—Thirteen Years Ago**

"Why am I here, Mozenrath," Killian asks in a bored tone, staring around him at the numerous artifacts the Necromancer kept around his citadel. "Last I heard, you were running for your life from a band of thieves intent on using your head to decorate their walls." The other man scowls at Killian's words, pacing around the library with his hands clasped behind his back. "Fine, I'll do whatever you want as long as you stop the damn pacing." He was growing fed up and he's only been here for five bloody minutes! Satisfied with Killian's words, Mozenrath allows himself to drop into one of the high-backed chairs that surrounded a long table made of dark, polished wood. The man was more disheveled than Killian had ever seen him, his turban was gone so his curly hair fell freely across his shoulders, his Gauntlet was lying on the table and his skeletal arm and hand were bare, and his clothes were hanging off his emaciated form.

"Those thieves have Aladdin held hostage in their little hideout," Mozenrath explains. "They've somehow made it magic proof, so I can't do anything even if I somehow manage to get inside."

"That's where I come in, I take it?"

"Yes, I need you to gain their trust enough to smuggle Aladdin back here where he'll be safe."

"Since when do you care about Aladdin?" Killian had thought the two hated each other, but apparently Mozenrath was growing fond of the Prince. Mozenrath's scowl deepens and the ashy hue of his cheeks turn bright red as he blushes. "Ah, you've fallen in love with him. How fantastic."
"Just get him back here, we're getting married in two weeks and I won't have him dead just yet!"
Smiling, Killian picks up the slip of parchment and shoves it into his coat pocket. "How much will
this cost me, Pirate?"

"Let's call it a favor."

"I don't like owing anybody."

"Get used to it, Necromancer." And then Killian was walking through the halls, the sounds of his
boots clicking loudly when they hit the stone beneath his feet. The whole place was cold, but the
magic here wasn't as dark as the magic that made up Neverland, so it was a welcome reprieve.
Every now and again, he would pass one of Mozenrath's guards; the creatures a pale green color,
dressed in tattered uniforms with their mouths stitched closed. They were surprisingly hard to take
take down since they felt no pain, but a sword made dismembering them to slow them down much
easier than doing it by hand. Easier still was being invited to the citadel and not having to bother
with the Mamluks at all. "This Prince had better be worth it."

It was nearly daylight when Killian made it to his destination, the sea in front of him seeming to
stretch on for miles. Perhaps he should have brought a few men with him, just in case things
weren't so easy as he hoped they'd be. He dismounts the horse he'd stolen and unsheathes his
sword, the familiar weight of it lending him some confidence. If anyone who wasn't the Prince ran
at him, then he would kill them without a second's thought or hesitation. With that thought in
mind, he steps up to the edge of the sea and raises his arms. "I feel like a fool," he grumbles with a
scowl before speaking in a louder, though no less grumpy, voice. "Open Sesame!"

Just like Mozenrath had demonstrated on the parchment, the sea rose up before Killian and parted
down the middle, giving him a walkway of sand to sprint through. He didn't dare take the horse
with him, he would be making enough noise by himself and he didn't need to add the clatter of
horse's hooves to that mixture. Killian ran as fast as he could towards the door that opened in the
cliff face, the water behind him beginning to crash back down to its normal position. If he didn't
speed up, he would drown and all of this will have been for nothing. Ignoring the stitch in his side,
Killian tries to run a little faster, leaping through the door just as it closes and the water crashes
against the now smooth rock.

"That was a miracle if I've ever seen one," he huffs, getting to his feet with a quiet groan of pain.
Before him was what looked like the ruins of an ancient city, fallen pillars and cracked obelisks
everywhere. It was like the occupants of this lair had stolen from every culture imaginable and
brought the monuments back here to crumble. Further into the lair, he found the golden head of a
Minotaur mounted on the wall, Killian grimacing at the sight. Those creatures were rare enough
without people killing them for sport. Shaking his head, he lowers himself down onto his stomach
and crawls over to a ledge, peering down below to see what was going on.

The thieves were gathered in a dining hall of sorts, a large, tall man dressed in a black vest and
dark blue pants standing up on a dais. Nearby and tied together were two men sharing similar
features, a brightly colored parrot, and a little monkey in a vest and fez. The two men, obviously
related somehow, had dark brown hair, wide brown eyes, and darkly tanned skin; Killian
recognized the younger one as Aladdin, but the older one was unfamiliar. "Look what we have,
boys," the man in charge was shouting energetically. He had a strange gray skin color that spoke
of illness and a black goatee, but the thing that stuck out in Killian's mind were the golden claws
fixed to the man's left hand. He was the one that murdered the Princess at her own wedding three
years ago. "Our old leader, his brat, and their sidekicks!" The parrot tried to say something, but the
thieves had tied some rope around his beak to keep him quiet.
"Best to do this now." Still on his stomach, Killian maneuvers until his bottom half was hanging over the ledge, finding hand holds in the rock to climb down safely. All eyes were fixed on the front of the chamber, so no one noticed as Killian joined them from behind, his sword in its scabbard to avoid attention for as long as possible. Slowly and carefully, he makes his way to the front of the crowd, standing next to a large man that had the dumbest laugh Killian had ever heard. The larger man at the front continues to talk, listing all the ways the older man had betrayed them and why the group of prisoners had to be put to death. As the man's eyes roamed the crowd, they fixed on Killian, and he knew he'd just been recognized.

"It appears we have a special visitor!" The man pointed at Killian, his eyes bright with insanity, and his grin revealing all of his rotten teeth. "Have any of you heard of the famous Hook?!"

"There should be a Captain in there somewhere," Killian remarks, pulling his sword and a dagger out as the men closed ranks around him. "If you have heard of me, then you know I have never lost a duel before, so does anyone want to back away before I take their life?" The thieves glanced nervously at one another, a few looking like they wanted to do nothing else, but then the larger man joined the fray and rallied them to him.

"The one to bring me Hook's head will get the honor of killing our beloved Cassim!"
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Quirkistan is a place from the Aladdin TV series, we see it in the episode Bad Moon Rising.

The Lair of the Forty Thieves—Thirteen Years Ago

The men came at him at the same time, unintelligible shouts and snarls filling Killian's ears as he began to fight for his life. If he died for a man he didn't even know personally, then he would come back as a ghost and pester Mozenrath until the Necromancer died. At first, it looked like he really would die, one of the thieves burying their dagger in his side and another sword—or was it another dagger?—grazed his neck. He was growing tired quickly, constantly moving to either dodge blows or deliver them, the blade of his weapons stained crimson and his breaths leaving him in ragged pants. He grunts as a larger man hits him with the hilt of a sword, seeing double as he swung widely. Apparently he hit somebody because the pressure on his left eased up a bit and he heard a strangled gasp.

The leader of the group, Killian didn't know his name, grabbed Killian by the back of his overcoat and throws him a few feet, Killian hitting the hard stone and rolling until he came to a stop near the prisoners. He was bruised and bloody and he hurt in places he didn't even know could hurt, but if he gave up, then he wouldn't fulfill his revenge and his daughter would be left in the hands of Pan. Grunting, he manages to sit up and throw his knife, the point burying itself in the fat one's throat. He couldn't do this by himself, he would need help if anyone was going to make it out of this lair intact. As the group began advancing on him, Killian uses his sword to cut through the ropes binding the prisoners together. Aladdin sprung into action, diving into the group without any weapon with Cassim right behind him. "Idiots," Killian gasps, standing up, "all of us are idiots." And then he was in the fray again, his movements sluggish from blood loss as the wound in his side stays open.

With the extra hands, soon all of the thieves are either dead, dying, or unconscious and tied up. "Thank you," Aladdin says as he stitches up Killian's side, both of them sitting on the ground a few feet away from the bodies. Killian had his back against one of the obelisks, his flask of rum grasped in his hand as the Prince continues to work.

"Don't thank me, I didn't do it out of the kindness of my heart." He takes another long drink, wincing slightly from the burn as it goes down his throat. "Your darling fiancé sent me and I thought it might be useful to have him owe me a debt in the future." Aladdin shrugs, finishing up his work and sitting beside Killian, both men staring ahead at the bloodstained floors and walls. Gold and crimson, both were familiar colors to him back when he sailed freely and took what he wanted without answering to a demon or his wife. "I'm Killian Jones, Captain of the Jolly Roger."

"Aladdin, soon-to-be Sultan of Agrabah." The current Sultan must be ill, Killian muses, or else Aladdin would have just said he was a Prince. "The parrot is Iago," he points at the red and blue colored bird, then at the little monkey. "That's Abu, and that's my father." He was pointing at the older man and Killian could see that he was dressed in fine silks of dark blue. Cassim was older than Killian had originally thought, his dark hair beginning to gray in places, but he was just as handsome as the Prince.
"Well, Aladdin, what do you say we get you back to Mozenrath, so I can return to my daughter?"

**Neverland—Present**

Leaving Neverland had been a difficult challenge without Pan attempting to use his magic to pull them back, but Aveena had realized that her father was right and was soon using Pan's magic against him, allowing the ship to travel out of Neverland's reach into safer waters (quite literally). Now, the crew relaxing a little since Pan couldn't strangle them, Killian found himself catching his daughter before she hit the deck. James, thankfully, was close enough to take over the wheel so that Killian could tend to his daughter. "Are you alright, Vee," he asks worriedly as he carries her into her cabin to rest. She gives a little nod to show that she would be. Killian carefully lowers her into her hammock, removing her shoes afterwards in case she did fall asleep. "How did you know that would work?"

"I didn't," she shrugs with a sheepish grin as she opens her eyes to look at him.

"I've had more of an influence on you than I thought." Perhaps dumb luck was genetic? He couldn't be sure about that, but he was sure that his daughter was a miracle in times of crisis; she had rested her hands against the railing of the ship and pulled Pan's magic out before pushing it back in with her own commands, continuing to do that until the ship obeyed her and continued to sail forward. "Get some rest, sweet girl, and when you wake, you'll be in a completely different realm." She smiles at that thought, her eyes slowly closing and her breaths evening out as she falls into a deep sleep. Using her magic like that wore her out and Killian wasn't taking any chances when it came to her safety.

"Is she alright," Smee asks, coming to stand just outside the cabin with his red hat in his hands.

"She will be." When Smee doesn't move and only continues to wring his hat nervously in his hands, Killian faces him fully with a frown. "What is it you need, Mister Smee?"

"I was... I was just worried about Vee, Cap'n." That was understandable, most of the crew has grown attached to the little hellion and he could see a small crowd of sailors gathering behind Smee. With an irritated sigh, he leaves the cabin and closes the door behind him. "We were all worried when we saw her collapse."

"She'll be fine," he says loud enough to be heard, his hands held up to keep the men at bay," She needs rest, and you lazy rats need to get back to work!" The men scurried back to their jobs, Smee included, and Killian allowed himself to close his eyes and rest his head against the closed door. He was beyond exhausted, but he couldn't afford to have his plan backfire when he's so close to getting his daughter and Trista somewhere relatively safe. If he knew Aladdin, then he knew that the Prince would have Mozenrath's darker side tamed enough to be around a child. Besides, the Necromancer owed Killian a debt and Killian wouldn't hesitate to kill any man that harmed his baby girl—mystical powers or not. He lets out a quiet groan, pushing away from the door and walking into his own cabin. He could do with a few hours of rest while James handled things.

As he walked to his cot, he snatched up a drawing off his desk and stared at it once he was lying down; boots and hook discarded. It was drawn with charcoal, a simple picture of Killian, Aveena, and Milah that Milah had drawn from memory when they were in Quirkistan—a kingdom not too far from Agrabah that was ruled by a boy-king who controlled the weather. If Killian remembered correctly, there was a thunder storm happening when he and his crew left, taking the Sultan's favorite toy with them. He allows a small smile at the memory, a peaceful time before Vee began to get sick and Milah was murdered. The smile dims at the last thought, the Dark One moving to the forefront of his mind. The man was immortal, but everyone has a weakness and he just needed to keep digging until he found Rumpelstiltskin's. Maybe Mozenrath had an idea of what it was? If
he did, then Killian would happily pay the price in order to be even an inch closer to his revenge.

Killian sets the slip of parchment under his pillow and turns onto his side, a light blanket covering him even though the cabin was still warm; he couldn't sleep well without having a blanket over him. He blamed Liam for that since the older man had convinced a four year old Killian that a monster resided in the kingdom and would eat all little boys that didn't cover up at night. It wasn't until he was eight that Killian realized his brother had told him that, not out of cruelty, but because several boys around Killian's age were falling ill from the dropping temperatures. Then again, there probably was a bit of meanness there since most brothers love to torment each other at some point. As Killian slept, he dreamed of the happier times in his life, the small glimpses going by too fast for him to properly see them, but he remembered that happy feeling when he woke up three hours later.

The citadel was as dismal as Killian remembered, the pale stone of the place glowing under the moonlight and the two large snakes carved into the wooden doors looking slightly more vicious this time of night. Mamluks still made their patrols along the borders where the black sand mingled with the golden sand, though Killian, Vee, Trista, and James made it past without being spotted. That was a miracle considering how large their group was. Still, as confident as he always was, Killian felt nervous as he crossed the large stone bridge that lead from the village to the citadel, his hand shaking as he pressed it against the cool wood doors and pushed them open.

"Are you sure we'll be welcome here," Aveena asks in a whisper, peering past Killian and into the dark hallway stretching on in front of them.

"Of course," he answers, though he didn't sound convincing even to himself.

"How sure?"

"Er...Twelve percent, but an argument could be made for fifteen." With a snort, Aveena summons a small orb of light to brighten the hall, the orb giving off a faint lavender-colored glow that made Vee's blue eyes look violet. "Alright, no sense in standing around letting all the warm air out. Let's go." Killian led the way inside with the two girls in the middle and James at the end, this way they would be easy to defend in case of attack. "Stay close and don't wander off." He's only slightly comforted when he feels Vee's slim fingers gripping the back of his vest, her fingers warm even though the citadel itself was cold. He would be surprised if it was ever warm here considering how rarely sunlight was able to break through the dark clouds over the kingdom. As they move further into the citadel, Killian can make out faint voices; an argument? He turns towards his companions, placing one finger over his mouth to show that silence was needed, only moving again when the other three nod in understanding.

"...the tenth demon you've summoned this week," he heard Aladdin shout, the exasperated tone making Killian think this was a regular conversation to be had in the Land of the Black Sands.

"You're the one that suggested it in order to find my father," Mozenrath retorted, sounding a lot like a spoiled child that had just been told no for the first time in his life. "Besides, I can't remember the man's name, so I have to do the random summoning rituals until one of the demons recognizes his description." Neither of the two men noticed as Killian and his group slipped inside the room and watched them continue their argument, Vee's orb of light disappearing. The room itself was larger than many Killian had occupied, the ceilings vaulted and a large circle drawn on the floor in the direct center of the room. The circle was glowing a dark blue, as were the runes that ran along the outside of it and the pentagram in the center. "Now, do you want me to keep looking, or have you finally decided that I could live without knowing the bastard?"

"Come on, Moze, you should at least meet the man one time in your life."
"Or I could use the spare time..." The expression on Mozenrath's face helped Killian realize where the conversation was going, and he quickly covered his daughter's ears.

"Perhaps you could discuss your sex life when there isn't a child in the room," Killian remarks, stepping further inside so that the torchlight would reveal him. Mozenrath rolls his eyes and sits on the edge of a round table that looked like it had a small depiction of the Seven Deserts painted on it. "I've come to collect my debt."

"You have the worst timing of anyone I've ever known." While Mozenrath had his normal sullen expression in place, Aladdin offered the group a kind smile. "Aladdin, I assume you remember the pirate I sent to rescue you and your bumbling sidekicks."

"Come now, Moze, you're going to have your own sidekick for a while." He nudges Aveena forward and grins as his daughter holds out a hand for Aladdin to shake. Aladdin does just that, his kind smile never faltering as he studies Vee. Next, she moves to Mozenrath with her hand still outstretched.

"Don't be rude," she tells him when the Necromancer just crosses his arms across his chest and looks away. "I said..." She kicks his shin, causing Mozenrath to fall off the table with a yelp. "Don't be rude! When someone offers their hand for you to shake, then you shake it. It's not a difficult concept to grasp."

"So, is she welcome to stay here or not?"

"As long as she promises to kick my husband whenever he's rude, then she can stay for as long as she wants," Aladdin grins, watching as Mozenrath begrudgingly shakes Aveena's hand. "I've been trying to teach him proper manners for years and she managed to teach him one in less than five minutes."
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

The Song Vee sings is off Mary Poppins, and even though she wouldn't know it, I couldn't resist using it. My shameless self promotion here: For new readers, this is an AU of my other story on here called 'Ignorance is Bliss.' My other story is what would have happened had Rumple taken Vee and raised her as his kid. Vee is a sarcastic little shit and it's basically finished until the new season comes on, so you guys might like that one! :)

Dark Castle—Thirteen Years Ago

The castle ahead would normally intimidate people who weren't used to the evil surrounding it, dark stones and stained glass windows—almost like the cathedrals in the land without magic. Mozenrath admired the architecture; it reminded him of his own house in the East, a citadel guarded by the undead under his control. With confidence, he walks closer to the castle, pushing its heavy front doors open and stepping inside. He had to give it to the Dark One, he certainly possessed more magical objects than Mozenrath thought possible. "Trespassing isn't a smart thing to do here, Dearie," someone speaks in a singsong tone, the voice echoing and making it impossible for Mozenrath to pinpoint the direction it came from. "I assume you have a good reason, little Necromancer?"

"Come out and face me," Mozenrath demands. A giggle reaches his ears and magic assaults his senses, Mozenrath lashing out and grabbing a handful of a silk dress. Instead of the Dark One like he had expected, he finds a girl staring up at him, maybe fourteen or fifteen years of age and still just a child. She stares up at him with black buttons where her eyes should be, a magical countermeasure, but not a very good one. "Are you through with your tricks?"

"Mozenrath," the other voice states, a man appearing from the shadows seconds afterwards. Now, this is the man Mozenrath expected to see, the green-gold skin making the other immortal seem intimidating enough without the waves of powerful magic coming off him. "Lord of the Land of the Black Sands."

"Rumple," Mozenrath says with a respectful nod. "I suppose you know why I'm here."

"Of course I do, Dearie! You're in wuv, but your other half isn't immortal like you are. What's his name again? Something strange yet fitting."

"His name is Aladdin."

Rumple—Present

Rumple was fairly certain that something was different as he stepped up to the front door of Mozenrath's citadel, a different kind of magic that he hasn't sensed in a very long time. He pushes the thought of new magic aside, wanting to get back to his castle as soon as he could. He was expecting a visitor at any moment and didn't want to spend any more time here than needed. The reason he was here is a simple one: he wants to study Mozenrath's Gauntlet. It's not like the Necromancer needed it anymore since he was mortal now after some help on Rumple's part.
Using his magic, he opens the doors of the citadel and steps inside. It was gloomy here, but Rumple could see that someone had tried to cheer the place up with vases of colorful flowers and cheerful paintings. The Street Rat must be behind that garish display.

As Rumple came closer to the throne room, he could hear a soft voice singing a song he'd only heard two times in his lifetime—the first time when he'd went to Killian's ship to ask for his wife back and the second time when he had followed Milah to the docks to get his magic bean. Curious as to who the voice belonged to, Rumple followed it to the kitchen and found a young woman sitting on the floor, a small black cat sleeping on the floor beside her and a thick book propped up on her legs. She might have been pretty to someone else, but all Rumple could see was a pirate. She was sixteen or seventeen and she had dark brown hair that nearly reached her waist, she was lightly tanned, and he could see she had fine features.

"Early each day to the steps of Saint Paul's, the little old bird woman comes. In her own special way to the people she calls, come buy my bags full of crumbs. Come feed the little birds, show them you care and you’ll be glad if you do." It was obvious that she wasn't actually reading, she wasn't seeing the book in her lap, she was far away in her own world. "Their young ones are hungry, their nests are so bare; all it takes is tuppence from you. Feed the birds tuppence a bag—tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag. Feed the birds, that's what she cries, while overhead, her birds fill the skies. All around the cathedral the saints and apostles look down as she sells her wares. Although you can't see it, you know they are smiling each time someone shows that he cares. Though her words are simple and few, listen, listen, she's calling to you. Feed the birds tuppence a bag—tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag. Though the words are simple and few, listen, listen, she's calling to you. Feed the birds tuppence a bag—tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag."

Rumple allowed his eyes to drift closed, remembering a time that seemed so long ago now, when Milah would sing Bae to sleep or while doing her chores. That was Milah's voice and it took him a good amount of time to reason out why this child would have it; he'd heard rumors that Jones had a small daughter called Aveena and now those rumors were confirmed. It's only when he comes back from the memory that he realizes the girl has stopped singing. He opens his eyes, finding her blue ones fixed on him with an expression of apprehension on her face. She wasn't necessarily scared of him, but he could tell that his appearance unnerved her. "Who are you," she inquires softly, the lilting accent of her voice pointing towards Killian Jones as well. She must not have inherited much from her mother, just her singing voice and the slight wave of her hair.

"I am Rumpelstiltskin and you're Milah's daughter." He felt rage boiling inside him at the fact that the pirate still had something to remember Milah by, but he couldn't bring himself to harm the girl. He wanted to, but something made him hold back. The girl reminded him of the son he had lost and some part of him wanted to protect this little Lost Girl from all the badness in the world that he couldn't protect Bae from. "Aveena Jones." She rises quickly from the floor, her book falling to the ground and the sudden clatter making the kitten beside her wake up with a start. The noise also brought the sounds of hurried footsteps followed by the annoyed voice of Aladdin.

"All I ask is that you don't reanimate the dead bodies where Aveena and I prepare the dinner."

"Okay, okay," Mozenrath was grumbling, both of them much closer to the room now. "Let's just see if Vee is alright." Aveena's eyes never left his even as the two men he came to see walked inside. "Rumple?" With a dark look, Rumple turns to face the Necromancer, almost amused when the man uses his magic to poof himself in front of Aveena.

"Why bother with protecting her? I am much more powerful than you are, Mozenrath."

**Dark Castle—Thirteen Years Ago**
"Sorry, Dearie," Rumple apologizes, not sounding sorry in the slightest," there's no potion or spell to turn someone immortal. If there was, do you think anybody around here would be mortal?" Mozenrath scowls, Gauntleted hand clenched into a fist and glowing a faint red. "But that's not what you want, is it?"

"No, I want the opposite. I don't want to be immortal anymore, make me normal again, Dark One, and I will owe you a favor in the future." Rumpelstiltskin pauses to consider the offer, his eyes moving around the room, but not really seeing anything. "Do we have a deal?"

"I suppose you'll want me to take care of that, as well?" Mozenrath stares down at the arm ensconced in the dark brown leather, the magic humming in it like an old friend. He's tried going without it before, he even went as far as to lock it away in a trunk thrown into an ocean, but the pain was too much to bear. If Rumple could remove the pain of a severed connection, then he could do the healing himself. "Very well, but only because you killed your former master before I felt the need to." Mozenrath shivers at the mention of Destane, the older man having abused Mozenrath until the Gauntlet had run its course and chosen a new master.

"Thank you, Dark One."

"Don't thank me yet, we're going to need the blood of a mortal, someone pure and I don't think either of us has been the pure and virtuous sort in decades."

"I….I think I may know someone as long as the blood loss wouldn't kill them."

"Don't worry, Moze, your precious Aladdin will survive the ordeal, but you may not."

Rumple—Present

Now that he had another weakness of the pirate, Rumple wondered what to do with the girl. Lock her in a tower, kill her, or force her into servitude? The possibilities seemed endless to him, but he must decide quickly. The unpleasant smile on his face had Mozenrath's right hand clenching into a fist, his flame-like magic swirling around the now-fleshy hand. So, he'd gotten his natural magic back after cleaving himself from the Gauntlet. Rumple wondered if he could do the same if cleaved from the dagger.

"Why are you here, Rumple," Mozenrath demands. Rumple gives a little shrug, walking around the smaller room to examine all the objects stuffed in it. A small bed was tucked away in the corner, the mattress soft and covered by a purple blanket; books were piled high beside the bed and table beside it; a window near the bed offers a view of where the black and golden sands intertwine with each other. In the distance, Rumple could barely make out the glinting of gold that signified Agrabah.

"I thought I'd drop by," Rumple finally answers with a giggle," and I'm so glad I did!" He spins on his heel to face the others, noting that Aveena was nearly hidden behind Mozenrath's tall form and Aladdin's broad shoulders. He could just make out the top of her head, but not much else. "Come now, if I really wanted to hurt her, then neither of you could stop me." For demonstration, Rumple gives a small wave of his hand and Aveena appeared in front of him, her feet stuck to the ground. Aladdin let out a strangled gasp of surprise while Mozenrath's expression only darkened. "Aw, you've come to care about the pirate's spawn."

Dark Castle—Thirteen Years Ago

Aladdin watches with wide eyes as the Dark One mixes up a new potion, Aladdin sitting at the table and holding Mozenrath's hand tightly. If he were completely honest, Aladdin would tell Mozenrath to leave this place and they'd find a better way to rid themselves of the Gauntlet, but he
knew this might be the only way for that to happen. The Prince felt bad for the pain that Mozenrath would soon endure, but knew it would mean getting what he wanted in the long run.

"Mozenrath," Rumpelstiltskin calls," be of some use while I'm doing this." Mozenrath scowls at the tone Rumple used, but his hands were steady as he takes the small knife from Rumpelstiltskin. "Make a small cut on Aladdin's arm just near the elbow."

"Don't speak down at me," he grumbles, holding Aladdin's forearm in his free hand and running the tip of the dagger across the man's upper arm, a shallow cut quickly spilling out precious blood. Aladdin hisses, but doesn't jerk away, simply watching on as Rumple captured a few drops of blood in a small brass bowl, moving back to his other ingredients while Mozenrath healed his lover. "Are you okay?"

"Yes," Aladdin nods while Mozenrath uses his uncovered hand to push a few strands of hair from Aladdin's face. They looked at each other tenderly, as though nothing else in the world mattered as long as they were together. After Jasmine's death, Aladdin thought he would never feel this way again, but here he was with the man that used to be his biggest enemy. Aladdin laughs, trying to cheer Mozenrath up despite the way his stomach was twisting. "Remember how we first met?"

"I created a monster to terrorize your fiancé's kingdom to lure the heroes out, so I could use them to collar a Thurdack." Mozenrath blushes, grumbling under his breath about the nasty magic-eating beast that had nearly finished him off when he first recovered it. "Of course, the whole incident ended up blowing up in my face when you and your friends forced me to return the Thurdack to its world again."

"But you kept fighting back."

"Yes," Mozenrath drawls," it was all very dramatic back then." Aladdin smiles, nudging the older man until he was smiling, too.

"Enough with the background," Rumple orders, holding up a clear vile containing a cloudy substance. "Mozenrath, if you would be so kind as to drink this and get out of my hair until I need that favor." Mozenrath takes a deep breath, the Gauntleted hand taking the vile while his free hand squeezed Aladdin's.

"It'll be okay, Moze," Aladdin promises softly," I'm here for you." With a meaningful look sent in Aladdin's direction, Mozenrath tips the vile back and swallows it all at once, shaking his head fiercely afterwards in disgust.

"Eck," he groans," that's horrible!" Everyone keeps their eyes on Mozenrath, watching as he sticks out his tongue and continues to make fussy noises until he suddenly doubles over, dry heaving as his legs give out. He lands hard on the floor, back arching and face growing a dark red. "A-A-Al—"

"Do something," Aladdin snarls, dropping to the floor beside Mozenrath and supporting his head as he goes into spasms. His eyes have rolled into the back of his head and his mouth is beginning to foam.

Rumple—Present

Something strange was happening as Rumple continued to talk, he could feel his magic slipping the longer held Aveena in place with it. "Now, what do you suppose I should do with her now that I have her? I suppose I could always turn her into a bug and set her loose in Killian Jones' path—he'd step on her and kill her, and then I'd turn her back into a human to let him see his good work."
"Why do you want to hurt my father," Aveena inquires with a glare in his direction. Rumple's smile diminishes the longer he stares at her, the confusion in her gaze making it clear that she was never told the whole story of why her mother wasn't around.

"Don't," Aladdin growls, muscles tensed even as Rumple forces him and Mozenrath to remain in place. "She doesn't need that in her head."

"All the more reason to do it," Rumple replies, his smile back in place. He faces Aveena again, twirling a lock of her soft hair around his finger and finding amusement in her look of disgust. "You obviously know who I am."

"Everyone does," she answers, slapping his hand away.

"True enough, but I haven't affected everyone's family the way I have yours, Dearie." As Rumple talks, he uses his magic to change her tattered dress to something more fitting; her old dress had been a shade paler than her eyes and made her look innocent, but the black gown Rumple changed it to looked more like it should be worn to your deathbed. It wasn't until he had changed it, though, that he noticed the sapphire heart hanging around her neck, the gem smaller than even his thumbnail, but he recognized it instantly. "Where did you get that?" He pokes the gem, his rage beginning to rise again.

"It was my mother's." She'd covered it with her hand, but Rumple already had it memorized. He'd given it to Milah the day of their wedding, the only gift he'd been able to afford and now the bastard child of a pirate and an unfaithful wench wore it around her throat as though she had any claim to it.

Pan—Thirteen Years Ago

Pan watches on as Mozenrath writhes on the floor, no one in the room knowing what to do, Aladdin shouting for Rumpelstiltskin to do something about it. Rumple looked undisturbed, seated in the chair at the head of the table and fiddling with ingredients to see if he had the ones necessary to help the seizure pass without doing more damage. It wasn't taking Mozenrath's immortality that was sending the boy into the fits, but the Gauntlet fighting to regain complete control.

The magical artifact was bound to him tightly, feasting on flesh and muscle all the way up to the man's shoulder. The second Mozenrath slipped the glove on, he signed away part of his soul and no one could save the boy now. Well, no one apart from himself. Pan smirks, floating along to the next window as Aladdin's tears begin to fall freely. Cloaked by his magic, Pan grins, leaning casually against the wall and looking the scene over. "Poor Moze seems to be in trouble," he says even no one could hear him.

Knowing he could use the Necromancer at a later date, he pulls a square of chocolate out of thin air, holding it up between two fingers. Pan waves a hand over the small square, the dark chocolate glowing golden for a second before returning to its natural coloring. "Enchanted chocolate—just the thing Mozenrath needs to survive this ordeal."

After a second longer of debating whether or not to tempt fate and leave this to Rumple, Pan takes a couple of steps forward and presses the chocolate into Aladdin's hand. "You'd best make him eat that, he doesn't have much longer to live." Aladdin stares at the chocolate for a moment, wondering where it had came from and if he really should use it.

Rumple—Present

"And do you know who gave it to your mother?" He had to spit out the word mother, knowing
Milah wouldn't be a fit parent for a cat let alone a human being.

"M-my father did," she answers, growing uncertain under Rumple's constant glower. "I think so, at least. He never talks about her." She wilted under the look, her eyes on the floor and her head lowered. Where her hair had been hanging freely, it was now in a loose bun at the base of her head, a few of Milah's favorite flowers braided into it. Cleaned up and dressed properly, he supposed she was pretty, but she wasn't beautiful yet; she was chubby and her movements seemed to be on the clumsy side.

"I'm the one who gave her the necklace," Rumple practically growls, wrapping the fingers of one hand around her throat and bringing her a few inches closer to him while he bound her hands behind her back with magic. "She left her real family to be with that filthy pirate and then she had you, but do you know what I did to her when I found her again?" His voice was low, only Aveena able to hear him as her face turned a light shade of purple from oxygen deprivation. "I crushed her heart right in front of your father and I would have done the same to you had I found you that day."

Aveena was letting out feeble gasps, trying desperately to suck in air, but Rumple only tightened his grasp. "Let her go," Aladdin was shouting, and Mozenrath was cursing loudly as he fought against Rumple's magic, but his was no use against the Dark One. "You're going to kill her!"

"Oh no, I'm not killing her just yet." He gives a dark laugh, glaring down at the girl. Her pupils were beginning to dilate the closer she comes to death, but he wasn't done with her. "I want your father to know that I held your life in my hands, quite literally. I want him to know that I can get to you no matter where he sends you to stay, and next time I may not be so kind." It wasn't until he released her throat that he registered how strangely his magic was reacting, and then Aveena—choking and gasping—brought her leg back and kicked him hard enough to send him to the floor. As she did that, she held out a hand and he saw a familiar sword seemingly appear out of nowhere and fit perfectly in her hand. In seconds, the blade was held against his throat and he found himself wondering how the hell that had even happened.

"I'm not completely defenseless, Rumpelstiltskin. Remember that the next time you try to harm my family." The giggle he lets out shocks the girl, her brows furrowing as he runs one of his slim fingers along the sharp edge of the sword.

"The next time we meet will be interesting indeed." And then he was gone in a puff of smoke, the scent of fresh rain following him back to his castle and Mozenrath's Gauntlet clutched in his hand.

Mozenrath—Thirteen Years Ago

Mozenrath raises slowly from his spot on the ground, the bitter tang of chocolate in his mouth enough to make him nauseous. That combined with the aftertaste of a powerful enchantment had him wondering where the spell had come from since Aladdin was not yet powerful enough to have made it on his own and it was too different to belong to Rumple. "Thank you," he says breathlessly, leaning heavily on Aladdin as pain spread through his body after the violent seizures.

"Well, don't keep us in suspense," Rumple grins, standing and walking around the two men to Mozenrath better. "Take it off and let me see if my spell truly worked!" Mozenrath knew what he was talking about, what he wanted to see. Wincing, Mozenrath sinks down into a chair, using his un gloved hand to remove the Gauntlet and revealing the pearly white bone underneath. Only a bit of ligament and magic kept the bones in place, the flesh and muscle gone all the way up until his right shoulder. "Ohh, truly gruesome, Moze. You should take care of that."

"I will heal it when I return back to my citadel."
"Please," Aladdin says, stepping forward," let us stay here for the night and we'll leave with the sunrise. Mozenrath won't be able to make it through the journey after what he just went through and I'm sure you'd be angry if he died instead of letting you collect on your debt."

"I suppose the Street Rat is right," Rumple sighs," I'll tell my maid to ready one of the guest rooms."
Chapter 8

Jolly Roger—Nineteen Years Ago

"And what's this," Killian asks, his hands resting on Milah's shoulders as he leans down to meet her gaze in the warped glass of the mirror. She was holding something in her hand, her fingers loosely closed around it and a nervous smile turning up the corners of her lips. Her nervousness has him frowning in confusion. She's never been nervous around him, not even the first night she spent with him, so what would cause that now? "What's wrong, Milah?"

"It's nothing," she murmurs, almost too softly for him to hear her. "Just something I plan on throwing out." His eyes land on the hand she has laying in her lap, noting the way her fingers had tightened on whatever they held. "I'm tired; I think I'll turn in for the night."

"Milah." She pauses, having only just stood up when he called her name in a tone that dared her to defy him. "Please," he says in a softer tone," don't keep things from me if I can help you." She sighs, seeming to shrink into herself as she turns with her hand outstretched and fingers open to reveal the item that made her worry. Resting in the center of her palm was a necklace, expertly crafted and hanging on a silver chain. The heart-shaped gem was a sapphire, obviously expensive. He wondered where she'd gotten it since he wasn't the one to steal it. "Why were you hiding this?" He takes it from her, studying it closer in the light of the candles.

"He gave it to me when we were married." Killian knew who she meant, the husband she'd left behind for a life of adventure and a little romance. Neither of them had expected to fall in love, but that's exactly what happened. "I shouldn't have kept it this long."

"Don't be ridiculous; he obviously loved you when he had this made for you, and you loved him once upon a time. You should keep it; think of it as a symbol of when you were younger." She gives a sad smile, taking the necklace back from him and setting it down on the little bedside table before taking her hands in his.

"Perhaps I could pass it down to a child."

"What child?" Killian didn't know what she was talking about until she raised a brow at him and placed his hands on her toned stomach. Even then, it took him a full minute to work out what that simple gesture meant, then he was on his knees, lips pressed against her stomach where his child would reside for nine months or so. "Are you sure?"

"Completely."

Aveena Jones—Present

Her muscles aching, Aveena groans as she sinks into the hot water Aladdin had drawn for her earlier. Fighting she could do, magic she had down, but being polite to rich snobs that made up Agrabah's aristocracy was a new challenge she wasn't up for. She'd had to parade around all day in a gown that could be confused as a wedding dress, a pair of shoes that could be used as a weapon, and the dumbest grin on her face. As if all of that hadn't been enough to make her want to jump off a balcony, she'd been paired up with a shy prince from the Enchanted Forest named Eric. She wasn't sure why they were the ones paired together since he was at least seven years older than her, but the look Aladdin sent her said not to argue.

Mozenrath's look pleaded for help, but she could barely get two feet from Eric and the prince would look completely lost. So she'd played the part of gracious ward, spoke highly of the new
Sultan of Agrabah, and tried not to gouge her eyes out with the spoon meant for dessert. The entire day had been filled with people she's never seen before trying to worm information out of her about her parents, but Aveena had given them the warmest smile she could manage, and avoided the questions. When that stopped working, she gave them a warm smile and, in the sweetest voice she could manage, told them just how many different ways she knew how to kill someone using only her shoe. Most of those ways were lies, but she didn't think the royalty would know that.

And now, with darkness long since fallen on the kingdom, Aveena was enjoying her warm bath and attempting to build her energy back up for her task tonight. Mozenrath and she had managed to track the location of the Neverland to a seaside village not too far from Agrabah—not too far meaning she'd have to using magic to get herself there because it would take her nearly a month to get there by horse. All she knew was that the merchant that found the Nevergem was notorious for boasting about his finds in taverns, so she had to hope that he would do just that when she arrived.

"Are you sure about this, Vee?" Mozenrath was standing in the doorway, his eyes averted and a faint blush adding color to his pale cheeks. In his arms was a bundle of clothes that Aveena wore on nearly every little mission she undertook. Mozenrath wasn't as strong as he used to be, so it was up to Aveena and Aladdin to get the artifacts most times, and Aveena lived for the rush of adrenaline she got after she succeeded. The top had short sleeves and was made of red and black velvet that Aveena had stitched together herself, the halves held together by a black leather corset-styled belt; next came the leather breeches similar to the kind her father wore, and then the boots Mozenrath had given her when she first started a few months ago. The boots hugged her calves and had a slight heel to them, but the heel was thick to avoid it breaking when she was forced to run.

"Fifteen percent sure."

"I'm not joking, Aveena." The teenager scowls as she climbs out of the bath, quickly drying and braiding her thick hair before she began to dress. Mozenrath had his back to her now, giving her as much privacy as he could without shutting the door. "This could be dangerous and you'll have to do this one by yourself since Aladdin's being forced to stay here by those snobs."

"You're pretty snobby yourself." She smiles when she hears his scoff, doing up the buttons of her breeches and then tying her cloak in place; the fabric was silk and the same black as her pants, tied around her throat by a silk ribbon. It would be cold once she left the desert behind her and she didn't want to chance the cold effecting the way she performed her magic.

"Very funny."

"I really am, aren't I?" She gets another scoff at that, moving quietly across the room to her balcony. This would be the time to do it if she wanted to avoid the speech on safety that Mozenrath delivers before every mission. She and Al had it memorized by this point and could probably recite it back at Mozenrath, word for word and expressions included. As Mozenrath starts up again, Aveena climbs onto the ledge, her legs shoulder-length apart and her arms held out for balance. She's done this before, but the ledges here are thinner than the ones in the citadel, so she had to get used to the feel of the marble under her boots. She takes a deep breath, closing her eyes as her magic begins to swirl below her, forming a safety net to catch her and carry her away to the village. Mozenrath said this was similar to the portals magic beans created except they can't transport you to different realms.

"...And don't forget the potato incident last month- HOW DARE YOU DISAPPEAR IN THE MIDDLE OF MY SPEECH!" Right as Mozenrath had turned around, Aveena allowed herself to fall forward off the ledge and into the magic, swept away with his indignant shout following after her.
Killian Jones—Present

Killian had expected this task to be an easy one compared to others; in fact, he had hoped to have it completed in less than an hour. Unfortunately for him, things were rarely so simple. He'd followed the merchant from the tavern where the man had drunkenly boasted of the rare gem he'd recently discovered in a land called Egypt. Killian didn't know where that place was, but he did know that the gem was hanging round the man's neck by a chain of brass. Killian lost sight of the merchant when the larger man turned down an alleyway, but Killian only quickened his step when he heard a muffled cry and the sound of a heavy body thudding to the ground.

As Killian rounded the corner, sword drawn, he found a cloaked figure kneeling over the merchant's unconscious body. "Stand up slowly," he commands. "Pull down the hood of your cloak and face me." At first the person tensed like they were going to run, but they straightened when Killian pressed the point of his sword against the person's lower back. They raised their hands slowly to push the hood back, the chain the gem hung from clasped in their left hand. As the hood falls back, the person's hair (done up in a neat braid) comes out as well. The fact that the thief was a woman made no difference to Killian. "Turn," he commands again." He'd expected feminine features when the woman faced him, but he didn't expect them to be as familiar as his own features.

The girl looked up at him with wide eyes and a sheepish smile, her expression one that showed she wasn't sorry for what she had done. She was obviously skilled at this sort of thing, her movements showing her grace, and the fact she'd run along the roofs without Killian noticing her hinted at extensive training. Even Killian would have had a hard time keeping up with the merchant without making too much noise on the tiled roofs. But here was this girl, nineteen years of age, and already skilled in thievery. His eyes then fell on the necklace she wore, made up from scrap metals to form a compass front; Killian knew that necklace.

"Fancy seeing you here, Daddy."
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Sorry that this one is so short, but I couldn't think of anything else for this chapter and the next one is where we'll be diving into S2! Be prepared for sassy Hook and some arguments between Vee and Cora. :)

Killian Jones—Present

"What the hell are you doing here," Killian demands, hand on his hip as he stares down at his daughter. He'd left her just three days ago and here she was, up to trouble with neither of her temporary guardians in sight. Aveena kept her head up defiantly, not a timid girl of six anymore. He may be proud when she acts like this to other people, but he's her father and he expected some respect when he's berating her! "In what way did sneaking away from Agrabah sound like it would be a good plan? What if Pan had realized you were away from Mozenrath and came after you?"

"Mozenrath and Aladdin knew I was coming here," she retorts, mirroring her father's stance. "Mozenrath needed this for a spell he's working on." She holds up the gem for Killian to see, the strange gem looking almost see-through. "He said this would help us to get revenge." Killian tenses at her words and he notices her flinching right after they left her mouth. So she knew what happened to Milah, but who told her about it? Mozenrath wouldn't because Aladdin would kill him if he did, Aladdin wouldn't because he felt it would be wrong, and Killian sure as hell didn't because he didn't want his daughter being tainted by the darkness revenge brings.

"Who told you?" Now her head lowers, nimble fingers fidgeting with the brass chain as she avoids his stare. "Vee... Just tell me, sweetheart." He moves closer, the fingers of his good hand resting under her chin and forcing her head back up. Her blue eyes show hatred and deep sadness, though there was some fear there as well. "You know you can tell me anything."

"Rumpelstiltskin told me." Killian's mouth went dry, his hand started to shake, his vision went red—white-hot fury swept through him at the thought of the Crocodile being anywhere near his daughter and Killian clutched her tightly against his chest, his cheek resting against the top of her head as she wrapped her arms around his waist. How could that have even happened and how is she still alive? Rumpelstiltskin made it plain that he would destroy all the good things in Killian's life, so why spare his daughter? Could it have to do with Baelfire? The pair did share very faint similarities; could that be what stayed his hand? "He said he wanted you to know that my life was in his hands."

"Why wasn't I told?"

"Because I knew how you'd react. The only place he can't get to me is Neverland, and I'm not sure I want to go back there." She was right, of course, Pan would protect her from Rumpelstiltskin if only to keep Killian in line, but what would Pan do if Killian brought her back there after her two years away? "I have to go back, though. No one can protect me, but the magic on Neverland is still strong and I can use it against Rumpelstiltskin if he comes."

"And what about Pan?"
"I...I don't know." Killian holds her tighter, squeezing his eyes shut and praying that his daughter would be kept safe. "That's why we needed the Nevergem, Mozenrath intends on dissolving it and having me drink the leftovers. It'll slow my aging process, the closest I can get to immortality without becoming the Dark One."

"Then you won't need to go to Neverland?"

"It'll only start when I'm there, but Pan won't be able to get his hands on the gem, which is good I guess." He feels her shrug before she pulls away, stuffing the gem in a small pouch tied to her belt. "I'll see you back in Agrabah."

"Be safe." And then, lavender smoke curling around her and whisking her away, Killian was left in the alley with the merchant beginning to regain consciousness. The man was mumbling and growling under his breath, quickly getting on Killian's nerves. With a scowl, Killian brings his boot down on the man's head, forcing him back into a comatose state. "Shut up."

**Aveena Jones—Two Months Later**

Aveena watches as the gem breaks down in the bubbling potion, the moonlight draining color from everything as it shines down on the cauldron through the skylight above. A full moon was needed to complete the potion because Aveena was born on a full moon and any thing less would kill her the instant the potion touched her lips. "Alright," Mozenrath sighs, using his magic to lift the potion out of the cauldron and into a small vial with a stoppered top. "It's ready." He turns to face the room's occupants, expression solemn as he hands the vial to Aveena. "Drink it when you're touching the ground and not before."

"I know," Aveena murmurs, taking the vial from him and holding it tightly in her fist. "We've gone over this a hundred times since you found out about it." She gives the older man a hint of a smile.

"I don't need you screwing this up after all the hard work I put into making it." He was surly that night, scowling at everyone including his husband, but it didn't phase Aveena. She raised up onto her tip-toes and wrapped her arms around his neck in a hug, Mozenrath freezing for a moment before returning it with a worried frown. He'd gotten close to her, closer than he had most people in his life, and he wasn't too happy about sending her away. "Be careful, brat."

"Remember your manners, Necromancer." She moves to Aladdin next, the pair sharing a hug and exchanging a few words; Trista was next, the woman practically sobbing as she hugged Aveena until James came between the two of them for his own hug, followed by their son. The last one she met with was her father, standing apart from the group and trying not to start pacing again lest Mozenrath go through with his threat of turning the pirate into a toad. Aveena hugged him the longest, tears stinging her eyes. "I love you, Daddy."

"I love you too, Vee," he returns, voice choked with the tears he refuses to let fall. "I'll see you as soon as I can."

"I know." With a shaky breath, she pulls back and moves to the balcony across the room, the cool desert breeze almost making her shiver through the light clothing she wore. It would be hot on Neverland, so lighter material was needed. She climbs up onto the railing, perfectly balanced after doing this for years, and then she allows herself to fall forward into the magic. It wrapped around her like a blanket, keeping her warm and making her feel safe. She could smell something different though, something that stuck out against the usual smell of rain—it was almost like the Sweet Pea perfume her mother used to wear that Killian kept with him at all times.

Before she could ponder it for too long, the magic dropped her and she landed on the sandy
beach, rolling into a crouching position before allowing herself to straighten up. Wet sand clung to
the pale fabric of her pants and cloak, but she paid them no mind as she pulled out the stopper of
the vial. The liquid was black and thick, a foul odor spilling out as she brings it closer to her face.

"I knew you'd be back, Aveena," Pan states confidently as he walks through the trees, but his grin
falters when he spots the vial. She could feel his magic reaching out, reacting with the Nevergem's
and entwining with her own. "Don't drink that, Aveena."

"I don't take orders from you, Pan." And then she tilted the vial back and forced the sludge down
her throat, coughing and sputtering after she swallowed. It tasted even worse than it smelled and
she had to struggle not to vomit it all back up as she fell to her knees. The Nevergem's magic was
reacting badly with Aveena's, causing her to fall onto her back and stop breathing for a moment.
She tried desperately to suck in air, she could hear her pulse pounding wildly in her ears, and then
things began to dim. Her heart was beating too slowly, her limbs were going numb from the loss
of blood flow. She could dimly make out the shape of Pan hovering above her, and then felt a
sharp agonizing pain blaze through her chest before she started to breathe again. Pan had stabbed
her with an arrow dipped in Dreamshade.

The next time Aveena opened her eyes, she was lying on a cot in Pan's camp and unable to even
wiggle much. Someone, probably Pan, had tied her hands above her head, but it wouldn't have
made a difference since she felt too sore to move. "I told you not to do it," Pan says smugly as he
enters the room, a bottle of black poison in one hand and another arrow in the other. "Your
precious Necromancer missed one key ingredient." He holds the bottle up higher to make sure
Aveena could see it. "Dreamshade. You have to die briefly before the Nevergem will work on
you."

"Why save me, then," she croaks, barely able to keep her eyes open as more of her strength
drained away.

"Because you're mine, my darling." He sits beside her on the cot, dipping the arrow tip in the
poison, then holding it up in the pale rays of dawn sunlight to watch the black ooze spread further
over the wickedly sharp edge of the arrowhead. "I can use you later on, so there's no point in your
permanent death quite yet." With an almost lazy movement, Pan twirls the arrow around and
plunges the tip back into Aveena's chest, having to hold her down when her back arks on instinct.

And then Aveena Jones was dead.
"Just how did you manage that," Cora asked, staring with some shock at the teen a few feet away. Aveena was stuck in a tree, a branch wrapped up in the satchel she had strapped around her chest —her ingredients safe enough, but her fear levels rising as she realized just how high up she'd climbed for the last thing she needed.

"I'm great at climbing," Aveena calls back, trying not to move too much in case it made the branch snap.

"It appears you aren't so good at climbing down." Aveena scowls, grumbling under her breath as she tries to plot out a way to get down without the possibility of breaking her neck in the attempt. Dying would really interrupt her plans for today. "Would you like some help?"

"No, I wanna hang here all day until Daddy finishes his work." Cora rolls her eyes at the sarcasm, noting yet another trait she'd inherited from Jones. "$\text{Yes I want help!}$" Aveena shivers when she feels Cora's magic wrap around her and lower her to the ground, the feel of it completely different to the magic she's used to; it was dark, but not nearly as dark as Neverland's and it wasn't as pure as Aveena's magic. It felt gritty against the bare skin of her arms and face, and Aveena scrunches up her nose as her feet touch the ground.

"What were you even doing up there?"

"I needed something."

"What?"

"None of your business." Grumbling, Aveena walks back to the camp while Cora followed behind, the older woman taking on the familiar guise of Lancelot—a knight she had murdered before bringing all these people together and ruling over them. Like always, the survivors of the Curse were out scavenging and rebuilding shelters that the last storm had brought tumbling down, a familiar hum of people talking and the hammering coming from the Blacksmith's stall were all normal and comforting sounds for Aveena to work to. She had her own tiny hut where she made small healing potions in case someone fell ill or got hurt while working—she'd saved at least three children and a grown man on the edge of death, so the people were grateful to her and didn't question her methods.

Payment for her services was a matter of trade, sometimes they had ingredients that Aveena needed or just food that could be preserved by her magic for a later time when it became scarce. She spares a smile at her father before walking into her hut, setting the new ingredients down on the table and beginning to ground the stones she'd found into a fine powder. Everything here—well, almost everything—was imbued with magic and could be used to perform simple spells, the stones would allow her to open the smallest of portals in order to catch a glance of two of her friends that the Curse swept away. Once the stones were ready, she grabbed a brass bowl and mixed the powder into it, her magic stirring the powder and water mixture until it was tinged a light pink at the edges and she could make out Mozenrath and Aladdin in the center.

They were different in this new land, Aladdin's hair changed to a pale blonde and Mozenrath's to a red-brown, but they were still together, so Mozenrath's protection spell secured that, at least.
They had different names in that world as well, Aladdin was Nicky Blaine and Mozenrath was Micah Blaine—they owned a theater and lived in the wealthy section of the small Maine town. There were several things in their new land that Aveena didn't understand, but she was ecstatic to see them alive and relatively happy. As she watched the two men walking down what she believed to be a sidewalk, an older man bumped into Mozenrath. The conversation was silenced by the spell and she couldn't read lips, but she recognized the old man to be Rumpelstiltskin.

Her anger rising, she quickly cancelled out the spell and threw the bowl across the room, the brass colliding with the wall and its contents spilling over the floor. The mixture was still a light pink color, but there were no images of Mozenrath or Aladdin anymore. "Bastard," she growls, the smirking face of Rumpelstiltskin appearing every time she closed her eyes.

"You alright, Vee," Killian asks, poking his head inside. His blue eyes moved from the mess to Aveena, and she did her best to hide her shaking hands behind her back.

"I'm fine, Daddy." She didn't need him growing upset because she was meddling again when he told her to save her strength. With a sigh, Killian walks further into the hut and rests a hand on Aveena's head. "I'm fine." She pushes his hand off, frowning when he grins down at her. His favorite hobby seems to be finding new ways to irritate her. "Aren't you supposed to be working?"

"I finished early. I thought all of us could go for a horseback ride to that clearing by the stream and eat some lunch." *All of us* meaning Trista, James, and their son Kellan. "You look like you could use a break from... Whatever it was you were just doing." A break would be welcome and her stomach was growling loudly at the thought of food.

"Alright, let's go." Killian wraps his arms around her shoulders, leading her outside in time to see Mulan and three other women enter the camp—two of which had their hands bound by rope and looked confused at their surroundings. Aveena ducks behind her father out of instinct, peering past his arm to watch as the two bound women broke free but were captured after running a few feet. They wore strange clothes, similar to the ones Mozenrath and Aladdin wore, but more feminine.

"Take them to the pit," Mulan commands as a few men move in to apprehend the blonde that was still conscious.

"Come on, Vee," Killian mumbles. "Cora has them now." Frowning, Aveena follows her father to the small cottage that Trista, James, and Kellan occupied, the place situated at the edge of the camp and not too far from the woods. The only reason the Norrington family, Fidget, and Pup are still alive is because Killian sent them to Neverland to guard Vee until just before the Curse hit and froze time for twenty-eight years. As Killian and Aveena drew closer, the twelve year old came flying out to greet them with a bright smile lighting up his face. He was more handsome than any boy his age had a right to be, inheriting most of his father's features except for his slim build and slightly flattened nose. As he wrapped Aveena in a hug, she couldn't help but feel a little annoyed that the top of his head brushed her chin.

It wasn't right that her nephew—because he might as well be since they spent most of his childhood together—would be taller than her before he even reached thirteen. "Are Auntie Tris and James awake," Vee asks, allowing Kellan to lead the way inside with the two animals following in after Killian. Fidget and Pup, a strange team by any standards, seemed to have an unspoken agreement that at least one of them had to be with Aveena at all times to avoid her getting badly injured, though the cat couldn't do much to keep her from hurting herself most times.

"They're hunting right now," Kellan explains, picking Fidget up and scratching the cat behind his ears," but they should be back before sundown." That was a rule in the camp, be back before sundown if you want to have a small sense of security because the Ogres were taking over again
and small noises could draw them in. Aveena could tell that Kellan was worried, his parents had a
bad habit of not returning until the last minute when they were on hunting duty. Food was
growing harder to come by, so the hunters had to stay out longer and work harder.

"Don't worry about them, lad," Killian tells him, patting down his curls," we all know that they'll
be back in time." Kellan gives a nod, but Vee doubted he really believed anything that came out
of her father's mouth. "Come walk with Vee and I down to the stream, she can magic us up some
lunch, and then you can stay with us tonight." Still unconvinced, Kellan allows Killian to nudge
him out the door and lead the way to the clearing Aveena had found after the Curse, the three
deciding to walk rather than risk losing the few horses they had. It wasn't a very long walk, just
two miles away from the camp, and they quickly found a dry path of land not far from the stream
that cut the clearing in half. Tall trees formed a perfect circle and sunlight spilled down, turning the
grass an emerald green.

Most of the lands had been ravished by the Ogres returning, the grass stomped down and dying,
and the soil unfit to grow crops, but the clearing was kept healthy from the stream and the magic it
absorbs from Aveena. It was a place Aveena and Killian came to in order to find a moment of
peace, the bubbling stream soothing their frayed nerves after twenty-eight years of listening to
Cora manipulate the people around them. Aveena would rather stay here where she knew how
things worked, but she knew that her father needed his vengeance and the only way to get that is
by going to Storybrooke where the Crocodile currently resided.

"Are you alright, Vee," Killian asks. It was only when her father spoke that she realized she'd
been close to falling asleep. Killian and Kellan stared at her with worry etched into the features,
only relaxing when Aveena gave them a reassuring smile.

"I'm perfect," she murmurs. And, in that brief moment in time, she was as close as it could get to
perfect, but Fate was moving forward and she would soon find herself in a world she knew
nothing about.

Aveena had thought her day would pass as it normally did and was applying a salve to her Uncle
James' sore feet when Mulan and two of the three women from the day before barged into her hut.
"You know the first thing you should do before entering someone's home," Aveena asks, sending
Mulan a stern look without stopping her task," it's called knocking and I've heard it's quite
popular. One other thing you should know before you try to insult me is that I have magic and I
can do some nasty things with it." The other two look hesitant, the blonde one looking like she's
had more than one run in with dark magic. "Well?" Rolling her eyes as Aveena faces her uncle
again, Mulan raises a fist and beats it against the door twice.

"Lancelot has ordered that you come with us," Mulan informs her, her fingers wrapped around the
hilt of her sword.

"Unless you plan on losing your hand, I suggest you take it off your sword," James warns before
Aveena could, his commanding look enough to make the woman obey quickly. She had done it
on instinct, something she did when she felt uneasy. "There's a good girl." Aveena didn't have to
turn to know that Mulan was clenching her jaw in annoyance. James loved pulling rank on her
since she irritated him with her talk of honor—honor that James had given up when he joined the
ranks of Killian Jones after the pirate had fished him out of the Caribbean and helped him heal.
Davy Jones had stabbed him through the chest and his crew had tossed him overboard moments
before the Jolly Roger sailed past and pulled him out. Aveena's father always said it was always
good to have a man you could trust implicitly.

"Lancelot wants Aveena to come with us in case one of us is badly injured."
"Where are you going?"

"Snow White's castle." Aveena bandages Jaime's feet and then turns to stare up at the two strangers. The tallest had long blonde hair, a fit build, distrusting blue eyes, a stern mouth, and high cheekbones. Her companion was shorter with ebony hair that was cut like a man's, her features were softer and kinder than the other woman's, but Aveena could notice a few similarities and pegged them as sisters. It was strange, though, Aveena had heard that Snow White's sister had died in a bear attack when they were just children.

"I'm not leaving until I get some introductions," Aveena states stubbornly as she rises and dusts off the butt of her pants. James' green eyes only leave the women while he pulls on and laces his boots, longer fingers doing them up easily and quickly before moving to rest on the hilt of his sword in much the same manner Mulan had done just moments ago. James was easily the tallest person in the hut, towering over everyone at 6'1" and, compared to Aveena's simple five feet, he was a giant. "Who are these two?"

"I'm Snow White," the ebony-haired woman says quickly, holding out her hand for Aveena to shake. Aveena just stares at it until it's lowered, the teen's arms crossed over her chest as her gaze moves to the blonde next. "This is my daughter, Emma. We just need to get back to our land and we think there's something in my castle that could help us." The pleading look Snow White sends her way has Aveena letting out a soft sigh, turning her back long enough to wash her hands in a bowl of cold water. "Please, Lancelot said we couldn't leave without a healer and you're supposed to be the best one left.

"You have magic, Aveena, you wouldn't be anyone's meal and you know it," Mulan states. Aveena runs a hand through her thick hair, her other hand on her hip as she meets Mulan's gaze again. "If Lancelot commanded it, then you have no choice.

"Pirate," Aveena reminds her, pointing at herself with a sarcastic grin. "Last I checked, the only people allowed to order me about were my father, Uncle Jaime, and Auntie Tris; you are none of those people, Mulan."

"Pirate or not, you don't have a choice."

"That's the best part about being a pirate, I always have a choice. Unfortunately for me, you won't leave until I choose to go with you lot, so I guess that's what I choose." James takes a step forward to put himself between Aveena and the others, the dark expression on his face one she's only seen a handful of times—when Killian had slapped her the first and last time, when Kellan had yelled at Trista, and when he'd caught Pan with his mouth on Aveena's neck. It wasn't a look that made people feel safe, it was one that made them realize they may have just made the worst mistake of their lives. So, when Emma doesn't flinch away, Aveena is beyond impressed.

"If anything happens to my niece while she's away, I will kill all of you and not a damn person will be able to stop me," he threatens. It always makes Aveena feel loved when the people around her get protective, it reminds her that they really do love her and they weren't just doing it because her father was their Captain. "You two should know that I do not make idle threats."
"We know, Uncle Jaime." Aveena rests a hand on his shoulder, giving him a sweet smile that was rare to see these days. He wraps her up in a tight hug, placing a kiss on the top of her head before pulling back and allowing her to join the group at the door; she had a satchel filled with everything she would need and Excalibur was tied to her belt. "I'll see you soon, alright?"

"Alright, sweet girl." Her father, Kellan, and Trista were fishing, so she wouldn't have a chance to say her goodbyes to them, but this isn't her first mission and she knew Mulan would keep her alive because everyone knew that James could be scary, but Killian was scarier. It felt like she had two butterflies in her stomach as she left the safety of the camp and it wasn't until they were a mile out that she realized this is what being nervous felt like.

Writer's block is a pain in the ass to get through, so bear with me here. I posted a completed story a few days ago called A Game of Spies, it's set during Mission: Impossible 1, so could y'all go take a look at it and tell me what you think? I'd love you forever, lol. I also have a new computer (Acer something or other) and it's tiny, so I had to choose between Word or iTunes and Word won, so I have to use Netflix when it decides to cooperate in order to write this. Sorry if I missed any mistakes.
Chapter 11

In case y'all didn't notice, I added a bit to the last chapter! The song Vee sings is 'My Jolly Sailor Bold' and it originated in the 1980's or so and I didn't just get it off PotC: On Stranger Tides, though, it is super catchy and that's where I first heard it. Do any of you guys watch Fear the Walking Dead or TWD? Just curious since they're pretty good shows and they're tiding me over until OUaT comes back on.

"This will do," Mulan calls out, Aveena allowing herself to fall to her knees and then forward the second the words left the warrior's mouth. She lets out a pitiful noise, unused to so much walking even when she lived on Neverland where she was forced to do almost everything by hand. "Are you okay?" She lets out another long groan, her cheek pressed against the dead grass. "We'll camp here tonight, but we need to find some water and collect firewood."

"If we're hiding from Ogres, shouldn't we maybe, I don't know, not start a fire," Emma suggests.

"Ogres are blind," Snow informs her daughter, "they only hunt by sound." Aveena raises her head just enough to look up at the three women, nodding when Emma looks her way for further confirmation.

"Right, because that's something everyone knows about Ogres."

"It is," Aveena states, rolling onto her back and looking up at the clear sky. Her father was going to strangle Cora if she died on this little adventure. "I'm going to gather some fresh water, so we don't have to worry about it tomorrow morning." In truth, she just didn't want to be around Snow White and her daughter longer than she had to; they were quickly starting to irritate her by being themselves. No one was as kind hearted as Snow White is pretending to be, they'd explode from all the negativity they kept buried. Aveena shakes her head, stopping and closing her eyes as she focuses on the feel of everything around her. Being used to the magic in this land, she was quickly able to find the nearest stream and transport herself there in a puff of magic. "Upon one summer's morning I carefully did stray down by the walls of wapping," she sings softly as she uses her magic to purify the water before moving it to the canteens, "where I met a sailor gay. Conversing with a young lass who seemed to be in pain..."

"Saying William when you go, I fear you'll ne'er return again," Pan picks up seconds after the magic had shifted and allowed him to appear a few feet behind Aveena. "A lovely song if you don't mind the fact that she leaves behind a good life to be with a lowly sailor." Aveena straightens up, tying the canteens to her belt before facing Peter Pan.

"Careful, Pan, my father's a sailor." "Yes and the only good thing he's done thus far is bringing you to me." Pan smirks, resting his hands on her hips and bending down to place a surprisingly gentle kiss on her lips. "It's been far too long since our last meeting."

"Mm, get your hands off me before I run you through." Her hand was resting on Excalibur's hilt and the expression on her face told Pan not to test her. She was obviously in a bad mood and she still needed to get him back for temporarily killing her. Pan raises his hands in a don't shoot me
gesture, backing up a few paces with one of his brows raised in question. "Cora sent me on an
adventure with the warrior woman, a sickeningly sweet princess, and a blonde that trusts me as far
as she can throw me."

"I see," he mumbles, leaning back against a tree as he continues to stare at her even as she glances
away. "Shall I walk you back to the others, darling?" Aveena shakes her head, finally beginning
to relax as the familiar magic in the land wraps around her and comforts her. She couldn't relax
when the magic was low, there wasn't enough for her to absorb and push back out, so it made her
body tense and her anger spike. She could put the Evil Queen to shame before the Curse was
lifted. "Come here." Scowling, Aveena walks over to him and allows him to rest his hands on her
shoulders.

"Where's your worst half?"

"On Neverland, he doesn't know I'm gone yet." Aveena relaxes further, resting her head against
Pan's chest as his arms go around her. She had missed this during the Curse, being able to touch
another person that wasn't somehow related to her. There weren't many people her age on the
island—none that looked her age, anyway—so she was basically all on her own in that
department. Then again, if her father knew Aveena was even trying to hop into a man's bed, he
would slap Aveena silly and kill the man. The only reason Pan's still alive is because Killian still
thinks Aveena hates him. "How do you feel about me, Aveena?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I. Does that make us weird?"

"You're an almost immortal teenage that occasionally gets possessed by an Alp and I'm an almost
immortal teenager that absorbs magic. Have we ever been normal?" They share a laugh at that,
Pan lowering them both to the ground and holding Aveena closer to him.

"Maybe once, when we were babies." Aveena snorts and shakes her head in amusement before
pressing her lips against Pan's. His were soft against hers and he tasted like the sweet chocolate
one of the Lost Boys had brought to Neverland, she was almost reluctant to pull back, but she had
to leave soon or risk Mulan finding them. Pan follows her as she moves and she presses a chaste
kiss against his lips before using her magic to transport her back to the edge of the stream. "That's
not fair."

"Pirates aren't fair, sweetheart." With a wink, she reappears in the clearing, her breathing still a
little ragged and her hair mussed from when Pan had ran his fingers through it. "Where's everyone
gone?" It was just Emma and Aveena left, and the surroundings were growing dark and cold. The
blonde gives a feeble shrug as she continued to pace.

"They went after food and firewood," she grumbled," I was told to guard the camp."

"With what? You have no weapon." She pulls out a small, black device out of her pocket for
Aveena to see, but Aveena couldn't fathom how something so small would have any effect on an
Ogre. "That's rather small, isn't it?"

"Yeah, well, it has a powerful punch." Aveena just shrugs, looking unconvinced that so small a
weapon could do damage to anything larger than a rabbit. "I'm gonna go look for Mary-Margaret,
do you wanna come?"

"Who's Mary-Margaret?"

"Oh, it was Snow's name during the Curse." Aveena makes a small noise of understanding as she
follows Emma out of the clearing and along a freshly-made trail, Emma following the footprints in
the grass and Aveena praying they don't get lost and eaten. It was completely dark by the time
they found Snow White, but she wasn't alone, she was being shoved to the side by Mulan after
climbing off the scrawny woman from earlier. Aveena wasn't worried, the woman Mulan took a
knife from posed no real threat; unfortunately, Emma didn't see it that way. Before Aveena could
tell her not to overreact, Emma had her weapon pulled out and squeezed part of it to issue a loud
bang while pointing it up at the tree line. Vee flinches away from the sudden noise, looking
around in wide-eyed fear as she waited for another, louder noise to follow that signaled an
approaching Ogre.

"Emma," Snow asks with the same fear," what are you doing?" Emma was now pointing her
weapon at Mulan, who still clutched the other woman's knife.

"Protecting you. Drop the weapon!" Mulan stows the knife in her belt for later use as Aveena
pulls out Excalibur and looks around them for any sign.

"Do you have any idea what you've just done?" And then it happened, the snapping of trees and
limbs, and a low growling that Aveena had been waiting for. "Run!" Aveena doesn't bother with
running, trying to use her magic to transport her far away from the mess only to have it
unresponsive due to her stress levels. Emma grabs her wrist and yanks her along with the group
further into the woods with the Ogre following behind. "Split up!" The new woman and Mulan
branch away and run off to the right while the rest continued to run straight.

Aveena was struggling to keep up, her legs not nearly as long as Emma's, but she was forced into
a roll when the blonde lost her footing and fell face first to the ground. She had barely regained
her footing when the Ogre burst out of the trees, crouching over Emma and letting out a loud roar.
To help or to run, that's the eternal question. Letting out a frustrated groan, Aveena cups her
hands around her mouth and does something incredibly stupid to help Emma live an extra few
seconds.

"Hey, ugly," she shouted at the Ogre, the beast's head snapping up as its milky white eyes landed
on her. "I should've just run away when I had the chance. Yeah, over here, you idiot!" She jumps
a little and waves her arms above her head as the beast roars again, the force of its breath knocking
her backwards. The Ogre was straightening up to come after her when Snow let out a high whistle
from behind.

"Back away from my daughter," she screams as it turns to face her. Aveena watches in awe as the
other woman fired an arrow that found its mark in the Ogre's eye, the creature letting out a pained
shriek before collapsing and going quiet.

"You just killed an Ogre with a bow and arrow…. How does that even work?" Aveena joins them
by the carcass as Snow yanks the arrow out, Vee's nose crinkled in disgust when the pungent
smell of Ogre reaches her. "When was the last time you shot an arrow?"

"Twenty-eight years ago," Snow answers with a shrug. "I guess it's like riding a bike."

"What the hell's a bike?"

"Nothing you need to worry about here." Snow gives her a kind smile, patting her shoulder.
"Think you can get the Ogre gunk off my arrow?" It was Aveena's turn to shrug this time,
sheathing her sword before using her now cooperating magic to clear away all the nastiness off the
arrow. "Whose sword is that?"

"No one's, really, it just showed up in my room one day." She pats the hilt affectionately with a
smile," Come on, someone needs to tell Mulan that she can stop running for a while."
"We're getting close," Snow announces. Mulan was leading the way with Snow behind her to help out with directions, then Emma, Aveena, and the extra woman—Aurora—bringing up the rear where she would be safest. She was clumsy and about as smart as a rock, so it's a good thing she had good looks.

"Aurora," Mulan scolds, "you've got to keep up." Aurora yanked the tattered skirt of her dress free from brambles before catching back up with the group, pouting when she stares down at the torn fabric.

"Sorry, but I'm not exactly dressed for the woods," she complains, "it's cold out here." 'I'm a princess', 'don't walk so fast'. If she doesn't shut up soon I might snap and 'accidentally' turn her into a frog!

"Then why did you bother coming at all," Aveena asks, the bite of her words making the princess' pout deepen. She just wanted to get back to the camp, but that might never happen if people kept messing everything up. She followed Snow and Mulan up an incline while Aurora and Emma hung back for a moment, nearly falling when some of the soft earth slipped away under her feet.

"Thanks."

"I thought thieves had to be light on their feet," Mulan comments when she helps Aveena the rest of the way up.

"Yeah, well, I'm not usually so tired when I steal things." Aveena looks out across the wide lake at the ramshackle castle that rested on a small island; the only way to reach it was by the narrow strip of land that connected the island to the forest. It reminded Aveena of the safe place she's lived on since the Curse hit, just a little less destitute.

"Up here!" The blonde and Aurora join the others, Emma looking at the castle with widened eyes as though it's the first time she's seen one.

"Is that it," she asks, not tearing her eyes away from the sight.

"Yeah," Snows answers with a smile, "that's our home." Even so broken, the castle was a cheerier sight than Mozenrath's citadel ever was. Then again, it's hard for a place to look happy when its surroundings are dreary and reanimated dead people are guarding the boarders. Still, at least Aveena was comfortable around the citadel, while this place was foreign to her. "Think you can poof us to the entrance to save us some energy, Aveena?"

"I could probably move the whole damn castle if we had the time, but a few people should be easy," Aveena smiles, squaring her shoulders and focusing on wrapping her group up in the faint purple haze of her magic. Just a second later, all of them were standing in the entranceway of the castle, Aveena having to lean on Mulan as more of her strength leaves her.

"Are you okay?"

"Never better, just really tired right now." She slumps down against the wall, her legs stretched out in front of her as she took a break. "You guys go on ahead; I'll make sure no creepy crawlies find their way inside." Shooting her a concerned look, Snow leads the others further inside the castle, Snow's voice echoing back to Aveena whenever she makes a small comment on how things had been different twenty-eight years ago.

Aveena looks out the doors at the woods, fighting off sleep as she waited on something to happen. She could sense the magic bubbling, similar to the way it did when Pan showed up, so she knew she wouldn't be alone for long. True enough, Cora appeared a few moments later, staring around
her to get a feel of the place. "I trust everyone's still in one piece," she inquires when her dark eyes land on Aveena.

"Only barely, we had a run in with an Ogre last night." Cora's lips purse at that, moving over to Aveena and holding out a hand to help the teen up. Aveena slaps it away and stands on her own, her energy was still mostly gone, but she was too prideful to accept the old witch's help. "What do you want to do?"

"The wardrobe that carried Emma away from here will allow us the same passage. We need to get it back to your father, so I can be reunited with my daughter."

"If I recall, your daughter sent you through a mirror into Wonderland and then sent my father to crush your heart." At Cora's dirty look, Aveena continues a little smugly. "If that doesn't tell you that she wants nothing to do with you, then I don't know what will."

"Come on, you brat." Using her magic, Cora morphs into her Lancelot form before transporting us to the doorway of Emma's old nursery in time to hear Emma ask how they were going to carry the wardrobe. "With the help of an old friend." Aveena wasn't paying much attention to Snow and Emma, she was looking for Mulan and the bothersome princess that tagged along with her.

"Lancelot," Snow asks in surprise, "what are you doing here?"

"Aveena managed to send me a message about the Ogre attack, and I had to make sure all of you were alright." Cora walks a bit further into the room while Aveena moves over to the window that overlooks the lake. It would be a beautiful view on lazy summer afternoons, just sitting down and watching the sunset as it sets the lake on fire with pinks and oranges. It was tough to ignore the ever-present tug of magic as she watches the moon's reflection waver with the wind. Its light shines down brightly, sucking out the vibrant colors and turning everything a cool shade of blue. Aveena would have killed for a view like this when she was younger for the simple reason of having something beautiful to look at when she was sad or lonely.

"Where are Mulan and Aurora?"

"I sent them to find food, thought we could camp out here tonight, and in the morning we'll head back. So, this is it, the portal you were after." Aveena moves away from the window and walks over to the wardrobe, resting her hand against the enchanted wood. It was strangely warm and felt like it was pulsing beneath her hand.

"They wouldn't be staring at it with hope if it wasn't," Aveena remarks, her mumbled words making Emma and Snow frown at her, the pair not yet realizing that this Lancelot isn't actually the fabled knight.

"It was carved from an enchanted tree, but there's no magic left," Snow explains, glancing between Cora and Aveena.

"No, there's still magic, but it hasn't been used in so long that it's fallen dormant. Maybe with a little help…" she trails off, her brow furrowed when the magic in the wood refused to twine with her own magic. That's never happened before; she's never been rejected when she tried to absorb magic in the past.

"Why are you so interested in the wardrobe, Lancelot?" It was an innocent question, but Aveena could see that Snow was growing suspicious.

"I just want to get you guys back to your families," Cora shrugs, "I'm sure Emma's son Henry must be missing her." Vee can see something change in Snow's face as she turns to give her
daughter and Vee a smile. She knows. In an instant, Snow had her sword drawn and Emma pushed behind her, the point of her weapon aimed at Cora's throat. Aveena had Excalibur unsheathed as well, the blade comforting in her hand.

"What the hell," Emma gasps, looking at all of them like they've lost their minds.

"There's only one person you told Henry's name," Snow hints.

"Stop with the theatrics, Cora," Aveena sighs, walking to stand beside Lancelot with her sword pointed at Snow. "You're not the actress you think you are." Dark blue smoke hides Cora for a moment, but when it's cleared away, her Lancelot guise is gone.

"Clever girl," she compliments with her hands on her hips.

"Where's Lancelot," Snow demands.

"He's dead. I killed him a long time ago."

"And you've been posing as him ever since."

"When a wolf wants a sheep for dinner it takes on its disguise," Aveena says softly, remembering the words Rumpelstiltskin told her when she was younger. "All the sheep flock to it while it plots what sides it should have to go with the meat."

"You never told me you met Rumple."

"I don't like you, remember?" Snow lunged forward, but Cora was quicker and she used her magic to pin Snow against the wall on the left, then threw Emma to the side.

"I have to thank you, Snow. I've been looking for a way over for so long, but I never thought the person to help me find it would be you." While Cora's back was turned, Emma tried to get up and attack her, but Aveena kicked her back down, keeping one foot on the blonde's chest with her sword pointed at her throat.

"Just don't, Blondie." Aveena lets out a noise of surprise when a strange white magic throws her across the room. Her body is slammed against the hard stone wall, the air forced out of her lungs and leaving her gasping on the floor, clutching her midsection. She coughs, sucking desperately for any air that she can get until she's breathing normally again—lightheaded, but no worse for wear.

"No!" Cora's snarl made Aveena glance up, spotting the fire that was turning the wardrobe into ash at a fast pace. Cora uses her magic to pull a ball of fire out of the wardrobe and tries to throw it at Emma, but Mulan blocked it with her sword just in time, seeming to appear out of nowhere. "We're not done." Cora's magic wraps around Aveena and yanks her out of the room, the pair reappearing in the woods not far from the castle. "How could you let her destroy the wardrobe?!"

"Someone's magic threw me across the room!"

"It wasn't mine!"

"Why didn't you just transport us and the wardrobe back to the island instead of gloating?!" Cora's mouth snaps shut and she begins to pace with her hand clinched into fists. "Where's my damn sword?"

"Why does it matter?"
"It matters because-." She cuts herself off, not wanting Cora to know who that sword had belonged to at one point. "My father gave it to me," she lied, sitting down in exhaustion. "Wake me up when you have a real plan." She was sound asleep in seconds, her arms serving as her pillow. It felt good to rest and she could already feel her energy beginning to rebuild. What seemed like minutes after she closed her eyes, she woke from a sharp kick to her ribs. She glared up at Cora as she slowly got back to her feet.

"We have our portal." She holds up a small glass bottle with a cork to keep the pink sparkly stuff inside from floating out. Aveena takes it from the other woman to examine it closer; watching to the pink stuff floated around and clinked against the glass as it tried to get to her.

"Wardrobe ashes."
Aveena follows Cora across the damp beach where Killian was standing, the pirate looking out at the calm waters and not noticing the approaching women until they were just a few feet away from him. "I don't appreciate you using my daughter," he states as they come closer to him. He'd returned home late only to be informed by James that his daughter was sent out to play Cora's spy.

"Hello to you, too," Cora says once she reaches him, her smile showing how little his words mean to her. She could easily kill him, but she also knew that he would be broken if she harmed his daughter, so Killian stayed in line and Aveena freely crossed it just for the fun of irritating the witch. Killian positions himself between Aveena and Cora, standing half in front of his daughter out of instinct.

"You told me you had something important you needed to show me," Cora holds up the bottle of wardrobe ashes, the magic infused in it turning the ashes a bright pink. "Sparkly dirt, wonderful."

"That's going to fuel our portal, Daddy," Aveena informs him when he's not nearly as excited as he should be. "You're gonna get your revenge and I'm gonna be able to see Mozenrath and Aladdin again." She was just excited to see her two best friends after several years apart when she was on Neverland and when the Curse snatched them away.

"Is it enough to get us where we need to go?"

"Almost, we just need a couple more things to get everything moving smoothly." A magical compass and some of the water from Lake Nostos, but the hardest part of it all would be retrieving the compass since it's at the very top of a beanstalk and guarded by the last of the Giants.

"We're almost ready to set sail. What's our port of destination?"

"Storybrooke," Cora answers with a pleased smile.

"Curious name. Is that where-"

"She is." Cora's daughter, Regina, had cast the Curse and sent everyone to a world without magic. "And so are they." Aladdin, Mozenrath, and the Dark One were trapped there like rats, and hopefully Killian can kill Rumple without too much fuss.

"Excellent. You'll be able to see your daughter, Vee will be reunited with old friends, and I can skin myself a crocodile."

"The golden heroes will be returning soon, so we'll have to get them to trust you. Anyone have any ideas on how to do that?" Cora looks first at Killian and then at Aveena, raising her brows when no one offers one up for her to shoot down. "I'll slaughter everyone in the village, rip out their hearts and keep a few of them safe in case we need someone to fight for us, and you, Hook, will play the part of frightened blacksmith that was lucky to survive. Unfortunately, Aveena revealed herself too soon, so she'll have to change into someone else." Aveena shrugs, feeling her magic swirl around her as she changes into a younger girl she'd met briefly on Neverland. Her dark hair shortened and curled more as it turned a pale gold color, her skin lost its faint tan as it turned pale, and her features shift slightly to resemble the other girl.

"I certainly feel sorry for this poor girl now," she states, staring down at her new guise with a frown. "Pretty or not, I would hate to be stuck at twelve years old forever."

"What's your new name?"
"I'm Wendy Darling, the bastard daughter of a knight of Camelot and recently found wandering aimlessly through the woods after falling through a portal created by Morgana."

"Good girl. And Hook, why would you care about Wendy?"

"I'm the one that found her," he answers with a shrug, "we had just returned from the stream when we noticed you ripping out people's hearts, so we hid under the bodies of those you'd already murdered. I'll protect her as if she was my own since a fake Aveena will be found among the deceased. You double-crossed her and that's why I want to tag along with the heroes."

"Very good. Now, shall we put our little plan into action?" Killian and Aveena share an exasperated look before following Cora back to the village, watching as she used her magic to freeze the villagers in place and rip out their hearts. Most of the hearts were crushed, but she slipped a few into her satchel for later use. "When the two of you hear the heroes getting close, hide under the bodies and look terrified."

"What about the false body of my daughter?"

"Aveena, would you like to do it?" Aveena shrugs, moving over to a girl that looked the most like her and fixing the glamour in place.

"Where's Uncle Jaime, Auntie Tris, and Kellan," she asks Killian, looking up at her father expectantly.

"I told them to wait on the Jolly Roger for further instruction," he informs her with a shrug. "James knows what to do in order to keep them safe from the Ogres." While Killian and Aveena were talking, Cora disappeared further into the woods, leaving the pair alone to have their moment. Killian holds his daughter close, his cheek against her soft hair. "I've missed you being this small, Vee."

"When all of this is over, will you tell me about Mother?" Killian didn't like to talk of Milah, it hurt him badly, so all Vee really knew came from James.

"Of course, sweet girl, I'll tell you whatever you wish to know." All she had of her mother's was the cream-colored scarf tied around her wrist that smelled of her mother's favorite perfume. "For now, let's get comfortable because we may have a long wait ahead of us." Aveena nods, sitting at one of the long benches with her father, Killian holding her hands in his larger ones to keep them warm as a cool breeze picks up and ruffles her newly blonde hair. "Will you sing for me?" At Aveena's unsure expression, Killian offers up one of his soft smile reserved only for his small family. "Please, sweet girl, something to help pass the time until we have to put on a show." She gives him a nod, biting her lip as she thinks of a song he would like. Uncle Jaime said she had her mother's singing voice, but she was always afraid that she would sing what day and sound nothing like Milah.

"Lavenders blue dilly, dilly, lavenders green; when I am king dilly, dilly, you shall be queen. Who told you so dilly, dilly, who told you so? Twas my own heart dilly, dilly, that told me so. Call up your men dilly, dilly, set them to work; some to the plow dilly, dilly, some to the fork. Some to cut hay dilly dilly, some to make corn while you and I dilly, dilly, keep ourselves warm. Lavenders green dilly, dilly, lavenders blue; if you love me dilly, dilly I will love you. Let the birds sing dilly, dilly and let the lambs play, we shall be safe dilly, dilly out of harms way. I love to dance dilly, dilly, I love to sing; when I am queen dilly, dilly, you'll be my king. Who told me so dilly, dilly, who told me so? I told myself dilly, dilly, I told me so." Aveena looks up as she finishes she looks up at her father, smiling a little when she noticed how much he's relaxed; his eyes were closed and he was still smiling. A breaking twig broke the serene moment and Killian's eyes snap open to
look around.

"Alright, Vee, let's find us a corpse to hide under."
Chapter 13

Anyone care to name a few good scary movies on Netflix? I think my favorite on there so far is Secret in the Walls, it's more thriller than scary, but I loved it all the same.

The bodies on top of Killian and Aveena were quickly beginning to stink as the sun beats down on them mercilessly, Aveena having to press her lips together tightly to keep the bile from rising. "Oh my God," Emma gasps out once she sees the carnage Cora wrought. The sound of voices has Killian letting out a sigh of relief, knowing they could get out from under the corpses soon enough, then the real work would begin.

"This can't be," Mulan states sadly," our land- we were protected here, hidden. How did the Ogres find us?" Aveena rolls her eyes at the predictable line of thought, waiting on someone to connect the dots that were right in front of their faces. Literally.

"Ogres didn't do this," Snow informs everyone," Cora did. Their hearts- they were ripped out. This is her magic—twisted and evil. We have to stop her."

"Too late. She killed them, she killed them all. Look, she even killed Aveena." Vee sneaks a look while everyone's distracted, watching as Mulan's expression fades from sadness to desperation. "Do you think Aveena was even working with Cora or do you think that she thought it was her best chance to survive?"

"It doesn't matter now. We have to stop Cora before she hurts anyone else." As Emma drew nearer, Aveena sunk down next to her father again, snuggling close to him for a sense of protection. Killian stares down at her, both shrugging and deciding it was now or never. He puts out a hand, moving it around on the ground to gain attention.

"Hey," Emma calls out," look!"

"There's someone under there," Aurora cries next, and Aveena could hear the sounds of footsteps as the group comes closer to them to help them out. "They're alive!"

"Please," Killian begs, looking close to tears as he was dragged out from under the pile, his good hand clutching the back of Aveena's simple gown. "Please help us." Aveena managed fake a few tears, grasping tightly to her father as they're pulled out into the open air. The sudden flood of sunlight caused Aveena to squint, bringing her arm up to shield her eyes as she moved closer to Killian.

"You're both safe now," Snow promises," we won't hurt you."

Enchanted Forest—Past

Aveena moved swiftly through the crowd of people, her eyes on the crimson-cloaked figure just ahead that seemed to glide more than walk. It didn't deter her, only made her want to work harder to achieve her goal. She needed the dagger he carried with him, the one that could stop his heart and give her father what he so desperately needed. She watched the figure turn a corner, rushing to keep up with it only to find herself alone on the street.

"Nice try, Dearie," the figure's voice rings out behind her, the chipper tone grating on her nerves. "Too bad you were so obvious." Aveena turns to face him, the Imp's hood thrown back and a smile playing on his lips. "So, what were you after this time?"
"Your dagger," she snarls at him, feeling their magic crackling in the air the longer they're near each other. It's done this the last few times they'd been near each other, it was like his magic recognized hers, and her magic was trying to mix with it. She'd never experienced that with anyone else before and it seemed new to Rumpelstiltskin as well. "And I will get my hands on it one of these days, Crocodile."

"No need to resort to name calling," he giggles, stepping closer and tapping her nose. She swats his hand away with a scowl, used to his theatrics by this point.

"When did you know I was following you?"

"Well, you got closer this time, little bird."

"Don't call me that!"

"But it fits you so well!" She strikes out at him, only to stumble when he appears behind her, his booted foot connecting with her ass and knocking her into the dirt. "The way you move and your compulsive need to steal what doesn't belong to you makes me think of the birds that fill this realm. Aveena scowls up at him, standing as he flips the hood back up to cover his face and unfreezes the marketplace. "Would you like a little tip?"

"Do I really have a choice in that or will you tell me anyway?"

"When a wolf wants a sheep for dinner it takes on its disguise. All the sheep flock to it while it plots what sides it should have to go with the meat." And then he had disappeared back into the crowd and Aveena was set back to square one.

**Aveena Jones—Present**

"Have you seen them before," Emma questions as Killian and Aveena settle down at one of the long benches, Killian rubbing the bridge of his nose while Aveena rested her head in her hands. Both of them were listening in, though their loud voices didn't exactly make that difficult.

"He's a blacksmith and Aveena's father," Mulan explains," they came around a couple of months ago with another family. He usually goes into the forest to scavenge for food and occasionally finds people who have just made it to the camp. The little girl must be one of the stragglers. He said he lost his hand in an Ogre attack."

"Why would Cora leave a survivor?" *Why would you talk so loudly about the people you just supposedly rescued if you don't trust them?* "It's messy, doesn't make sense."

"You think they're lying?"

"I think Cora's tricked us before and I don't want that to happen again." At least she's getting smarter about how this world works. Vee raises her head, unused to the thinness of Wendy's hair when her own was so thick that it caused her head to pound. Still, it was nice not to feel so weighed down, and the gown she wore wasn't as hot as the breeches she wore on her little quest. This one was made up of a white chemise, a maroon skirt that stopped around her ankles, and a black corset that she could do up herself and went outside the dress to allow her an easier time of breathing. Her boots stopped just under the skirt of her dress and had thick heels that made her a little taller and she wore a gold medallion around her throat that her father had brought back from the Caribbean when he rescued James. "Here you go."

Aveena only looked away from her lap when Emma sets a cup of water down in front of her and another in front of Killian, drinking from it like a man who was dying of thirst.
"I can't thank you enough for your kindness," Killian states gratefully. "Fortune, it seems, has seen fit to show me favor even after it snatched my daughter away from me." He allowed a few tears to fill his eyes and slide down his cheek, looking past everyone at the girl that wore the disguise of Aveena's body. It didn't seem to Vee that he had to force the tears, the thought of her death making the pirate naturally sad.

"An island full of corpses and you two are the only ones to escape having your hearts ripped out. How exactly did it happen?"

"It was dark when we made it here," Aveena speaks up in Wendy's timid voice," Mister Jones found his daughter first and seemed ready to let the same fate fall on him, but I managed to get him to hide under the…." She lets out a shaky breath, setting her cup down on the table and looking down at her hands where they rested in her lap. "Under those who'd already had their hearts ripped out. It was horrible." Aveena could tell that Emma didn't entirely believe them, so she used her magic to influence the way Emma was thinking, turning her suspicions back to Cora and away from them. Emma's brows crease in momentary confusion before she sits down opposite Killian and Aveena.

"We should leave," Mulan states as Emma comes out of her daze," in case Cora comes back."

"And we should start searching for a new portal back to Storybrooke," Snow adds. "I only got about five minutes with my husband. No to mention my grandson."

"You have a grandson," Killian asks with a smile.

"Long story."

"Well, I know this land well. I can guide you."

"You're not gonna double cross us and use magic to do a Vader choke hold, are you," Emma checks, though it seemed only she and Snow understood most of that.

"What's a Vader choke hold?"

"It's a…." She mimes the motion that most magic users make in order to cut off someone's breathing. "Never mind about the Darth Vader thing, you're not gonna kill us?"

"No, I haven't hurt anyone since I found my way here." He gives Aveena an uncertain look, playing his part well. "You're not going to do this Dark Vader thing, are you?"

"It's Darth Vader, and I doubt she's capable of it since she's so tiny." Still, Emma's gaze lands on Aveena, her expression stern until Aveena gave her a nod in agreement. "Where are you from, Wendy?"

"Camelot," Aveena lies," I'm the bastard daughter of someone important, I guess, because Morgana banished me here to avoid me messing up her plans. "I was wondering around the woods for hours before Killian found me and brought me back here."

"And you. You said you haven't hurt anyone since you came here, but what did you do before that?"

"I-" Killian lowers his gaze to the table for a moment, trying to think before answering. "I worked for a bad person, I was a pirate of sorts that did what I had to in order to keep my Vee alive. It appears it was all for naught since she was murdered while I was away by that strange woman we kept in the Pit."
"A pirate missing a hand? Please tell me you don't have a nickname."

"Aye, they called me Hook." Emma rolls her eyes, looking completely done with all the things being thrown at her. "How would you know that, though?"

"I'll explain later. Right now, we should get going."

"There's something you should know," Aveena speaks up as they stand," while we were hiding, we could hear Cora rambling to Aveena while she was dying." Killian sucks in a sharp breath, resting his hand on her shoulder as though to make sure she was really there. "She was talking about how she had these magical ashes that could take her to that Story place Snow was talking about earlier, but she needed this… This…" Aveena looks to Killian for help to make it all the more convincing.

"A magical compass," he fills in," I heard my-" He cuts off with an expression of deep sorrow, squeezing his eyes closed for a moment before regaining composure. "I heard my daughter commenting that the compass was at the top of the last Beanstalk in the Enchanted Forest. I know where that's at."

"That compass could get us home," Snow breathes with a smile at her daughter.

"Not without those ashes," Emma reminds her. "If Cora gets the compass first, then Storybrooke's gonna have a new crisis on its hands." She turns to look at Killian and Aveena, biting her lip. "You're sure you know where it's at?"

"I've been stuck here for twenty-eight years thanks to that bloody Curse, I've had more than enough time to explore and the Beanstalk's magic always drew my daughter to it." He wasn't lying about that, it was one of the strongest sources of magic in this realm.

"Then let's move, but first…." Mulan pulls out two lengths of rope, standing in front of Aveena expectantly. "We're not taking any chances, so hold out your hands, both of you." With a frown, Vee and Killian allow their wrists to be bound, the knot one that would be hard to untie in the best conditions, but Killian had no chance of doing it with only one hand. "Where's your hook?"

"What makes you think I have one," Killian asks indignantly.

"They didn't call you Hook for nothing."

"It's in my satchel." He was reluctant to give out the location, but Aveena had sent a small charge of magic through him to get him talking. The more voluntarily they gave up information—true or otherwise—the more these people would be willing to trust them. Snow was the one carrying the satchel, so she rummaged through it until she found the silver attachment Emma had asked about, pulling it out with slight fear.

"It really is him," she mumbles before speaking louder," you terrorized villages and killed people for the fun of it, you weren't under anyone's control!"

"Have we ever met?"

"No."

"Then how would you know what I enjoyed doing? A maniac took my daughter hostage before she was even one, then he used her as leverage to get me to do his bidding, so don't you dare presume to think I'm as cold-hearted as you think. I never got the chance to get my Vee back until she was nineteen years old, and we'd barely gotten here before the Curse hit and froze time. Now she's been killed because none of you could manage the simple task of dispatching a magic user!"
"Your daughter helped Cora escape," Emma snaps back, "she’s dead because she trusted an insane woman over us."

"Or she heard the rumors about your mother, or has Snow White forgot to mention that she was a famous bandit that the Evil Queen's been after for decades. She killed people too, so why would my daughter trust her any more than Cora? So yes, I was a pirate and still am in some ways, but don't you dare talk about my baby like that when she can't even defend herself." Aveena had never seen her father so angry before, not even when Pan had kissed her the first time, and it came as a shock how much he loved her. Sure, she knew he loved her like most fathers loved their daughters, but he'd never been the hugging type.

"So much for being a soft-spoken blacksmith."

"I never said I was, love, I was just afraid for my life, but now I know you can't kill me because I'm the only one here who knows the location of the Beanstalk." Not waiting on anyone, Killian begins to walk towards the forest, Aveena right beside him with a happy grin on her face. Seeing Killian stick up for her like that made her feel warm and giddy. After they had been walking for a few hours with Killian yelling out the occasional directions to avoid making the others thinks he's trying to run, Aveena can feel the Beanstalk's magic calling out to her own and she gives Killian a nod. "Up ahead," he calls out to the others," we'll find the compass just over the ridge.

The climb up the ridge was a difficult one to do without the full use of her hands, but Aveena managed to do it with some help from Mulan. "Let me guess," Emma sighs when she joins the others," the compass is up there?"

“Oh yeah.” The Beanstalk itself was a large twisting thing that disappeared into the dark clouds swirling around it, protected by magic that kept anyone from climbing up without the necessary precaution of a magical leather cuff.

“So how do we get to it?”

“Most people would say that you wouldn’t,” Aveena remarks,” but most people aren’t able to steal from Cora either.”

“It’s not the climb you need to worry about,” Killian informs everyone before Emma can ask about what Aveena meant. “It’s the Giant at the top.”

“And I’d bet my last penny that he’s not the type to invite you in for tea.”

**Hey, look at this, I do know how to update. Anyway, you can find Vee's outfits on the site called Polyvore, the collection is called Ignorance is Bliss/The Best Defense. Sorry that the links in my profile aren't working right, but there's nothing I can do about it. Leave a review, please? *Puppy dog eyes***
I'll proof read in the morning, but right now I have Walking Dead to finish watching.

"It's a little freakier than I remember from the story," Emma remarks once they reach the base of the Beanstalk.

"Reminds me of death," Mulan adds.

"You're a chipper bunch," Aveena remarks, reaching out a hand and watching as the protective magic ripples slightly and then calms once it recognizes her, swirling and glittering a pale gold in the sunlight as it curled around her fingers. "Any questions before we begin the perilous climb up the Beanstalk and face the furious Giant waiting at the top?"

"Yep," Emma nods, "you guys mentioned magic beans on the way here that could open portals, so why don't we pick one and go home that way without all the fuss?" Aveena and Killian share matching expressions of exasperation from all the blonde's questions. "Why do we need the compass or ashes at all?"

"Because," Killian explains, "there aren't any more beans. Whatever story you think you know, my dear, is most certainly wrong."

"There was a guy named Jack and a cow, something about an evil Giant with a treasure, and a golden goose." Sounds like the strange tales Uncle Jamie told me as a child.

"Sounds like a lovely tale, but the truth's a bit more gruesome. The Giants grew the beans, but rather than use them for good, they used them to plunder all the lands. Jack was a man who fought a terrible war, defeating all but one of the evil Giants. The beans were destroyed by the Giants as they died. If they couldn't have their magic, then nobody could. It's very bad form."

"There's a flaw in your tale, Captain," Aveena tells him with a smug grin. He raises his brows, gesturing for his daughter to go on. "Jack was a woman." It was hard not to remark that she was the type of woman he would bring back to the ship in his dark years, but Wendy wouldn't know that, so Vee kept her mouth shut.

"And how would you know that, Lass?"

"Common sense, ever met a man that was capable of being quiet enough to steal from a Giant?" Killian purses his lips, trying to think up a remark. "You lot prefer to burst in and fight to the death while us women take a subtler approach."

"Are you two finished," Emma asks sarcastically. "We do have work to do, don't we?"

"The compass is up there with the treasure," Killian explains, sending his daughter an amused smile. "All we have to do is sneak past the one remaining giant to do it. Once we accomplish that, we have to steal the ashes from Cora, and then we're on our way."

"How do we know you're not just using us to get the compass for Cora," Mulan asks.

"Because you five are far safer company. All I need is a ride back; I'll swear allegiance to whoever gets me there first."

"Why do you want to get to their land?" Killian frowns, unconsciously reaching out a hand to touch Aveena, as though to reassure himself that she wasn't killed along with her mother and this
was all some horrid dream that he would wake from.

"To exact revenge on the man who took my hand." And my mother. "Rumpelstiltskin." Aveena wanted the Imp dead, she'd tried several times once she knew the truth, but she wasn't sure how much it would darken her father's heart. What if it was beyond repair already? He wasn't exactly the pure and virtuous sort to begin with.

"I guess we should get climbing," Emma sighs, staring up at the beanstalk in resignation.

"Of course, you can't just climb it without a protection spell. No, that would be suicidal and, to be quite honest, I'm much too handsome to be killed this early on in my life." Aveena scoffs at that, dropping her hand to her side to break the tenuous connection with the magic. Killian holds up his bound hands. "If you'd be so kind?" Snow unties the ropes, making it look easy, though Vee supposes it was for her since she's the one that tied his hands together in the first place. Killian brings his face close to Snow's with what Vee recognizes as his usual seductive half grin and a wink. "Thank you, milady." He takes off his ratty outer clothing to reveal the fitted clothing underneath—a dark leather vest, trousers, and a black shirt. The cuff on his right wrist glows faintly. "I've got one more of these, so which one of you four lovelies shall accompany me?"

"Hey," Aveena snaps when he nudges her to the side to take in the other four women. "Go on, fight it out." He holds up the other cuff with a grin, watching the women with an expression Vee had seen on his face too many times to count when he was around attractive women. "Don't be afraid to, you know, really get into it." Realizing that the women would actually argue until the chosen one stepped forward to volunteer, Aveena decides to sit down and draw in the loose sand. Killian sits beside her, watching as she drew. "What on earth is that?"

"I'm not sure," she mumbles," I saw it in Mozenrath's hand during my scrying practice, I think he called it a tellyphone. Do you promise to come back safe?"

"I'm just hoping to come back in one piece." When she doesn't return his smile, his drops and he brushes some of her blonde hair behind her ear. "I'll try."

"Promise to tell me about my mother?"

"Of course."

"Good, now you have to come back or else you'll break that promise." He's never broken a promise so far, so this should work as a good luck charm. "I love you, Daddy."

"And I you, my sweet girl. I'll be happy to see you back in your own body instead of using this stranger's." Wendy wasn't a stranger to Aveena, the two had been friends on Neverland until Peter had locked her away somewhere.

"Anything in that bag that can help me," Emma asks Mulan a few minutes later.

"A hook," the Chinese girl frowns.

"Hey," Killian calls out, wounded. Mulan ignores him, leading Emma out of hearing range. Vee can tell that her father's growing impatient as the minutes wear on and it doesn't look like Mulan's finished talking yet. "Ladies, in this world we are slaves to time and ours is running out. In other words, tick tock." Emma walks over to Killian and Aveena, the pirate standing again as the blonde holds up her arm. "I was hoping it'd be you." He sets her hand on his shoulder so he could see to put the cuff on.

"Just get on with it," Emma mutters. The dark cuff glows golden faintly once it's in place and Vee
can feel the magic trying to come her way, but she pushes it back.

"This will allow you to climb, but there are other dangers." Like a lecherous pirate. "Thankfully, you've got me to protect you." He holds up his stump, pointing at it expectantly. When Emma just sends him a look that suggest she has doubts about his supposed brilliance, he gains that wounded expression again. "I can't climb one-handed, can I?" Emma takes the silver hook out of Killian's satchel and hands it over to him with a moment's hesitation.

"Don't think I'm taking my eyes off you for one second." He twists it in place inside the cover that goes on his arm, the hook making a faint **click** to tell the pirate that it's locked in.

"I would despair if you did." She hangs the satchel on his hook, walking over to the beanstalk with Killian right behind her. Once they were out of Vee's limited sight, she lays back in the sun-warmed sand and stares up at the sky. It was a bright blue with a few wispy clouds creating shade whenever they pass in front of the sun. It was surprisingly warm for it to be so close to winter, but Aveena wouldn't complain.

"You'll have the last watch," Mulan informs Aveena, "you're the youngest." Vee nods, going back to her thoughts as Mulan lays down a few feet away to sleep. "You should get some rest, Wendy. You'll want to be wide awake for your shift." She nods again, rolling onto her side and looking at the trees. After a few minutes of restless tossing and turning she pulls out the scarf that belonged to her mother.

It smelled like a mixture of both of her parents, that cloying scent of Sweet Peas lulling her into a light slumber.

**Killian Jones—Past**

Killian smirks as Milah walks over to him, a squirming black puppy in her arms and a hopeful light in her eyes. "I know you don't like animals," she starts, seeing his smirk transform into a frown. "But I found him wandering around by himself and he needs a home."

"He can find a home on his own, I won't have that thing aboard my vessel." She pokes her lower lip out in a pout, standing at his side and resting her head on his shoulder. The puppy lets out of small yip, its tail wagging rapidly back and forth. "No, Milah." He was absolute on this one, there's no way he's going to have a dog on his ship, especially since Milah just realized she was pregnant.

"Oh, but Killian, just look into his eyes." She holds the puppy's face close to Killian's, its brown eyes practically daring Killian to turn it down.

"Fine," he snaps, turning away from his lover and the mongrel," but you'll be the one taking care of the thing!" It's going to be a huge dog, he could tell that by its paws. Milah lets out a happy squeal, rushing past him to board the **Jolly Roger** before Killian had a chance to change his mind about the whole thing. It's a good thing he loves that woman.

**Enchanted Forest**

Aveena wakes with a yelp, hearing screaming and looking around for a threat. It's a good thing that there wasn't one because she wouldn't have been any use in her half-awake state. Mulan is hacking away at the beanstalk with her sword, the magic the beanstalk is sending out leaving Aveena dizzy. Snow tackles Mulan to the ground, the two women rolling around in a fight. "Good God, Killian would love that," Vee mumbles, shaking her head and trying to sit up.

"Stop," Emma shouts, jumping the last few feet to the ground and falling once she gets there.
"Emma!" Snow was almost in tears as she runs over to her daughter. Aveena groans, deciding to just stay where she is until the magic finishes sending a warning signal to the giant. Closing her eyes, she curls into a ball and listen to the others.

"Did you get it," Mulan asks, sheathing her sword.

"Yep," Emma says, bringing out the compass for the others to see. Vee watches them through barely opened eyes, the world finally stopping its constant spinning and letting her sit up on her own.

"Where's Killian," she asks loud enough to be heard.

"He's detained. Let's go, get your stuff. We've got ten hours before he follows us."

"What do you mean he's detained?" Aveena stands quickly, feeling her magic begin to respond to her anger. "What did you do to him up there?"

"The Giant owed me a favor and he'll let Hook go in ten hours, but we have to go now." Aveena shakes her head stubbornly, holding out a hand.

"Give me your cuff."

"What?"

"Give me your cuff." She spoke slowly, making sure to enunciate each word to ensure even an imbecile like Emma could understand the simple command. "I'm asking nicely right now." Emma looked unsure, like she was briefly able to see through Vee's guise, though that should be impossible. "Now."

"You could die rescuing him, you realize that, right?"

"Unlike you, I can't just leave someone up there to die. Sorry if I have a conscious." He promised to come back. "I'll ask politely one more time before I show you what I had to learn to survive." Emma removes the cuff and tosses it over to Vee, still looking confused of why a total stranger would want to save a man she'd never met until a few days ago.

"We can't wait for you two."

"Then don't." As the group disappeared into the forest, Aveena pops the leather cuff in place and begins the long climb up the beanstalk.

He's going to owe me big time for rescuing him from a Giant.
Chapter 15

Has anyone watched Ravenous on Netflix? The last 15 minutes or so were my favorite and Robert Carlyle made an excellent villain in it, so y'all might check it out! Are there any other good movies on Netflix that y'all could recommend? I want to have a movie marathon tomorrow since my brother's visiting.

Aveena grunts as she finally makes it to the top of the beanstalk, her feet hitting a stone floor instead of vines that writhed beneath her feet when they came in contact with her magic. "This looked so much easier in those books I stole," she gasps, hands on her knees as she took a moment to catch her breath. "Okay, this shouldn't be too..." Her sentence trails off when she enters the castle, stacks upon stacks of treasure towering high above her head. "...Hard." With a pirate's instincts, she moves immediately to a large chest filled with gold coins like the one around her neck, the gold warming in her hand.

"Who's there," a voice roars, preceding thunderous footsteps that knocked Vee off her feet. "Show yourself!"

"For the love of Bastet, can't I get a break?" The Giant came around the corner, snarling down at Vee like she was something disgusting he'd just found stuck to his shoe. "I'm right here, come get me!" As the Giant bent down to grab her, she threw a ball of magic at him that knocked him unconscious. He fell hard, knocking over a pile of jewels, and sent Aveena back to the hard floor. "This is getting old." Using her magic to create a satchel, she stuffs some coins and jewels in it, wrapping a jeweled necklace around her wrist. If they were going to Storybrooke, then they would need currency. "Dad," she calls out loudly.

"Vee," he shouts from somewhere on her left. She runs in that direction, listening to his shouts and the jingling of a chain. She finds her father chained to the wall, his expression dark and speaking of how angry he is.

"Fancy finding you here. I was just strolling around this treasury, looking at all the beautiful scenery."

"Ha, ha," he says sarcastically, "get me out of here."

"Yes, Daddy." With a satisfied grin, Vee calls on her magic to unlock the manacle keeping her father up here. "Shall we go?"

"Not until you take off that guise and I see your pretty face again." Vee lets the disguise drop, her thick dark hair returning and her form filling out the dress she wore. "There's my girl." He cups her face and plants a kiss on her forehead. "Come on, we need to leave this place before the Giant finds us." He takes her hand in his tightly, both of them squeezing through a crack in the foundation before beginning the long climb down. "What could be worse than having to climb in the dark?" A clap of thunder followed that and then a hard drizzle began to pour down on them.

"You really had to ask that?" Grumbling, Aveena and Killian continue their descent down the beanstalk, both shivering in the cold rain as it picks up. Six and a half hours later, they drop the remaining few feet to the mud, the only thing keeping Vee from slipping being her father's protective grip on her arm.

"My dear Captain," Cora greets, "it seems you two have been on quite an adventure." Killian and Aveena both make the same face, the one a child might make when they're caught with their hands in the cookie jar. We're fucked. "My compass, please." Slowly, both of the Jones turn to
face the hag, Aveena looking less afraid than her father.

"Yes," Killian nods," that. Well….Matters grew complicated. It's eluded us for the moment. The details of the affair are a bit of a bore."

"Really? Stealing my protection spell and climbing the beanstalk without me might seem like a bore to the pair of you, but to me, it's a betrayal." On instinct, Killian and Vee move to stand in front of the other, but both end up standing side by side with one of Killian's arms outstretched in front of Vee.

"I was gonna bring it to you. Our agreement remains."

"I can get the compass," Vee states confidently," they won't allow my dad within ten feet of them, but little Wendy is someone they would welcome back with open arms when they found out that the pirate she went to rescue tried to gut her for even contemplating leaving him behind." 

"And why should I trust you," Cora asks, narrowing her eyes at Vee. "You're just a pirate's bastard, so why shouldn't I just rip out your heart right now?"

"Because I'm the one that stole your protection spell, I'm the only person who's been able to surprise Rumpelstiltskin in the last hundred years, and I'm the only one of the three of us that those idiots trust not to stab them while they sleep!" Cora looks down her nose at the teen, looking unimpressed. "And if you call me a bastard one more time, I'll show you what hell I'm capable of raising. Try me, bitch."

"Very well, but if either of you fail me again, you can rest assured that not only will I leave you here, Hook, I'll crush your daughter's heart the same way Rumple crushed your Milah's." Killian lunged forward at the threat, Cora disappearing and making Killian fall to the ground.

"How are we supposed to find them," Killian inquires as Vee helps him up.

"No need," she says, holding out her hand. Indigo flames burn there for a second before disappearing and leaving the compass there in its place, Vee's hand untouched by the flames. "We've already got it and now we just need those ashes to get our revenge."

"That's my girl."

Bastet is the Egyptian goddess of protection and cats, and the Greeks changed her name to Aelurus and made her into their moon goddess. Anyone who's read my other Vee story knows that Vee was born the night of a full moon so she has strong ties to it. "Aveena was born the night of a full moon and so she had a strong affinity for finding light in the darkness."—Ignorance is Bliss, Chapter 22.
Moze and Al’s Storybrooke names are Nicky and Micah Blaine, just so none of you are confused in the very last part of this chap.

"Why can't you just poof the sparkly dust to us like you did with the compass?" Aveena rolls her eyes as they continue the trek to the camp where Cora was sure to be hiding out.

"Because," she explains for what feels like the tenth time," I saw where Emma hid the compass on her person, so I was able to poof it into my possession, but I have no clue where Cora is hiding the wardrobe ashes." She rolls her eyes, pushing low hanging branches out of her way in order to keep up with her father. "Do you realize how tall you are compared to me? I may seem big when I'm yelling, but I barely reach your chest."

"Oh please, I've seen you make people much larger than you tremble in fear, yet you can't keep up with me as I walk?" Grumbling, Aveena takes advantage of Killian's pause by jumping up on his back, her arms wrapped loosely around his neck while her legs were tightly wrapped around his waist. Killian stumbled a little under the sudden weight of his daughter, but decided not to remark and just continued to walk. "I've always said you knew how to improvise, you're just proving my point."

"Another thing I inherited from you, eh?"

"Quite right, sweet girl." Aveena grins, placing a kiss against her father's ruffled brown hair. She used to do this when she was younger and tired of walking, and Killian always complained playfully that he wasn't her horse. That was before he started raiding villages for Pan, back when he was able to stay with her on Neverland and only left when they needed food or Pan wanted some obscure object on the other side of the island. She and Killian would sit on the beach for hours, swimming or drawing pictures in the sand. She missed those simple days where she didn't have to worry about everyone's safety. Soon enough, they enter the camp, the dead bodies gone with several sets of footprints leading away from the camp and into the woods.

"She's gone."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, there's no trace of recent magic here." She drops gracefully to her feet and starts towards Cora's hut as Killian moves to the Pit, Aveena pushing open the door and stepping inside. She'd never been in here before and now she knew why Cora had always kept people out—there were small boxes stacked carefully on top of each other, most filled with beating hearts while a few of the fresh ones were missing. "She's insane." Shaking her head, Aveena moves further into the hut, searching through the trunks and other boxes, searching desperately for anywhere big enough to hide the ashes. "Come on," she hisses," where are you, dammit?" She was almost ready to give up when she remembers something Cora had said a few weeks ago when Aveena had tried to hide her scrying powder.

"Always keep what you want hidden right out in the open for people to see because they’ll overlook it in their haste to find something cleverly hidden."

Aveena moves back to the hearts, running the tips of her fingers over the small glass pane set into the front of each one until she finds one missing the dull glow. "Have you found it yet?" She lets out a small squeak when her father speaks, sending him a glare over her shoulder as she crouches in the dirt. "Don’t give me that look, Vee." Aveena was ready with a remark when her eyes land
“You’re alive,” Aurora gasps, clutching her cloak tighter in fear.

“Relax,” Vee says, pulling open the box and digging around inside, “I hate Cora just as much as you do.” The box was enchanted to be bigger than it looks, holding several shrunken spells books and a large box; Aveena pulls the box out since she couldn’t find the ashes. Inside the box is a cloudy-looking globe with a needle fixed into the golden support, and stuck between the globe and the box is the most beautiful thing Aveena’s ever seen—the ashes. “Got ‘em, not let’s get out of here before Cora gets back!”

“You’re not leaving without Emma and Snow.” Killian shrugs when his daughter looks his way, Aveena rolling her eyes and gathering the things needed for a tracking potion.

“Do you have something that belongs to one of them?” Unless they had a way to track Emma and Snow down fast, Aveena would happily knock the Princess unconscious and leave this world without them.

“I do,” Killian states, pulling out a simple faux-silver necklace from his coat pocket. Aveena raises a brow when she takes it from him, Killian giving her devious wink as she pours the finished potion over it. He’d stolen it at some point in their journey, though Aveena wasn’t sure why since it held no real value in trade. As the potion takes effect, the necklace rises from the small table and begins to float out of the hut towards the woods.

“Let’s move.” Because he had the longest legs, Killian moved faster than both of the girls, but Aveena wasn’t hindered by a long skirt like Aurora was, so she was able to stay in the middle of the group. Still, a few times they all had to stop as Aurora and Vee stopped to unsnag their skirts from roots and thorns along the ground. With all the stops and occasional breaks from running, they managed to find the others in just two hours, the necklace sailing ahead until it landed in Emma’s cupped hands.

“Stop,” Aurora shouts, finding Snow straddling Mulan with an arrow held against her neck. “Let Mulan go.”

“What the hell is he doing here,” Emma demands as Snow slowly stands up, “and how is Aveena still alive?”

“Dumb luck mostly,” Aveena shrugs, “and a little bit of magic on my part.”

“And why would you set Aurora free when you obviously work for Cora?”

“I work with the people more likely to get Daddy and me where we need to be without killing us, which just so happens to be you lot.” The three women look between Killian and Vee, spotting the similarities and how close Killian stood to Aveena. “Now, are we going to Lake Nostos or are we just going to stand around and wait for Cora to find us again?”

“We can’t get home without the compass or the ashes,” Snow points out, hands on her hips. Aveena pulls both things out for them to see, grinning smugly when Emma pats at her coat pocket. “Fine, but you both will walk in front so we can keep an eye on you.” Killian shrugs as Vee stows away the objects, both moving to the front of the group and leading the way towards the mystical lake.

**Caribbean—Past**

Excruciating pain erupts in James’s chest where Bootstrap Bill’s sword was buried in flesh and
muscle, the pain worse than any he’s ever felt. He lets out a choked gasp, tightening his hold on the hilt of his own sword, but too weak to stand up and wield it against his enemies. Elizabeth was safe, he’d done his duty, that’s all that mattered now. He could still feel the softness of Elizabeth’s lips when she’d given him a desperate kiss before climbing up on the tow-line.

He gazes past his murderer as the other monstrosities surround him, all sending him leering grins and smug looks as he bleeds out on the deck of the Flying Dutchman. The constant pain kept him conscious, but only barely and his pride made him stay sitting up straight even as that voice in his head told him to just lie down and die. Just last year he would have done exactly that, but he had his honor back, he wasn’t a rum-soaked ne’er-do-well that followed a pirate’s orders anymore.

He lets out a soft laugh at the thought of pirates, wondering when he had started to prefer the company of pirates over the soldiers he’s worked with since he was old enough to join the Royal Navy. It was certainly a sad day when he would actually be happy to see Jack Sparrow over a man in brocade. He shivers, still feeling the sharp pain emanating from his wound, but he also notices that it's beginning to go away—no, not go away, it was beginning to numb; he was beginning to go numb. He reveled in this loss of feeling, his heart no longer aching for Elizabeth Swann’s love.

Davy Jones is standing in front of him now, glaring down at him with triumph in his eyes, but he's not the one that's triumphed today. No, it’s James that’s won since he finally felt free from all of his worries—no more loving Elizabeth, no more hating Will Turner, whose father’s just stabbed him, and no more worrying about a war the pirates are sure to win with Jack Sparrow leading the way.

If there’s one thing he’s learned about that pirate, it’s that the man was capable of escaping in the most elaborate ways that left James impressed even when he didn’t admit it aloud. His life may be over, but James was at peace with that, staring stubbornly up at the ship’s infamous Captain. “James Norrington,” Davy Jones questions, “do you fear death?” With one last act of strength, James raises his sword and drives it deeply into Jones’s shoulder, not even caring when it had no effect on the creature. “I’ll take that as a no.”

Two crewmembers toss his limp body overboard, none noticing the ship creeping by, but the crew of the ship noticed them. Compared to the Flying Dutchman, the other ship was small and well-hidden in the thick fog surrounding them. With a few shouted orders, a dingy is lowered into the water and James is hauled inside it, looking around in a daze as he feels the dingy being raised back onto the ship and then himself being laid out on the deck.

“Get the Captain,” a man shouts from somewhere on James’s left.

“....A Navy man,” another whispers. Darkness was teasing at the edge of James’s sight, dimming everything around him to dull, dark colors. He heard the heavy tread of a man’s boots on wood, felt someone close to him on his left, and then saw the most extraordinary blue eyes.

“Welcome aboard the Jolly Roger, Admiral,” the man kneeling over him greets. “You’re in safe hands now. Find him a bed below and I’ll have Milah see to him.”

Enchanted Forest—Present

James looks up as a group boards the ship, Killian and Aveena leading the way with only a brief glances in James’s direction. He and his family had been hiding on the Jolly Rodger for nearly a week now and here they come, just waltzing in like nothing was wrong. Killian Jones was a smug bastard at the best of times, but now that attitude was present in the little one as well.

“Finally ready to leave,” James asks, leaning against the main mast and watching their guests with
some curiosity. He only recognized Mulan, but he knew the only people allowed on the ship were those Killian chose to be here and had no worries.

“We are indeed, Norrington,” Killian nods, both men watching as Aveena pulls two small bottles and a compass out of a box the size of her head.

“Did I miss anything interesting?”

“Just the usual—angry Giants, beanstalks, Cora. Nothing to despair over.” James shrugs, letting out a bored sigh. It was days like this that made him wonder why on earth he decided to rejoin Killian Jones after all these years, then he remembered that he was as insane as the Captain and had nothing better to do. Besides, had he died all those years ago, he would never have met the love of his life or had his son. Trista and Kellan were worth all the choices he’s had to make over the years.

“If you boys are finished talking, I do have work that need done,” Aveena remarks without looking at them. Pink dust was swirling in the air in front of her, like a miniature cyclone, and she added to it a bit of water, making them both glow a faint purple color.

“And where do you think you’re going with my ashes,” Cora demands. James turns to face her, wondering when she’d managed to sneak on board in so short a time. “I gave you two a second chance like you asked, Aveena, and what do you do? You use it to betray me again, and I won’t tolerate that.”

“Can you tolerate my foot up your ass,” Aveena shoots back, but James knew she couldn’t use her magic to fight Cora while fixing their portal. Cora lets out a noise of disgust, but she’s thrown off guard when the woman with short brown hair tackles her to the deck.

“Should we step in and help,” James asks, his sword already in hand.

“No yet,” Killian replies, “I’m curious to see how it plays out.” But the pirate had his sword drawn as well in case things didn’t go in their favor.

“You little brat,” Cora shrieks, using her magic to blast the brunette three feet away. She would have fallen overboard had the blonde woman not grabbed hold of her shirt. James looks over at Killian, but the pirate shakes his head as Mulan moves to attack Cora this time. It looked like she may just win the fight, her sword deflecting all of Cora’s magic until one got past and sent the warrior woman flying against the outside wall of Killian’s cabin.

“Not yet, James.” The blonde woman lunges forward, using brute strength against Cora as she punches the woman in the stomach. “I’d wager Emma will win this for us.” At least James had a name to go with her face, but he couldn’t say that for the dark-haired woman and the other woman in a tattered gown. Somehow, Cora manages to flip Emma onto her back, ready to plunge her hand into her chest when she’s thrown backwards against the railing and pinned there by an invisible force.

“Let go of me! I refuse to be bested by a pirate’s bastard!” James eyes widen and turn to Aveena, noticing immediately the absolute fury that makes her eyes glow. With the ingredients still swirling in the air and one hand outstretched to keep Cora in place, Aveena stalks over to her and releases her from the hold. Before Cora had a chance to retaliate, Aveena drew her arm back and punched Cora in the face hard enough to send her overboard into the waters below.

“I told you,” she screams down at the water,” never to call me a bastard again!”

“As proud as I am that you finally snapped and hit Cora,” James drawls,” perhaps you can finish
what you came here to do?” Looking utterly satisfied, Aveena straightens her outfit and returns to the magic, stretching her arms wide as the ashes follow suit, then pushing it forward to hang in front of the ship.

“Compass, please.” Emma places it in Aveena’s hand and Aveena closes her fingers around it for a moment before tossing it into the cyclone. For a moment nothing happens, but then the cyclone flattens and lands in the water, turning into a portal that looked nearly identical to the one that had taken them to Neverland when Vee was still an infant, though this one was a sparkling pink color. “Dad, if you would do the honors.”

“I'd love to,” Killian grins, taking up his place at the helm. “Hang on to something, ladies and Norrington, we’ve a bumpy ride ahead!” James wraps one arm around Aveena and holds onto a thick rope with the other, knowing that his wife and son were safe in Vee’s cabin. They were finally leaving this cursed land behind them.

**Storybrooke—Micah Blaine**

Micah looks up in shock as a pirate ship sails towards the dock after bursting through a strangely pink portal. He’d love to say it was the strangest thing he’s ever seen, he *really* would, but then he’d have to cancel out the fact that he’s seen a man with very little magical ability defeat a sorcerer-turned-Genie on a power trip. This was a close second, though, no doubt about that.

“Come on, Mike, gimme the hammer,” Nicky grumbles, occupied by the post that was trying to separate from the dock. Micah was too shocked to do anything except tap his husband repeatedly on the back, brown eyes wide once he can recognize one of the people standing proudly at the front of the ship. “What is it?” Micah just taps harder until Nicky caves and stands up, his mouth dropping open when he sees what Micah sees.

“Is that,” Micah asks, trailing off in surprised confusion.

The ship sails into port, an anchor splashing into the water and a gangplank sliding out for the passengers to disembark. The first to hit the dock is a short brunette woman with bright blue eyes and a tired smile, patting Micah on the shoulder as she walks by.

“Close your mouth, Aladdin,” she comments in passing,” you’ll catch flies.” Once all of the passengers had disappeared into town and the Blaines were by themselves again, Micah furrowed his brow and scowled in the direction they had left in.

“That Aveena is still an ass.”
Chapter 17

It seemed having to steal for a living came with more perks than Aveena had originally thought, her and Killian able to sneak away from their passengers with relative ease even without a detailed knowledge of this new land. They quickly ducked into an alley and scrambled up a strange iron set of stairs that led to the roof of a building, from there the pair jumped from roof to roof until they found another set of stairs that led to the ground so they could sneak back to the Jolly Roger. Once there, Aveena cast an invisibility spell before relaxing in the cabin she shared with Trista and Kellan. It was a cramped space now, several pieces of parchment littering the floor from Kellan's drawing attempts, clothing strewn over every surface, a changing screen crammed into a corner, and a basin for cold water when they wanted to wash their faces.

She didn't mind the mess or the clutter, it made her feel snug as she curled up in her hammock at night. But she didn't want to sleep yet, she wanted to go and explore this new land, to find her two best friends again so she could talk magic to someone without having to stop and explain every small detail. So, once she was certain her father had disappeared in the hull to check on rations, Aveena tiptoed out onto the deck and made it all the way to the gangplank before she was caught.

"And just where do you think you're going, young lady." With a grimace, she turns to face James and gives him a little shrug. "Those men you talked to at the docks, they were the ones you stayed with, weren't they?"

"Yes," she nods, brushing some hair behind her ear. "I miss talking to people like me." Instead of the disapproving stare she'd been expecting, James gives her a little smile and walks over to her.

"In order to walk these streets without being noticed, you must clothe yourself like them. That's why I'm coming with you into the town." His smile widens, green eyes seeming to sparkle in the late afternoon sunlight.

"Thanks, Uncle Jamie, but I want to do this by myself." James's happy expression diminished a little, but the soft smile remained as a comforting reminder that he'd still care for Vee no matter the choices she made. If he, once a proud upstanding member of society, could become best friends with a scoundrel like Killian Jones, than Vee doubts there's anything she could do that would make him turn his back on her. "I stole this plastic thing from Snow White's pocket while she was asleep and I saw Mozenrath using it to purchase things when I was scrying." The strange thing was square-shaped with Snow White's Curse name and a few numbers underneath it. "I'll be back before dark, I promise."

"Well, if you're not, then I'll come and find you." He ruffles her hair before walking towards the opened hatch in the deck that leads down into the hull. With a smile of her own, Aveena starts down the gangplank and towards the town, using magic to alter her features just enough to avoid being recognized by anyone.

The town of Storybrooke is larger than most of the villages she's been in before, but smaller than Neverland. There seemed to be store after store, each squeezed together along a busy street with colorful flyers taped to their windows and large plastic dolls that modeled all kinds of scandalous clothing. Many here were wearing strange pants like Emma wore, and some looked as though they were wearing a chemise, but she knew for a fact that they were actually dresses. Vee walks into the first store she finds that has clothing that looked like it could fit her, starting slightly when she hears music that came from nowhere.

There were a couple other girls in the store, wearing the same outfit of a dark green top, black pants, and a black vest. "Welcome to the South Street Boutique," the ginger-haired one greets
boredly," please feel free to look around and I'll check you out when you're ready." Aveena gives her a nod and walks over to the clothing racks, picking out a simple dark blue shirt that had 'Fantastic, Allons-y, and Geronimo' printed in a lighter blue on the front, a pair of ripped jeans, strange blue shoes that had the word 'Converse' on the heel, a hat similar to Mister Smee's, a burgundy scarf the same color as her hat, and a black coat that the tag proclaimed to be part of the Sherlock collection.

Satisfied with the selections, she moves to the glass counter to pay for the items, handing over the plastic card when prompted, and leaving the store a few minutes later after changing into her new clothing. It didn't feel too different than the clothes she wore while doing Mozenrath's tasks, but the clothing was somehow softer and fit snugly to her body. Her father's head would explode if he saw her without the coat on—the coat covering her from her shoulder to almost her knees since she was so short.

The town, despite its size, was filled with people from other lands, Aveena able to catch snippets of conversations in different languages sometimes, though most conversations were spoken in English. She was so caught up in taking everything in that she didn't notice the person right in front of her until she ran right into them. She would've fallen if the person hadn't caught her arm in time to keep her upright.

"Thank you," she says, finally looking up at her savior only to be filled with anger the second she sees his face. She'd recognize him even without his flamboyant clothing and gold-flaked flesh—Rumpelstiltskin. "Oh." "Oh, indeed," Rumple says with a predatory look. "When I went out this morning, I never expected to run into a pirate, but stranger things have happened." Aveena's face lights up in a blush the longer Rumple sneers down at her, but she keeps herself from lashing out at him. It was obvious that he saw through her glamour, so she saw no point in keeping up appearances. "Why are you here?"

"Why do you think?" He lets out a chuckle, shaking his head as he tightens his grip on her arm until it was enough to make her wince. "Hurt me all you like, but my father is still going to kill you."

"Now, now, little bird, what have I told you about bluffing?"

**Dark Castle—Past**

Aveena moves quietly through the castle, standing on her toes to avoid making too much noise and alerting the residents. She could feel the magic of the place reacting to her, the amount of it nearly making her dizzy as she moves further inside, letting out a soft sigh as she moves into the next room. A long table dominates the space, a spinning wheel and stool tucked neatly away in a corner, and a few stands spaced evenly against the far wall, displaying objects that aren't locked behind the glass that serves as the face of a cabinet that's built into the wall on her left. Her gaze scans the shelves before moving on to the pedestals where a single object rests on each of them. Vee moves forward a few feet to get a closer look, finally spotting what she's looking for. Situated in front of one of the larger windows is a stand, and on that stand is an old oil lap, well-polished and made up of bronze. With the moonlight spilling in, it's easy to see the scratches and dents in the metal from years of it switching hands.

Sometimes the owner treated it well and sometimes they didn't, but it was always tossed aside or stolen in the end of things. Carefully, Aveena lifts it from the pedestal to study it better, wondering why Aladdin was so intent on having it. There didn't seem to be anything special about it, but she figured it would make a good birthday present for him. So focused on studying the lamp, she almost didn't hear the approaching footsteps or feel the magic as it shifted to allow someone in the
With a gasp, she ducks behind one of the velvet curtains right as the doors to the room slam shut.
"Come on out, Dearie," a chipper voice calls," no use in hiding when I know you're in here!" She could hear the smile in Rumple's voice and that alone has her scowling. Still, she was smarter than most gave her credit for, so she remained still, holding her breath and trying to keep her magic under control to avoid detection. There's a giggle seconds before she feels magic wrapping around her, forcing her to appear in front of the Imp. Thankfully, she'd hidden the lamp in her satchel, so he couldn't outright accuse her for stealing.

"Crocodile," she greets wryly, used to his theatrics at this point.

"Little bird, always a pleasure."

"Sure…." She rolls her eyes, pushing his magic away from her with relative ease before turning and walking for the doors.

"Before you go, I'd like my lamp back."

"Sorry, I don't have a lamp." His hand latches onto the back of her dress and yanks her backwards, Rumple giving her a stern look she's very familiar with—it's one nearly every adult she knows has given her at some point. "Get your disgusting hands off me!"

"Give me my lamp back and I won't throw you in my dungeon." Stubborn, Aveena raises her chin and gives Rumple a scathing glare. "You know, the key to bluffing someone is to have a neutral expression through the dirty dealings. You have no such talent for it, you're too cocky, and so I think a few days in my dungeon will do you some good."

"No-" But before she even had a chance to finish the word, she was in a locked cell, her arms chained above her head with magic-proof manacles that would send a nasty shock through her anytime she tried to escape them using magic. She was trapped until Rumple decided to let her out and she hated the very thought of it.

"What," a woman to her right gasped, Aveena turning her head to take the other prisoner in. She was beyond pretty with softly curling brown hair, blue eyes, and cream-colored skin.

"Nice to meet you, my name's Aveena."

"I'm…. I'm Belle."

**Storybrooke**

"Try and hold me prisoner again," she snarls at him," and I'll tell everyone around here that the great Rumpelstiltskin can't even best a little girl!" They match glares, both daring the other to blink first to prove they were superior. Before things could escalate, Aladdin and Mozenrath rounded the corner, both men running to Aveena's aid only to stop short when the Imp released her and continued on down the street.

"What was that about," Mozenrath asked, he and Aladdin leading Aveena away from the gathering crowd and towards a large building that had a sign mounted on it naming the place as The Genie's Lamp.

"It was just Rumpelstiltskin being himself." She doesn't comment further on it, hoping her companions would take her hint and drop the subject of him entirely. "What is this place?"

"A theater," Aladdin answers when Mozenrath just kept studying Aveena," we hire actors to
come perform plays and musicals that people in this realm are fond of. We're doing a month-long program to teach teens the basics of singing and acting as long as they can pay the five bucks required." Aveena's brow furrows at her friend's words, gazing around her as they walk further into the building. The theater must be one of the older buildings in town, the ceilings high with crystal chandeliers wired for electricity, the wooden walls painted with different scenes from old plays like Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet, and the folding seats were wood with red velvet padding to make them more comfortable. Stairs ran between the aisles, leading up to the second level balcony and the different boxes there meant to make people feel like they were at an old fashioned opera house when they rented one.

"What use do you have with five deer?" Aladdin lets out a snort of laughter, reaching out to ruffle Aveena's hair even as she grew frustrated.

"No, honey, bucks here can sometimes mean money." She makes a noise of understanding, walking up the short set of stair and onto the stage. She couldn't imagine why anyone would want to perform in front of crowd of people for fun, just being up on the stage made her hands start to shake and a nervous sweat start to form on her brow. "You still sing?"

"Only when my nephew or father ask it of me." Truthfully she stopped singing for herself a long time ago when she noticed how sad it made her father. My singing voice is the only thing left he has of Mother.

"That's a shame, you had real talent."

"She still does," Mozenrath comments," she just realized that the only reason Jones asked her to sing is so he can hear his dead lover."

"Mozenrath!" Aladdin delivers a hard slap to the back of Mozenrath's head, the sound echoing in the open space and making Aveena feel sorry for the Necromancer. "Quit being such a drama queen about everything!" Aladdin turns to look at Vee now, pointing an accusing finger at his husband. "I swear, ever since this Curse broke, Mozenrath has been nothing less than an annoying twat."

"I believe it," Vee mutters, jumping off the stage and landing lightly on her feet.

"Hey," Mozenrath says, his disgruntled tone making the teenager smile for the first time since actually entering the town. "I'll have you know that I've always been like this and he's just used to being the good guy!"

"You both just have to get used to each other again now that the Curse is broken. Remember what life was like back when Moze would sell his own mother for a cookie and Aladdin would save Moze's mother and take the cookie for himself as a reward. Wow, I'm hungry."

"How long has it been since you had a good meal?"

"A few days probably." She rubs her stomach, glaring at it when it lets out a loud rumble. "I should get back to the ship before Dad sends out a rescue party, it's bad enough that Rumple already knows I'm in town."

"Let us walk you back."

"Nah, I'll be fine, just go bake some cookies for me to eat the next time I come visit." Aladdin looked ready to protest, but Aveena used her magic to poof her outside the theater. The fresh air was cool on her face, the leaves on the trees beginning to change to gold and red as winter draws ever nearer. She loved this season the best, where all the colors come out and the air is crisp. She
closed her eyes, lifting her head up and breathing in deeply, holding her breath for a moment before letting it out again slowly.

"Enjoying the breeze?" Almost lazily, she opens her eyes and stares ahead of her at Rumpelstiltskin, unafraid of whatever he had planned for her. "I know your father is here and you're going to show me where he's hiding so I can gut me a pirate." Another smile graces Aveena's face, a tired one that shows just how old she really is.

"No, I won't."
Gold

Gold meets Aveena's stare head on, wondering how on earth she's lived this long and still possessed the looks of a nineteen year old. Sure, he knew there was a new source of magic swirling around inside her, one that seemed to be split in half or shared with someone else. "Remember what happened all those years ago," she asks, taking a step closer to him, "remember who it was that helped me out?"

Belle.

"She's been dead for years," Gold lies smoothly, only the anger in his brown eyes giving him away. Aveena notices it, too perceptive for her own good, and the corners of her mouth quirk up in a satisfied smile.

"I saw her walking down the street earlier and I'd bet that anger in your eyes is there because you handed her your heart to keep." Gold says nothing, clenching his jaw as he continued to glare down at her. "Come after me or my family and I'll crush Belle's heart just like you crushed my mother's and I'll make sure you're as helpless to stop it as my father was." She was still smiling as she turns on her heel and walks away, leaving Gold behind as he wonders what he should do.

He needed to keep Belle safe before anything else, but he also needed to get rid of the Jones family for good. They would only cause him trouble and Aveena was a constant reminder of the son he'd lost all those years ago. With his hands clenched into fists, Gold moves back to his shop where several of Storybrooke's residents had been streaming in and out of in order to get objects that may have ended up there.

The first thing he must do is find an object that may have belonged to Aveena or Killian, and then he would track them to their hiding place and slaughter them both.

Dark Castle—Past

Aveena struggles against the manacles, skillfully keeping her magic in check if only to spare her the pain that would radiate through her body. "Is- is there anything I can do to help," Belle asks, kneeling on the cold ground next to Aveena. She dressed in a cloth-of-gold ball gown, something Aveena would never have a chance to wear unless she got back to Agrabah.

"Not unless you know how to pick a lock," Vee grumbles, pulling against the chains with all she has.

"I'm sorry, I don't know how."

"Didn't think so, Princess," Grunting, Aveena manages to stand up even though her arms were at an awkward angle because of the chains. "Is there a knife in here?" Belle's blue eyes light up and she scrambles for a plate near her pathetic cot and grabbing something off of it before coming back to me.

"Will this work?" The knife was dull, but it might be enough to pry the lock open.

"You see the crease above the lock?" She moves closer, running one finger over the manacles until she finds what I needed. "Jam the knife in there and work it until it opens. It should only take about two minutes." Belle nods, biting her slightly full bottom lip as she works with the knife. It
takes her longer than Aveena had thought, but Belle manages to get the first one opened and Aveena did the second one herself.

"You should leave quickly before he gets back."

"I owe you a debt for this, so would you like me to get you out of here as well?"

"No, I'm here in exchange for the Dark One saving my kingdom from the Ogres." Aveena makes a face, using her magic to change Belle's gown to a simple white dress with a blue apron over it. "What was that for?"

"I don't like being indebted to people, so considered it filled." Rumple opens the door suddenly, no doubt feeling Aveena's magic, and he let out a snarl of rage when Aveena gives him a sarcastic bow before disappearing.

***Storybrooke—Present***

When Aveena was actually a teenager and getting into mischief on Neverland, she’d sworn that she hadn’t been looking for trouble. She never meant for a hell beast to chase her around and ruin Pan’s encampment, had never thought that a small army of fish could do so much damage to her father’s toes simply because she’d been mad at the time, and she certainly hadn’t thought she’d run face-first into the Dark One five minutes after leaving the ship. Her life motto had simply been that trouble had a way of finding her family, but letting the Dark One know she and her father were in town had to be her biggest mistake by far.

“Aveena Jones, where the hell have you been?” The voice of her father had her freezing in place just a few miserable feet from the safety of her cabin. She didn’t move, didn’t even look over her shoulder as the sound of her father’s heavy tread echoed in her ears like the beat of drums that signaled impending execution.

Make that the second biggest mistake.

“Answer me this instant.” Her blue eyes focused on his scuffed boots, she swallows hard and tries to think up anything that wouldn’t cause him to go into a rage.

“I was talking with Mozenrath and Aladdin,” she mutters after a second, still not brave enough to chance a glance up at him. She already knew what she would find, his face would be contorted in an expression of concerned anger than only parents were capable of, but his eyes would only serve to make her guilt shred her to pieces. Those eyes would be completely filled with the horror of what he thought might have happened to her, complete agony of what he would do if she never came back, and cold fury that burned her right to her core.

No, she couldn’t look in his eyes yet.

“You know better than to leave the ship without my permission.” He practically snarled the words and she flinched away from him, not remembering the last time he’d been so angry with her.

“How do you think I would feel if something happened to you out there? Huh? We know nothing about this new realm and until we do, you’re confined to quarters!” She opened her mouth to argue her case, but he just points to her cabin. “March!” She chanced a glance up at him, finding exactly what she knew she would before dragging her feet to her room with her shoulders hunched in shame.

“I’m sorry, Daddy,” she whispers, knowing he could hear her. Killian keeps his back to her, shoulders squared like he was facing some kind of foe. Her head down she leaves the warm deck for her cabin and collapses in her hammock. It was bright red and hand sewn by her mother, she
cherished it the most out of all her possessions because her mother had made it with love.

When she couldn’t sleep at night, she would close her eyes and picture different things she knew her mom liked to do—sewing, drawing, dancing with her father. Killian’s favorite story was the one where he and Milah danced on the deck as the sun was setting, the orange of the sky making Milah’s hair look almost red instead brown. He’d said that she looked beautiful, more carefree than he’d ever seen her. Try as she might, Aveena could never fully decide what Milah had looked like since she had nothing to compare her to. There were no pictures that Aveena knew of and her father so rarely spoke of his lost love, so Aveena filled in the blanks as well as she could.

“James,” she heard Killian bark, “you’re in charge until I return! I’m going out for supplies.” Her eyes widen and she moves as quickly as she could, throwing the door open and practically tackling her father to the ground. “What the hell are you doing?”

“You can’t kill him,” she shouts, everyone knowing who she was referring to.

“And why is that?” He sounded hesitant as they both sat up, his keen eyes taking in the anxiety and guilt that were prominent in her eyes. “Vee, what happened?”

“He and I ran into each other on my way to find Moze, he looked ready to kill me, but I threatened that we’d have out revenge.” His eyes darkened in rage, standing up far too easily and graceful for a man of his height. “Wait! There’s magic here now. You can’t kill him without my help.”

“Then I suppose we’ll get our vengeance together.”
Chapter 19

Neverland—Past

Aveena let out a soft moan against Pan's lips, her eyes closed as he laid her back on the cave floor. It was his quiet place where he went to relax or avoid the Alp, but tonight was different. Tonight he'd taken her there, both of them hidden from sight behind the waterfall in case Smee actually decided to keep an eye on them, and Pan had quickly leaned down to capture her lips with his. That had been seven minutes ago and now they were lying on a blanket, Pan braced on his forearm to keep from crushing her beneath his weight while his left hand was buried in the dark hair at the nape of her neck.

She'd never been kissed like this before, she was a little lightheaded but she loved how soft his lips were, how his warmth felt against her. It was only when Pan pulled away to give them both a chance to breathe that Aveena opened her eyes—blue meeting green and holding. They often shared moments like this one while he trained her, telepathic conversations while James or Trista watched them to ensure Pan's touch didn't linger for longer than necessary.

"If my father found out about this," Aveena tells him breathlessly," he'd mount your head on a spike and I'll never be allowed to leave my cabin until I'm an old woman." Pan grins down at her, nipping at her swollen bottom lip.

"Your father could try taking my head, but I doubt he'd manage." Both knew Killian wouldn't be able to stand up against Pan in a fair fight, but Vee refused to admit that out loud. Killian was strong, but he had no magic and he would be blown to pieces should he initiate a fight with the immortal teen. "Enough talking, I'd rather we used your lips for something much better." She opened her mouth to ask what he meant, but then he was kissing her again and his skilled tongue moved with hers. When Pan kissed her, she found her thoughts and concerns melting away, nothing else mattering except the feel of his body pressing against hers.

"Do you consent?" The words were hoarse and breathy, a quality she had never associated with Peter's smooth, confident drawl.

"Yes! Oh gods above, yes…"

Storybrooke—Present

"What on earth are you wearing?" Aveena looks down at her outfit, seeing nothing wrong with it since it kept all the important bits covered; the dress had short sleeves and stopped under her knees, it was a dark blue color with a black overlay that made the skirt of it stick out a little more at the waist. Mozenrath and Aladdin had stopped by earlier to drop off some clothes for all of them and the dress she wore now was comfortable and kept her from getting too hot during the day with an added bonus of great flexibility.

"I believe they're called clothes," she replies with a straight face, her father giving her a dry look.

"I don't care what they're called, you're not leaving my ship until you've changed into something
more appropriate. Like a nun's robes." Aveena rolls her eyes, using her magic to get her past her father and on the docks, looking up at him with her sweetest smile. "Oi, that's cheating!"

"Says the man that cheats at everything," James returns, he and Kellan working on patching up the sails that had torn going through the portal. "Leave the poor girl alone and let her dress how she likes. Lord knows she's going to do it one way or another." Killian gives James a betrayed look, bottom lip poked out slightly the same way Aveena's did whenever she was upset about something. "Don't give me that look, Jones."

"Surrounded by betrayers." He shakes his head, joining Vee on the docks and following her into the town of Storybrooke, blue eyes taking in every small detail from the strange black boxes that showcased small people trapped inside them all the way to the even smaller boxes that people kept pressed against their faces as they spoke. "What a strange place this is."

"Al promised to teach me as much as he can about this place," Vee tells him, "you can come along for lessons if you'd like."

"No thank you, I'll just walk you to and from the damn things." She shrugs, looking around her with a smile as she tried to take everything in as well. There were more people than she was used to being around, reminding her of the months she spent in Agrabah when Aladdin was made Sultan, the balls that followed that moment a whirlwind of activity that still left her dizzy if she thought about it too much. It wasn't until she was jerked to a stop that she realized her father wasn't walking anymore, he'd grabbed her wrist and come to an abrupt stop.

"What is it?" But he didn't hear her, his gaze was focused on two people talking across the street from them, one of them Rumpelstiltskin and the other a tall man with a mop of ginger hair. He looked nice enough, though a bit nervous as he spoke to the Dark One, letting out a breath of relief as Rumple walked away from him. "I've heard of that man; he's supposed to help people solve their problems or something. I think Aladdin called him a therapist."

"The Crocodile will have told that man all of his secrets."

"Then we'll bring him back to the ship tonight, interrogate him in the hold where no one would come to his aid." When Killian remains where he is, still staring at the spot the doctor and Rumple had occupied moments ago, she uses her free hand to turn his face towards her. "We'll get him, don't ever doubt that."

"I don't," Killian assures her, still marveling at the fact that she acted more like her mother every day. "Come, sweet girl, let's go and find those friends of yours."
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Land of the Black Sands—Past

"I don't think I can do this." Her hand was unsteady as she held it out in front of her, the magic making her feel lightheaded the longer she holds the prisoner up. "I can't—" Her chest felt tight and darkness was tinging the edges of her vision, but she tried to push that to the back if her mind as she focused.

"If you didn't have your doubts, then I would be worried," Mozenrath drawls, circling her and the prisoner with his arms behind his back. He was small compared to most men she's encountered, all skin and bones and nearly as gaunt as the undead servants that guard his kingdom. "Let me give you some motivation, sweetheart." He stops next to her, one of his sarcastic smiles making his full lips curve upwards as he tugs on a lock of her pale hair. "Drop him when he's still breathing and I'll turn you into one of my Mamluks."

She kept quiet, trying to even out her breathing like she'd been taught. The last time she had snapped at Mozenrath was two years ago and she still had nightmares about the experience—being lowered into the same airtight chamber as one of the Anemoi wasn't something grown women aspired to. Slowly, the pounding in her ears slowed, her hands stopped shaking, and her vision cleared. The prisoner scratched at his throat as she tightened her hold, her magic constricting the airflow, blunt nails digging into his throat even as blood welled to the surface and dripped down the front of his stark white tunic. He looked pathetic as he hovered in the air a few feet away, not nearly so regal as he had looked when he showed up at the palace.

He stopped bragging about his vast fortune hours ago and he stopped pleading for her to spare his life fifteen minutes ago. Gone was the noble prince that had snuck into her small bedroom and tried to seduce her with promises of jewels and gold, gone was the handsome man that had used her up and thrown her away like she was worth less than the mud on his boots, and gone was the arrogant man that had blinded her when she tried to convince the king of his son's crimes. She had just enough sight left to see his blurry visage as the infection raged in her body and she could feel the pride welling in her chest as his complexion slowly changed from his golden tan to an ugly purple color.

And then the prince was just gone, arms hanging limply by his side, chin resting against his chest, and feet still; and as she let his body drop to the unforgiving stone of Mozenrath's dungeon, the last of her vision left her.

With sharper hearing than she had before she was blinded, she could hear the click of Mozenrath's boots against the stone, echoing off drab gray walls as he made his way to the corpse. She could hear the dull sounds of him kicking the prince thrice to make sure the deed was done and then came the sharp, unexpected sound of laughter. Mozenrath rarely laughed like that, like he was actually happy about something, and it had her on edge.

"Did I please you," she asks, voice rough. She wanted to see his face, to be able to gauge his emotions so she knew whether to curl up or not. Instead of cowering like she did whenever she was near Mozenrath, she straightens her back, rolls her shoulders, and lifts her chin like she's seen the royalty do.

"You pleased me," he confirms, his hand soft as it cupped her cheek. She wanted so badly to lean
into his touch, to just pretend that Mozenrath was her younger brother if only for a few moments. She missed him so much, wished she could hold him in her arms one more time before really saying her goodbye to him.

"What's the next task?"

"You've passed your tests, Cecily, but there is something that you might like." She was free now, the thought had her heart beating faster. She hasn't been free in three years, not since Mozenrath took her in when he found her unconscious at the edge of his kingdom. He'd thought of her as a weapon he could mold, but instead he'd turned her into a monster of the worst kind—she'd been forced to eat her victims, forced to kill anyone that passed through his lands without his permission, but she didn't have to do that anymore. "In a land called Mist Haven you'll find a queen that needs an attitude adjustment. She goes by the Evil Queen and I want you to steal one of her poisoned apples. Think you can manage that, Cecily?"

"Yes." Going off her memory alone, she makes her way to the heavy door across the room, pushing it open with her magic, but pausing before leaving. This has been her home since she was thirty-six, she was remade here, forged in fire as cheap as that sounded. She wasn't sure where she could go from here that she would be safe. Maybe she would find a nice cottage in the forest, somewhere she could listen to the birds singing like she could at the castle.

"Good luck, my blind little witch." She tensed at the cruel name he'd given her when her vision had first started to leave her. In that moment she wanted to do nothing more than burn him alive and listen to his screams die away. She wouldn't do that right now, she would continue to gain her strength back and focus on her magic, then she would come back for him.

And then she stepped over the threshold, leaving the citadel behind for the Enchanted Forest.

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**Storybrooke—Present**

Aveena was calm as she used a knife to create small rips in her dress, the sharp metal easily tearing the cotton when she pressed the tip against it. Her father waited behind her in the alley, watching as she worked diligently on making herself look like she'd just been attacked. It made him feel sick to his stomach when he realized that she knew what to do from firsthand experience and this wasn't just her trying to guess.

"When were you attacked," he asks, throat feeling tight as he fought back tears. He couldn't cry in front of her, couldn't break the illusion that he was strong. He knew what the looks she sent his way meant, that she thought of him as some kind of hero that could never be killed, a god that would rip Zeus to pieces if it meant she was safe. The look she sent him now made her look older than she was, she looked ready to drop from sheer exhaustion.

"The first week I went undercover for Mozenrath," she mumbles, going back to her work. "I underestimated my target and he overpowered me for a bit, but that'll never happen again." It sounded like a promise, a vow she made to herself to ensure that she would work harder, be the better fighter every time. She wanted to be as strong as she thought he was and it tore at him to know that she needed to be even stronger if she wanted to survive this world. Jaw clenched in his frustration, he places a hand on her shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

"I've got you and I'll always be here for you, Vee." She nods but stays quiet, handing him the knife back. Her lips were pressed into a thin line as she stared hard at her shoes and when she finally looked up again there were tears in her eyes and her bottom lip was quivering, a completely different person.

"Do I look like a poor child that's just been accosted?" Even her voice broke near the end, her
arms wrapped around herself as she began to shake a little, as though she was terrified. He gives her a curt nod, biting his lip as she runs to the mouth of the alley, disappearing around the corner as she made her way to the doctor's home. He could hear her banging on the door and he closed his eyes as he fought down the urge to just grab her and run back to the ship.

He didn't like to hear her so scared, it made his stomach churn and his breathing hitch in his throat. That's what it was like being a parent, constantly fearing that he'd never be good enough for her or protect her, anxiously worrying about the choices she made, and a mixture of anger and irritation when she somehow managed to sneak a damn snake aboard his ship and lose it in his cabin. He let out a huff of air, muttering a curse under his breath at the thought of that bloody snake, remembering how fierce his seven year had been when she proclaimed sanctuary for little Bernard.

"What were you both doing in the alley," came an unfamiliar voice from his left. Killian pressed his back against the grimy brick wall as footsteps echo off the pavement. "Even in Storybrooke, dark alleys aren't safe at any time of the day." It was a concerned tone he heard, the voice soft like its owner didn't want to break the calmness of the night.

"We were just so tired," Vee replied, her voice still shaky," we've worked all day and we thought we would be safe if we stayed together, but the man came out of nowhere and my father is hurt so badly. I-I don't even know if he's- if he's still—" She broke off with a sob as they came closer to the spot where James lay on the ground, keeping his breathing shallow. James was unnaturally good at playing dead, Killian would have to congratulate him when this was done. "Here he is." They came into Killian's line of sight, both kneeling beside James. Aveena rested her hands on his broad back while the doctor pressed two fingers against James's pulse point.

"His pulse is strong, but we should get him to the hospital." Killian took a step forward, barely making a sound as he snuck up behind the doctor with the knife in his hand. "Can you help me get him up?"

"He can get up by himself." And just like that, she was back to being his little girl, no more tears in her eyes, perfectly composed.

"What are you—" Killian brings the hilt of the knife down hard behind the doctor's ear, barely managing to catch the back of his shirt to keep him from falling on top of James.

"Is it safe for me to stand up now," James questions, raising his head to look around and getting to his feet when he sees Killian's nod. He glanced at his new clothes in disgust, his crisp white shirt stained crimson from a spilled drink; it looked like blood in the weak light, dark and sticky as it spread outward across his chest.

Suddenly he wasn't in the alley anymore, he was back on his ship and staring down at his best friend, worry eating away at him as his First Mate worked hard to stem the bleeding from a stab wound. James was pale and unconscious on Killian's bed, sweat making his dark hair stick to his face as his fever raged, blood staining white sheets, and James whimpering from fever dreams. He would open his eyes every few minutes, staring around blindly as his wound continued to bleed. So much blood, gushing and pumping, and taking his life with it.

Killian let out a muffled noise of fear when he felt someone's arms around his waist, half expecting to find a corpse when he looked down, but instead finding a headful of dark hair. He was confused at first, trying to remember where this small girl had come from.

Then he was dropped back into the present, able to breathe again and hugging his daughter back tightly, half sobbing in relief when he spotted James holding the doctor, very much alive and looking concerned. "Where were you, Killian?"
"On the ship," Killian answers breathlessly, "the night I rescued you." Flashbacks were normal for people like Killian who have seen horrible things and lived through battles, but they weren't something anyone grew used to. Each one was like a punch to the stomach, driving the air out of his lungs and making him feel like a scared little boy that wanted to hide under the covers so the monsters wouldn't get him.

"I've got you, Daddy," Aveena assures him, tightening her hold around his waist and further grounding him. "I'll always be here for you no matter what."

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't help slipping in the Blind Witch PoV at the beginning since she's been in the newest eps. Plus, who didn't like Hansel and Gretel at least a little bit when they were younger? As for the name Cecily I gave her, I just thought the name was cute.

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