Magic in the Air

by DruidKitty

Summary

A Christmas Carol AU: Unable to pay her debts, Belle is forced to become a maid for the town’s scrooge, Mr. Gold. Despite his grumpy and greedy nature, she reluctantly finds herself falling in love with him. Knowing he would never return her affections, she keeps them a secret until one fateful Christmas Eve when they argue and he forces her to leave. Unwilling to admit his true feelings for Belle, Mr. Gold gets visited by three ghosts and finds out what his life might be like without her.

Notes

This is an RP written with Chipped Rose on tumblr. She plays Belle, I play Mr. Gold. The other characters are based on who they’re interacting with.
Chapter 1

Cold and snowy. Always cold and snowy. Mr. Gold grumbled to himself as he walked through the town toward his shop early that Christmas Eve morning. He didn’t mind the cold, but he hated the snow. It always made his injured ankle ache more than usual, making it hard to walk even with his cane.

But as much as he hated snow, there was one thing he hated more: Christmas. Everyone was always so cheery and bright. People expected him to donate his hard earned money to the poor. Others wasted their mortgage money on useless frivolities and would come to him later for an extension; something he never gave.

Walking along the sidewalk, he concentrated on the sound of snow crunching below his feet so he didn’t have to listen to the townspeople prattle on and on about such a nonsensical holiday. Stepping up to his shop door, he reached up and turned the doorknob, finding it was already unlocked. He wasn’t alarmed, however, because when he stepped inside he saw his only employee, David Nolan, was already there at his desk, hard at work.

When David heard the bell of the front door ring, his gaze raised up to see who had entered the shop. When he saw his boss, a cheerful, polite smile stretched across his lips. "Merry almost Christmas, Mr. Gold."

Taking the liberty of wanting to make the shop seem more festive and welcoming, David had decided to put a few lengths of garland along the edges of the glass showcases and counters that lined the entrance to brighten the shop up a bit.

Mr. Nolan had a few things on his mind and a rather important question to ask Gold, but he decided to wait to see if the older man would be in a good mood or not. He hoped that his boss would let him leave an hour or so early so that he could be with his wife on this special day.

Mr. Gold frowned when he heard David and it only deepened when he saw the garland decorating the cabinets. "Bah," he snapped. He lifted his cane up to point at the garland. "What the hell is all this?" It was clear he wasn’t happy about it.

David was taken back when he heard the older man. His smile faltered a little but remained on his face as he moved to go stand closer to Gold. "Just a few decorations I put up to make the place look less dreary on Christmas Eve. Out of all the days in the year, how can someone NOT be happy on a day like today? I mean, it’s absolutely BEAUTIFUL outside!"

"You of all people should know my feelings on Christmas," Mr. Gold growled and started to make his way toward the back of the shop. David had worked for him for years and still he tried to pull things like this. "Now unless you’re looking to get a pink slip this holiday, rid my shop of this ridiculous adornment."

"David’s smile finally fell off his lips when he heard the man’s threat. With a sigh, the younger man began to take down the decorations. As he saw him retreating towards the backroom, David knew he would be holed up in there for hours. Taking a deep breath, he spoke. "Probably not the greatest time to ask, but would it be possible for me to get off work a few hours early so I can spend the night with my wife? Or even just come into work tomorrow an hour or two late?" He knew asking for the day off tomorrow would be asking for FAR too much.

Mr. Gold paused in the doorway, and turned halfway around. "Why on earth would you want that?" he asked genuinely confused along with agitated. It was as if he didn’t realize it was Christmas Eve…and he didn’t, because he really didn’t care.
David sighed a little and shrugged. "Because not only is tonight our date night, but it is also Christmas Eve." The man always tried to spend every Friday night with his wife because of how busy he always was. Not that he expected Gold to understand, but he hoped he would take it easy on him.

Christmas Eve…ah yes…Mr. Gold recalled David mumbling something about it when he walked in. Of course it was Christmas Eve and just like every one else, David wanted something from him as well. He expected him to be lenient all because of some silly day. He was about to reply when the little bell above the door rang, signifying someone had just walked in the shop. Mr. Gold looked up to see an elderly man walk in looking nervous. "Who are you? What do you want?" Mr. Gold demanded. He was never very friendly to the customers.

When he saw a customer, David sighed and headed back to the little desk he worked at.

The older man, Marco, who had just walked in, took off his hat as he heard Gold snap at him. Swallowing hard, he began to wring his hat nervously. "W-Well.. You see, I was wondering if maybe… I could… Could.." He tried to find the courage within him to ask his question. "Could I have an extension on my mortgage? I donated most of my profits from my business to the nuns who are buying toys for the orphans in town.”

Mr. Gold rolled his eyes. “And I suppose it didn’t occur to you the money you were donating was meant to pay you mortgage?” he asked in a sweetly sarcastic manner.

Marco swallowed hard and shuddered from Gold’s tone. "I thought I had enough, but I accidentally put an extra hundred into my donation. Please, I promise to pay it to you in full WITH interest when the beginning of the New Year rolls around.”

Mr. Gold chuckled lightly. He shifted so his cane was in front of him and both his hands were placed a top it. “Mr. Booth, I wonder if you know what happens if I were to make an exception for every tenant who came in here with a story like yours begging for an extension?”

Marco let out a ragged breath and looked up at the man. "I know, I know and I am sorry but I NEED this extension. Don’t you have a heart? It’s Christmas for Christ’s sake!”

"Christmas, Christmas, Christmas! Is that the only excuse anyone can ever come up with? Well Bah Humbug to Christmas! You need this extension? Well I need my money! Have it here first thing tomorrow or expect to find yourself out on the streets!” Mr. Gold slammed his cane against the wall to emphasize his point, causing both Marco and David to jump.

Marco swallowed hard again, his breath hitching before he nodded and promptly left the shop.

David sighed and went back to work. "You know you just lost yourself fifty to a hundred dollars. The last time Marco paid with interest, he gave you seventy-five dollars.”

Mr. Gold turned his glaring gaze toward David, ignoring everything he just said. He was not going to give in. “You! Be quiet and get back to work!” With that he stormed in the back room, intentionally not letting their previous conversation resurface.

David shook his head and flinched a bit as Gold stormed past him. With a slight huff he went back to his work and began to write in his accounting books for the next while.

When Belle had woken up, she had made Mr. Gold a nice breakfast only to find out after that he had already left for work. After eating the meal she prepared, she did a few of her chores before putting on her jacket and boots to bring Gold SOMETHING to eat, knowing he wouldn’t feed
himself. Once she grabbed about $8 from his extra coin bowl, she went to Granny’s, got him a tea and a blueberry muffin before going to his shop.

People on the streets watched Belle as they did Mr. Gold, but they didn’t despise her like they did him. Instead, they felt pity for the poor girl who had been forced into becoming his maid because of her father’s debts. Still, they seemed to like Belle and many of them wished her Merry Christmas as she went by.

Belle gave the people small smiles as she walked past them, nodding her head curtly as she wished them a Merry Christmas back. When she arrived at her employer’s shop, she took a deep breath and made sure she looked okay before going in.

As her eyes landed on one of her only friends, David, she sent him a smile. ”Merry Christmas, David.”

David looked up when he saw Belle enter the shop. He smiled big and stood. Walking over to her he reached out and gave her hug. “Belle, good morning and Merry Christmas.”

The girl hugged him back before she placed the tea and muffin down on the counter. ”I didn’t realize you were working today. If I would have known, I would have brought you a muffin too.” She said softly, a small smile still on her lips. ”Is Gold in the back?”

"Oh it’s no problem, don’t worry about it," he replied, referring to the muffin. "Mary Margaret packed me a lunch." He pointed to the small brown bag by his desk, but didn’t comment on the lack of contents. With his salary, they could barely afford food. 
"He’s in the back as usual," he said answering her second question. "He’s in a horrible mood too worse than normal."

Belle sighed softly and nodded her head understandably. "Isn’t he always…” The girl brushed a curl behind her ear and glanced over at the door that led into the backroom. Was seeing him really worth probably getting her head ripped off? "Do you think he would appreciate some afternoon tea and a muffin? He left before I could give him his breakfast….”

David shrugged his shoulders. “You know as well as I do, but if anyone can brighten his spirits it’s you.” He gave Belle a knowing smile.

Belle blushed a little and rolled her eyes, biting her lip. She had assumed that he had figured out about her little infatuation with Adam, but part of her wished he didn’t. She still wasn’t quite sure what her feelings for the man were. But part of her knew she would have to come clean sooner or later. How, she had no idea.

"You look nice today," he said, noting her appearance. "Big holiday plans?” David wasn’t sure if Mr. Gold even allowed Belle to take a day off for herself, even for Christmas, but the girl lived in his mansion. The least he could do was give her a break and let her visit her family. Then again, David worked in the shop and he couldn’t even get Gold to agree to let him have a few hours off, much less a whole day.

Belle bit her bottom lip and shrugged a little. ”Maybe… But I probably won’t end up doing them…” She had been planning on confessing her feelings to him on Christmas Eve for about a month or two. ”And as for me looking nice, It is because Ada… I mean Mr. Gold bought me a new jacket.”

David’s eyes widened in shock. “He actually bought you a jacket?! I had no idea the man was capable of spending money.”
Belle couldn’t help but chuckle just a little and give him a small smile. "He kind of had to. I don’t have money and I needed a new coat. He didn’t want me to freeze to death when I went shopping for him or something. I am not getting out of our… ‘Agreement’ that easily."

Mr. Gold was sitting behind his desk in the back room as usual, counting his money. Despite the fact that it was almost as cold in the shop as it was outside, he had removed his thick wool coat. The cold itself didn’t bother him, so he refused to pay to heat the place. When he heard the bell at the front door and voices coming from the front room, he assumed he had another customer who David would send back any moment. But after several minutes, when whoever it was never walked back there, he decided to investigate.

Grabbing his cane, he stood and walked to the front room. "…you’re welcome to join my family for Christmas dinner tomorrow," he heard David say to the customer before he quietly moved the curtain aside that separated the rooms.

Mr. Gold couldn’t see who was in his shop because David had his back to him and was standing in front of whoever it was. He stood there a moment, not immediately alerting them to his presence.

Belle smiled weakly when she heard David, gaze dropping a little. How she would love to join him and his family for dinner. Unfortunately, she knew that there were many things in her way that were preventing her from doing so. One, she knew David didn’t get paid much and she didn’t want to end up eating some of what could be their leftovers and dinner for the next few days. Also, there was no doubt that Adam would make her clean or shovel the snow from his front yard the next day. He didn’t like Christmas and he definitely wouldn’t let her celebrate it. He didn’t last year or the year before. She was basically his property and he dictated her life. "I would love to, but I really don’t want to intrude." Her soft, slightly worried voice filled the room. "Besides, there is supposed to be a rather large snow storm tonight. We might get snowed in. That means I will probably be shoveling all day tomorrow."

"That doesn’t sound like a way you should be spending Christmas. Perhaps I could convince him to join us as well so you could come," David said optimistically. "All we have to do is ask him."

"Ask me what?" Mr. Gold piped up letting him know he was standing there listening.

Belle sighed a little as she listened to David, muttering a quiet ‘Good luck’ until she heard Adam’s voice fill the room, making her jump. As she stepped to the side a little to see him, she couldn’t deny the small flutter in her heart.

"A-Ask you… Ask you if… Uh…” The girl swallowed hard and looked up at David with slightly desperate eyes. Was it the right time to ask? Had he already heard what they had been saying? How long had he been standing there?

Mr. Gold had heard their conversation, but he didn’t let on that he had. When his eyes met Belle’s, the corner of his lip twitched upward just slightly, but instantly returned to its usual grimace. His gaze fell away from Belle and landed on David. He didn’t give him any time to ask what he already knew they were discussing. "Mr. Nolan I believe I’m paying you to work, not fraternize with my help," he said sternly.

Belle knew Adam didn’t know, but she had seen the small twitch of his lips when his eyes settled on her. He wasn’t always as cruel as people thought. Even when she spoke poorly about him and how unfair and horrible he was, it was only because she knew he had an image to keep a hold of. He wasn’t VERY different when they were at his home, but they sometimes acted more like friends rather that Master and Maid.

David gave him a look that resembled one of slight impatience. David was happily committed to his wife and Belle was just a long time friend of his that he kept his eyes on to make sure she was safe and happy. Turning back to Belle, he gave her a slightly sad smile. "Think about it," he told
her, talking about more than one thing. He still didn’t understand how the young woman had
developed feelings for someone like that man. With a sigh, he returned back to his desk.
Nodding her head, she picked up the cup of tea and the muffin before walking over to Adam and
holding it out towards him. ”You didn’t have breakfast this morning…”

He glanced down at the cup, before looking back up at Belle with a frown. “I had things I needed
to take care of…they couldn’t wait.” Instead of reaching out to take the offered items, he turned
and walked to the back, sitting down at his desk.

Belle huffed a little when he silently denied what she offered and walked away. Being the
stubborn person that she was, she followed him and placed the items on his desk in an empty spot,
which was rather hard to do on his cluttered desk. ”Well you need to eat. The last thing you, and
anybody else dealing with you, needs is for your blood sugar to drop.” Not only did he get even
more grumpy and easy to annoy, but he usually got woozy and a little weak. She had seen this a
few times before and forced him to let her help him walk to his room or to the nearest couch when
his bad leg stopped supporting him. But unlike her, other people would probably just let him fall
and wallow in him being on the ground.

Gold glanced over at the tea and muffin one more time. “Did you at least make it yourself?” he
asked. He couldn’t deny how much he loved her tea. She somehow had managed to make it
perfect every time, knowing exactly what he liked.

Belle’s heart stopped for a second as she heard him. ”Um… Not exactly… I found out that we
were out of tea so I took some of the change out of that little bowl you told me I could take from if
I absolutely needed to for groceries or something… But I told the woman at Granny’s how to
make it so that it wasn’t too strong or sweet like they normally make it. As for the muffin, we both
know that thing would be black if I made it.” She hoped and prayed to whatever god was above
them, that he wouldn’t be upset that she used some of the change. ”It turned out I didn’t even use
it all…” She took all the change that was in her pocket and placed it in a neat pile by his tea and
muffin, being careful to not get it lost in his other piles on his desk.

He stared at her long and hard, unblinking. “You went to Granny’s and purchased it?” He huffed,
his voice rising. It was not hard to see he was angry about his money being spent there. “You
know how I feel about that place! It barely passes for a restaurant. The food is garbage and
everything is overpriced! Return it now, I want my money back!”

Belle felt as if he had just slapped her. Taking a deep breath to stay calm, the girl looked over at
him with a blank expression. ”You really think I would pay over four dollars for something like
that? There was a special for a cup of tea and a muffin. It was three dollars altogether.” She
grabbed the cup and muffin, glaring at him slightly as she turned on her heels and stormed out. So
much for being nice to him. She wanted to spite him and throw it all on the ground just so she
couldn’t return it. But fortunately, she knew better. She had learned her place a long time ago.

Before Belle could leave the shop, the bell on the front door rang again, signifying someone else
had just entered. David glanced up to see a young man in his twenties with dark brown hair and a
light beard. “Bae!” He exclaimed happily. “Merry Christmas!”
Bae smiled back at David. “Merry Christmas to you too. Is my father in?”
David nodded, “In the back. Belle’s here too.”

Belle was just walking out of the backroom with a hurt, bitter look on her face, when she heard
David say her name. She was too deep in her thoughts, with her gaze on the damned muffin and
now cold tea in her hand, to even realize she was about to collide with Bae.

"Whoa, there,” Bae said as he grabbed either side of Belle’s arms to stop her from running into
him. He couldn’t quite see her face because she was looking down, so he didn’t notice that she
was upset.
He smiled big, waiting for her to realize who he was.

Belle tensed as she felt someone grab her arms. She blinked a few times to come back to reality. Looking up, it took a moment for her eyes to adjust. The face was familiar. The scruffiness of his beard, his slightly messy hair. "Bae.." She cleared her throat a little and stepping back a little. "I- I'm sorry.. I should have been paying attention to where I was going.." As usual, his smile was contagious and caused Belle to smile a little despite her mood that still showed as clear as day in her eyes.

"Don’t worry about it, Belle," he replied, brushing it off. He was about to ask how she was and wish her a Merry Christmas when he noticed the look in her eyes. His smile faltered a little. "Is everything alright?" He asked, genuinely concerned.

Belles own smile faltered when she heard his question. Was it THAT obvious that something was upsetting her? “Just tried to be nice to your father and look out for him because he didn’t eat breakfast to only to have it backfire severely… Nothing out of the ordinary..” She said with a sigh. "But nothing you need to worry yourself about.”

Bae frowned looking between her and the back room. His frown didn’t last long, however. “Oh Belle,” he said with a big smile on his face again, “You shouldn’t let him get to you. We both know his bark is worse than his bite.” He playfully nudged the bottom of her chin. “Now cheer up, it’s Christmas! You should be happy.”

When he nudged the bottom of her chin, subtly making her lift it so she wouldn’t be so slouched and upset, she couldn’t help but smile again. "I'll try. But for now, I have to go back to Granny’s and beg for them to give me back the money I gave them for this. I will probably have to clean the floor or a few tables but it will be worth it to make your father not mad at me.”

"What?" Bae said, astonished as he glanced down at the tea and muffin in her hand. "No you’re not! That’s ridiculous. You keep those and don’t worry about it. I’ll take care of it." He began walking toward the back room. He had dealt with his father all his life and he knew how to handle him.

As Belle watched Bae walk to the back room, she knew better than to try and stop him. He would never listen anyways; he was almost as stubborn as his father. Turning to David, she placed the two things on his desk. "You need this more than I do. I suggest you eat it quickly though," she told him before she turned and promptly left, needing to get back to her chores.

David took the muffin and tea without question, able to deduce what would happen if he didn’t listen. Despite that the food was cold now, it was still delicious.

Mr. Gold glanced up from his work when he heard someone enter the room. "Bae," he said softly, glad to see his son. "What brings you in today?" He sure hoped he wasn’t there to ask for money. He had expected it ever since Bae’s recent marriage.

Bae crossed his arms over his chest as he walked into the back of his dad’s shop. "Well I had originally come in here to invite you and Belle to dinner tomorrow night but now I am here to yell at you for being such a cheapskate. Belle brought you a muffin and tea but because of how cheap you are, I just had to save her from begging Granny to give her back your damn money.”

Gold looked at him angrily, focusing on what was not important. “So you’re telling me Belle’s not going to get my money back?”

Bae huffed and pulled a five-dollar bill out of his pocket and placed it on the table. "There, Happy? Now lets focus on what really matters. You make that poor girl work twenty-four seven.
When was the last time you let her have a day to herself to go see her father or go to the library or just to relax and rest her aching feet because you MUST see how she limps when she walks near the end of the day? And do you ever even thank her?” Adam’s son ranted to him, hating how his father mistreated people.

Adam remained calm, unphased by his son’s reaction. They bickered a lot, so it was nothing new to him.
He leaned back in his chair and crossed his hands over his lap. “She knew what was in store for her when she made a deal with me. I didn’t hide anything, or pretend she would have this easy carefree life. I laid everything out on the table and she agreed.”

"Whether she signed up for this or not, she is the last person in this world that deserves your hostility.” He sighed and shook his head. "Just think about all the things she does extra that you don’t ask her to but she does it for you anyways.” He sighed softly and took a deep breath to calm down before he made his smile return. "Anyways, the offer still stands for you and Belle to join Emma and I in our new home for dinner tomorrow night."

Adam sighed heavily, trying to ignore the point his son brought up about Belle. He didn’t want to think about how good Belle was to him; it made it seem like he shouldn’t force her to be his maid anymore—that he should set her free. But he couldn’t do that. Her father owed him a lot of money and that was how they agreed to pay it back.
Looking at his son skeptically he said, “I have yet to attend one of your ridiculous dinner parties, yet every Christmas you ask me. What makes you think this year would be any different?”

Bae’s smile faltered and he felt his heart ache a little. ”Because I am your son and we haven’t had a Christmas together since I was twelve.” Why was his father such a bastard sometimes? He was his only child; why couldn’t he make time for his only son?

Gold didn’t disagree with him. “And as my son you should know how much I despise Christmas!” He slammed his fist down on the table to prove his point.

Bae didn’t even flinch when his father slammed his fist down, he was far too angry. ”You didn’t used to. You used to love it more than anyone. But if that’s how you feel now, I just won’t show up on Christmases to even say hi anymore.”

That statement should have made Gold feel horrible and beg for forgiveness. He loved his son and wanted him in his life, but his anger blinded him from seeing that.
He also didn’t believe those were really his son’s words. “Is that your little wife speaking?” He knew Bae’s wife didn’t care too much for him and preferred not to have him around. “Why did you get married anyway?” he asked, baffled at the idea of marriage in general.

Bae scoffed at his father. ”Actually it’s not. It’s eighteen year old me finally speaking what I have wanted to say and why I moved out as soon as I can. And I got married to Emma because she loves me and I love her. But that is something you wouldn’t understand.” He glared at his father, feeling as if he had just spat in his face. ”It’s a wonder my mother abandoned us. She wanted to get away from YOU while she still could.” She suddenly turned on his heels and stormed off.

Gold watched as his son left, resisting the urge to go after him. After what Bae just said, he didn’t want to go after him anyway. How dare he blame him for Milah leaving! She was a wretched woman who never wanted Bae to begin with. It was a wonder she stuck around for the first few years of Bae’s life, but Gold had never had the courage to tell Bae the truth. No son deserved to know his parent didn’t want him. Gold knew that firsthand.
Ignoring the pang in his chest, he went back to doing what he did best: working and counting his money.
When Belle arrived back at the place she had been calling ‘Home’ for the past two years, she let a few tears fall as she began the rest of her chores, her heart aching in her chest. Why couldn’t he just be like how he used to? Back when she had first found out about her feelings for him, he had been actually tolerable.

As the end of the day neared, David wrung his hands in his lap nervously. He hadn’t managed to get Gold to let him off early, but he was still hoping he could convince him to let him have at least part of Christmas Day. Taking a deep breath, he gathered his things and slowly made his way toward the back room.

Mr. Gold sat at his desk quietly, still pouring over his books, completely oblivious to anything else around him.

Half way through the day, Belle realized that she should have been smart enough to know not to buy from Granny’s. Especially not with Gold’s money. As an apology for her behavior, she made him a dinner consisting of mashed potatoes, steamed vegetables and roast beef; some of his favorites. While the food was cooking, she decorated the dining room with subtle festive things like candles, mistletoe and holly, and a snow globe or two that she had in her room from her old house.

As it came time to close the shop, David got his courage up to walk to the back room. Knocking on the door frame, he took a deep breath. “Mr. Gold?”

Gold looked up when he heard David. At first, when he saw David was dressed to leave, he was confused. “Time to go already?” he asked and glanced over at the clock. Apparently it was. He had been so engulfed in his work that he had lost track of time. “Ah, yes. Well, I’ll see you bright and early tomorrow morning.” His gaze fell back down to his papers.

David stuffed his hands in his pockets. “Um… About that. How about I make you a deal, I get to come into work a few hours late tomorrow but I will also stay in for however many hours after work free of charge. You won’t need to pay me for over time. Please, it is my sons first Christmas, I NEED to spend it with him.”

Mr. Gold stopped what he was doing, but didn’t instantly look up. He took a second to close his eyes and take a deep breath. This holiday and the way everyone acted about it was really about to drive him mad. However, it had wore on him so much that day, he was unwilling to continue to fight it. Turning his head so his eyes met David’s finally he said softly but impatiently, “Just take the day, but be here all the earlier the next morning.” It was unlike him to do something like this, but he knew they wouldn’t have much business, if any at all, on Christmas Day.

David’s eyes widened as he heard him, shock written all over his face. ”R-Really?” He couldn’t help the smile that bloomed on his lips. Had he truly heard him correctly? ”Thanks, Mr. Gold. Thank you so much!” Trying to hold in his excitement, he bid him a goodnight before quickly running home to his family, not wanting Gold to change his mind.
Chapter 2

Belle finished setting the table, lit all the candles, dished out their food, and changed into a dress she had brought when she first moved to Adam's, but had never gotten a chance to wear it. The dress was a lovely shade of burgundy, had a sweetheart neckline, clung to her bust and waist, and flowed down a little just above her hips down to just under her knees. It made her curves look exquisite. She also tied back her hair with a white ribbon, wanting to look good in case she did decide to tell Adam about her feelings for him.

About an hour after David left, Mr. Gold summed up what he was doing and slipped on his wool coat ready to go home. Stepping outside, he noticed the sun had already set and there was almost no one out on the sidewalks or streets. Ensuring the door to the shop was locked behind him, he set off toward home. Hopefully Belle would already have dinner on the table; he was starving after having skipped breakfast and not eating lunch.

Once he arrived at his house, he trekked slowly up the front stairs, careful not to slip on the ice. It had already begun to snow again and there was an eerie feel to the air. It was like something was following him, but he knew that was impossible. He even glanced behind him once, but there was nothing there. He brushed it off to the fact that he was alone out in the snowstorm.

Placing his hand on the front doorknob, he was about to turn it with the plain gold knocker morphed into what looked like a face of his old partner, Regina Mills. Startled, he jumped backwards and at the same time a chilly wind blew by almost knocking him off his feet. After regaining his balance, he glanced back toward the door. This time the knocker looked completely normal. He huffed. His hunger must've made him hallucinate.

Grabbing the doorknob again, he slowly turned it, cautiously watching to see if the same thing would happen, but nothing did. Hurrying inside, he shut the door quickly behind him, trying to shake the weird feeling he had. He didn't think about it long, however, because the delicious aroma of roast beef filled his nostrils, taking his mind off of it.

When Belle heard the front door open, a small smile formed on her lips and she quickly did a few touch ups on the table, meal, and herself before placing herself beside the table where Adam always sat, planning on pulling his chair out for him. She knew that the smell of her rather delicious dinner would lead Adam to the dining room so she stood where she was with her hands folded in front of her, a small, warm smile on her lips.

Removing his coat, gloves, and scarf, Adam hung them on the bench in the foyer. Making his way toward the dining room, his slow and steady gait along with the tap of his cane echoed a little through the dark rooms. Most of the very large house was unused and he only allowed a room to be lit if he or Belle was in it.

When he entered the dining room, although subtle, the first thing he noticed was the Christmas decorations. "What is this?" he demanded, a slight hint of irritation in his tone. His eyes landed on Belle right after he spoke and the way she looked took his breath away. He did well to keep the grimace on his face.

Belle bit her bottom lip when he came in, brushing a stray curl behind her ear. He hated it. She knew it. He hated all of it. The decorations, the food, the way she looked…"My attempt at apologizing for what I did earlier without actually saying it…” She slowly pulled out his chair and motioned for him to sit. "I made all of your favorites including your favorite tea and a glass of whiskey to relax you from your day of hard work…” Where Belle sat, she had a simple glass of water to drink. In the lighting, she couldn't help but notice how exceptionally handsome he looked. The way the candlelight lit up his features even if he was grimacing.
He visually relaxed just a tad. His frown disappeared, but there was still no hint of a smile. Despite her good intentions, she knew he hated Christmas. Why would she try something like this? However, his thoughts were drifting away from the decorations as he continued to stare at Belle. She looked absolutely gorgeous, more so than usual; the dress she was wearing, how her stray hair hung down on her shoulders, and the way the candlelight bounced of her beautiful features just right. It all added to her beauty. Finally realizing he was standing there staring and letting his eyes roam up and down her body, he cleared his throat. He didn't want Belle to think he was a lustful old man who had nothing better to do but leer at his maid. "Where did you get that dress?" he asked, giving him a reason to stare and not look away. She would assume he was worried she spent his money on it. Wait…had she purchased it with his money? It surprised him to realize that hadn't been the first thing that popped in his mind. Honestly, in that moment he really didn't care if she had or not.

When Belle heard his worry about the dress, she instantly knew he would think that she had bought it with his money. "Don't worry, Adam, I got this dress back when I had been living with my father. It was what I had worn for Christmas that year before… You.. um.. Brought me here.." Her heart ached a little from the memory, missing her father dearly. She had bumped into him on the streets every once in a while but she could never stay long because she knew that either Gold would get mad at her for talking to him or for taking too long to get back.

"Won't you please sit? I spent a long time on this meal.. And before you question me, Yes I did all my chores."

Mr. Gold nodded, not saying anything else about the dress. He longed to tell her how beautiful she looked in it, but he knew that would only be weird after he was just staring at her like a love struck schoolboy.

Doing as she asked, he walked over to the table and sat down in his chair. Looking down at the meal, he smiled just a little. It smelled absolutely wonderful; she had made all his favorites. Bae was right—she did go out of her way for him.

When Adam came and sat down, it was Belle's turn to visually relax. Letting out a small sigh of relief, she pushed his chair in a little before she went and sat at the spot she had set for herself. "I hope you don't mind that I am joining you. I want to trick my mind into thinking that this is Christmas dinner but I can't do that when I am alone." Normally, Belle ate either before or after Gold but if he was in a good mood, he sometimes asked—more like told—her to join him.

His little smile managed to fade when he heard her words. He wasn't sure what was upsetting him more: the fact that she was basically forcing Christmas on him or the sorrow he could see in her eyes when she spoke of it. It was clear to him that she missed it. This was her third Christmas at his house and he had made her go without it the first two years.

Well perhaps he could make an exception—just this once. He could play along if it would bring her a little happiness. Besides, she hadn't terribly overdone it with the decorations and he couldn't wait to eat the delicious food she had prepared.

As long as she had no other surprises in store for him, he felt he could handle it. It was just the two of them—nothing could go wrong, could it? Finally he nodded, indicating she could stay.

When Belle saw him nod, she let out another sigh of relief. She was rather surprised that he didn't get mad at her for wanting to pretend that it was Christmas dinner. She had been regretting the words from the moment she said them but luckily, it seemed that he didn't mind. "Thank you."

As they began to eat, the girl would occasionally glance up at her employer, taking a moment or two to admire how handsome he looked. She couldn't help the fact that her heart felt like it was trying to pull itself closer to him. She just wanted to make him happy. All she wanted was to see a
smile on his lips. His lips… Gods, how she wanted to kiss him sometimes. She wanted to do it so badly that sometimes it physically pained her.

They ate their dinner in silence, but Gold noticed she kept glancing up at him with a look on her face he couldn't quite place. He assumed she either wanted to say or do something, but he didn't know which. He wondered if it had anything to do with her and David's conversation he had overheard that morning. Of course that had to be it, what else? "I believe there was something you wanted to ask me," he noted between bites.

When Belle heard him, she thought that he had caught her glances. Gods, she hoped not. Putting down her fork and knife, she took a sip of water. Then it clicked; could he be talking about what David and her had been discussing in his shop earlier. Or was he assuming that she wanted to ask something because she kept looking over at him. "I did?" she asked a little confused.

"Yes," he replied, taking another bite. "When you came in my shop this morning, you were planning on asking me something before we were interrupted."

Belle understood now and took a deep breath, nervously brushing a curl behind her ear. "Well. You see, David said that I looked nice today and asked me if I have any plans. When I said no and that you were going to make me work today and tomorrow like every other year, he asked me if I wanted to come over to his house to have dinner with him and his family."

"Ah," he said averting his eyes away from her and pretending he didn't know that already. She still hadn't asked him if she could go; she only explained to him what they were discussing. "Is this what you want to do then? Have dinner at my employee's residence?"

When she heard him, she nervously glanced over at him. "Well, he is my friend. And if I don't have anything that I need to do, I would like to go." She folded her hands in her lap and wrung them a little as she remembered what she had told David. "But I don't think it would be possible... There is a snowstorm tonight and we will probably be snowed in tomorrow. So when I finish my chores, I will have to shovel the walkway and the rest of the front yard like you always want me to."

"It has already begun to snow," he told her, not sure if she knew or not. Besides the chores, he wasn't sure what else she did when he wasn't at home. It was possible she hadn't been outside since this morning.

Taking the last bite of his food, he placed his fork down gently. "That was delicious Belle," he told her. It was the closest to a thank you she would ever get, but he was also being nicer than usual. He wasn't sure why.

He was also trying to change the subject-to deter telling her if she could go to dinner at the Nolan's or not.

When she heard what he said about the snow, she turned her attention to the nearby window and saw the white flakes falling. "So it has..." She had always had a love-hate relationship with snow. It was beautiful to look at, but living in a house with someone who was too poor to pay for heating ruined her outlook on snow.

But when he told her how good the food was, she was very taken aback. There was a hint of appreciation that she was picking up on. "Th-Thank you." She couldn't help but smile a little as she got up and began to collect their plates and walk to the kitchen. "Is there anything else you would like?"

He thought about it for a moment. He wasn't hungry anymore, but he also wasn't ready to retreat to his room like he usually did after dinner. On the very rare occasion he wanted to stay downstairs just so Belle could keep him company. This was one of those occasions.
"Perhaps a warm cup of tea?" he said with a little smirk. "That is if you were able to venture out to the grocery store and pick some up today?"

Belle put the dishes in the sink to wash them and grabbed the tin of tea she had bought for him earlier before she peeked at him through the door that lead from the kitchen to the dining room. "That I did. It is even your favorite kind that comes out around winter. It was the last tin."

She filled up the kettle with water and put it on the stove before she began to wash their dishes. It didn't take her very long and soon enough, she was bringing in two mugs of tea, both the perfect drinking temperature. "Would you like me to make a fire in the living room?" she asked softly. On nights like this, he usually had her build a fire in the fireplace for him so he could sit in front of it in his big comfy chair.

"That'll be nice," he replied and took the mug of tea from her. Just like in the shop, he didn't much care to waste money just to heat the house—especially since it was a very big house. However, since Belle was here all day and night, he allowed her a little more freedom so she wouldn't freeze to death—nor did he enjoy hearing her complain about it constantly. After hearing about it the first few days of her coming to his home, he finally gave in just to shut her up. She was still only allowed to heat the rooms they used the most, but it was more than he had allowed her before.

Belle gave him a small smile before she placed her mug down on the table and turned, walking to the living room. Once in front of the fireplace, she built the perfect size fire to heat up the small room. Compared to the rest of the rooms, it was one of the smaller ones—the bigger ones being his room, his study, the kitchen, the sitting room and the dining room. When she finished, she went back to where she had left him and grabbed her mug. "It is all set."

He nodded to show he understood. After grabbing his cane, he stood and began walking toward the living room with the mug of tea in his other hand. About halfway there, he stopped in his tracks and swung on his heels to face Belle. He raised his eyebrows at her in an accusatory manner. "Before I go in, I must know, have you treated my living room in the same manner you did my dining room—decorate it with all these ridiculous baubles and greenery?" Using his cane, he pointed toward the Christmas decorations. "I'm not much in the mood for surprises, so I'd prefer to know beforehand."

Belle walked behind him to make sure that the fire was to his liking, planning on going back to the dining room to clean it all up.

When he suddenly stopped, she couldn't help but jump a little. As she heard his question, she chuckled a little and shook her head. "No. I left your precious living room alone. Except for one candle—that is not festive—because the room still smelled like smoke from the fire I made for you a few nights ago. Hopefully, the room should hopefully smell like ginger and sandalwood." Belle knew that those candles were the only ones that he tolerated.

Adam nodded. He was relieved. He had managed to hold his temper when he saw the dining room, but he could only take so much at once. Turning back around, he walked into the living room, sat down in his big chair by the fire, and placed his mug of tea on the little side table. The room did indeed smell like she said it would. It was pleasant.

Belle followed him into the room, mug between both her hands. "If everything is to your liking and you don't need anything else, I will just go and clean up the dining room," she said, turning to leave the warm room.

"Stop," he said abruptly before she could leave the room. "I didn't dismiss you." He was lonely for her company, but he didn't want to come off that way. The only other thing he knew to do was play it out like Master and Maid.
Belle raised a brow and chuckled softly before she walked back to stand by the side of his chair. "I didn't know I needed dismissing." She took a small sip of her tea, a small smile on her lips. She felt like she was in a good mood but she wasn't sure why. "What is it that you need?"

"Nothing in particular," he said trying to keep what he really wanted subtle. "Have a seat." He motioned toward the floor since there was not another chair in the room. "You can clean later."

"If you say so..." Belle smiled a little more and did as he said, taking a seat by his feet so she could be in front of the warm fire. Her arms and legs were awfully cold in the dress that she was wearing so the fire was very much appreciated.

He sighed contently and leaned back in his chair. At least she was indulging him, more than he expected her to do. "I expect you had a productive day," he asked trying to strike up conversation.

Belle placed down her mug beside her before leaning forward to warm up her hands. "I did. I swept and mopped all of the hardwood and tile floors, I did your laundry, I swept, I did some grocery shopping and bought the things on your list and I obviously made you dinner. How was work today?" she asked softly.

He shrugged his shoulders and stared at the fire. "Less profitable than any other day of the year. Most of my precious time was wasted dealing with deadbeats who want an extension on their rent or beggars who want money to give to the poor. Christmas, bah, always brings out the worst in people."

Belle chuckled a little and looked up at him, a small smirk on her face. "Only some people." She placed her hand on his good knee. "I personally think Christmas brings out the best in most people. They want to help one another, they care for one another. When somebody is down, people help them back up onto their feet."

He scoffed at her, clearly not believing that. "People should learn to care for themselves. Why should I give my hard earned money to the poor when they have soup kitchens and poor houses?" He leaned toward her a little as if he was challenging her.

Belle crossed her arms over her chest and turned to look up at him. "Because do you know what they feed us... I-I mean them." She swallowed hard, straightening up a bit. Most nights when she had lived with her father when she had been younger before she could work, she and her father had to go eat at the soup kitchen. Many of the nights, she got food poisoning because things were under cooked or expired. "Not to mention that if you were in the same situation, barely having enough money to pay for clothes, food, heat, wouldn't you want someone to help YOU?"

He ignored her slip up that implied she had eaten at a soup kitchen or been to a poor house. He wasn't sure which because he didn't know much about her life before she came to live with him. He chuckled at her question. "Now you see dearie, that's where you're mistaken. I would never be in that situation. I'm smart enough to know how to handle my money, how to hold a job, how to keep from wasting what little I have on useless frivolities."

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Belle's jaw clenched as she heard him, her eyes narrowing at his insensitive biased opinion. Not only did it feel like he was taking a cheap shot at her father like he did when he was mad at her to make her stop talking back, but also it showed that he thought he was better than everyone else. "Well guess what, if you were getting sick constantly from being freezing cold, not having enough to eat and not being able to pay for medicine, you wouldn't be able to keep your job because of how often you had to stay home, which would lead to you losing money which would lead to you unable to pay rent and soon you would find yourself at a soup kitchen which would only begin the cycle again because of horrible the food is and how sick it can make you," she said, knowing that with how she worded it that time, she made her point and he wouldn't be able to argue back.
And if he did, she would be leaving the room.

He stared down at her, watching her carefully. "I had no idea you were so passionate about this," he said, making note of how infuriated the subject seemed to make her.

Belle practically glared at him, her blue eyes holding pain and something like jealousy because she knew that for the past twenty years, Adam had been having a wonderful life; living in a big home, having more money than he could ever spend, and a son who loved him with his whole being. "That is because that was my and my dad's life for ten years," she said through clenched teeth.

Mr. Gold frowned, highlighting the deep wrinkles in his cheeks that had formed over all those years of being unhappy. "Belle, I had no idea..." he said honestly and sympathetically, his hand mindlessly coming to rest on top of hers which was still sitting on his knee.

He already knew that Belle and her father were not well off—that was obvious considering the deal she had to make to get out of debt—but he had never realized it was that bad. Now he felt a pang of guilt, which was rare. He had tried so hard over the past three years to keep his distance from Belle—to only learn the bare minimum about her, just so he wouldn't have to feel things like that.

Belle scoffed and continued to glare up at him, jaw still clenched. "Of course you didn't. Because you don't care about anyone besides yourself..."

When he placed his hand over hers, her words stopped and her gaze fell down to look at what she had been dreaming about for months. Her face softened a little as she felt the warmth of his large, rough hand spread over her cold, smaller one.

She felt all her anger leave and her heart ache and beat fast in her chest as she continued to stare at his hand, his ring on his middle finger sparkling in the fire light. "I... I..."

He waited for her to finish her sentence, but as the seconds went by, he didn't think she was going to. Her focus seemed to be on something else. What was she staring so intently at? Glancing down, he noticed she was looking at their joined hands. He hadn't even realized he had grabbed hers, but obviously he had. And judging by the way she was acting, it was clear to him she wasn't happy about it. Swiftly, he jerked his hand away, not wanting to make her uncomfortable any longer. "Forgive me," he said, feeling he had stepped out of bounds. First, he was drooling over her in her new dress, now he was grabbing her hand. Gods, he wouldn't be surprised if she tried to leave.

When he pulled his hand back, Belle had to resist grabbing for it like a child who had their favorite toy taken away from them. When he spoke, she looked up at him with her crystal blue eyes, all the anger and pain gone from them, now only holding longing. "No matter..." She said softly, gazing up at him a little as she reluctantly pulled her hand away from his knee. "I'm sorry for snapping like that..." She dropped her gaze, a stray curl falling onto her face. "There is no way you could have known about that..."

She had looked at him funny again; he just didn't understand it. Was she still mad? She didn't look or sound mad anymore. She was definitely a mystery to him.

He could have known about her past if he had only asked, but he didn't. And he didn't want to consider that her words might be the truth: that he only cared about himself.

"Well, there's no need to worry about that now," he assured her, "you live here now, where there's a roof over your head and food on the table."

Belle nodded her head and sighed a little bit, turning back to the fire with her shoulders hunched slightly. "Yeah..." She picked up her tea mug and took a small sip. "And I appreciate more than you could ever know..." She said only loud enough for him to hear. Taking a deep breath, she looked over at him over her shoulder. "Thank you, Adam. It may not seem like it, but I DO enjoy being here most of the time."
His tiny smile returned when he heard her say that. He wanted to believe her—he really did—but he just couldn't. Despite the food and roof over her head, why would she want to be there instead of with her father? She had been reluctant to leave him in the first place, only doing so because she had no choice.

Adam never gave her any time to herself and he caught her daydreaming every once in a while. She wanted something more and he knew it didn't involve living in his mansion for the rest of her life. However, she still seemed content most of the time, so he never really gave it a second thought.

Despite everything on his mind that screamed he was a fool, he ended up asking something he already knew the answer to. "Belle, are you happy here with me?" Of course she wasn't happy. Why did he even ask?

The woman looked back at the flames in front of her when she saw his smile, her heart fluttering madly. Gods, she loved his smile more than anything. It always seemed to lighten and brighten her day.

When she heard his question, a smile of her own fell onto her lips as she looked down. Perhaps it was the day to tell him how she felt. It was what she had been planning all along. "Well, despite how often you yell at me and how many chores you pile on me, yes. I do quite enjoy being here with you. Especially during moments like these. It's times like these that make me happy to be here with you."

He nodded and turned his gaze toward his lap. Her words were so lovely, but he just didn't believe they were the truth. But why would she say them if they weren't true? The only explanation he could come up with was she was just trying to ensure he remained in a pleasant mood. She didn't want him screaming at her and breaking things. Either way, he wasn't going to sit there and pretend anymore.

Grabbing his empty mug, he stood to his feet. "I best retire for the evening," he told her as he turned to exit the room. He paused, however, turning his head just slightly so he could address her. "And Belle, if you'd like to join the Nolan's for dinner tomorrow night, you have my permission." He started to leave again.

When he spoke to her, his voice was soft, barely above a whisper, with a hint of sadness in it. For some strange reason, he did want her to be happy and he knew that allowing her this little outing would be step in the right direction.

Belle felt her heart ache a little when he said that he wanted to go to bed. She wanted to stay up longer and talk to him more. She wanted to spend more time with him and maybe learn things about HIS past. But if he wanted to go to sleep, then she would reluctantly have to go to sleep as well. "Alright…"

He seemed to be full of surprises tonight. He only added to that when he told her that she could go to David's house tomorrow. "Really?" She put out the fire and blew out the candle before she ran a little to catch up to him, following close behind him. She noticed the hidden sad tone in his voice. She didn't want to leave him alone on Christmas. She would only go if he was going somewhere as well. "You know, you could come too. You could be my date." She said in a slight teasing way but a hidden bit of hope in her voice because she would truly like that.

As they arrived in the kitchen, she walked over to the sink and placed her mug into the sink. Suddenly she smelled something. "Uh-Oh… I think I left a candle burning. Could you place your mug in the sink? I'll wash it in a minute." She turned and quickly went into the dining room to blow out the candle.

Date? Bah! He knew she was entirely in jest now.

Doing as she asked, he took the mug and went into the kitchen. "I think it's better I spare Mr.
Nolan the hassle of my company," he called after her to answer her question. "I'm quite certain he wouldn't want to entertain his boss on the only day he doesn't have to deal with me."

After placing the mug in the sink, he turned and went to leave the kitchen, his sights set on going upstairs.

"I think it would be a great opportunity to show David and Mary-Margaret that you're not always as grumpy as you are at work," she said with a small chuckle.

Belle walked into the dining room and blew out the candles before turning to walk back into the kitchen, a soft smile on her lips. Covering her mouth, she yawned and closed her eyes for a moment.

Mr. Gold was about to reply to her statement, when he glanced up and saw she was about to run right into him. Pausing briefly in the doorway from the kitchen to the dining room, he held up his free hand and caught her by the arm before she did so. "I think you should watch where you're going," he said in a slightly teasing manner. He did that with her on occasion, when she had somehow managed to brighten his mood.

Belle gasped a little as he suddenly grabbed her arm. Opening her eyes, she looked up at him. He was so close… She could smell his intoxicating cologne. She could see the gold flecks in his eyes… She could feel his warm, rough hand on her skin. Biting her bottom lip, she suddenly remembered something else and nervously glanced upwards, motioning for him to look to. Above them hung one of the most classic items of Christmas: Mistletoe. But instead of backing away, she studied his features as he looked up, hoping that he wouldn't break the tradition. She wanted to kiss him so badly.

Cocking an eyebrow, he looked at her curiously. Why did she look so nervous? And what was she staring at now? Glancing up when she motioned for him to do so, he saw there was something hanging above them. At first he didn't register what it was, having spent most of his years trying to avoid anything to do with Christmas.

But as he went to turn his attentions back to Belle, it hit him. "Mistletoe," he accidentally said aloud.

Why in the devil would she hang something like that? She couldn't possibly want to kiss him. Or did she? Why else would she hang it? It wasn't like she could expect to kiss anyone else besides him. They were always to only two people in the household. He never had any visitors and even if he did, the snow would have kept them away that night.

Swallowing thickly, his eyes ventured down to meet Belle's once again. He was torn about what to do. On the one hand, he could just ignore it and continue on his way, but on the other he couldn't deny that he really did want to kiss her. This would be the perfect opportunity to do so. If she didn't like it, all he had to do was blame it on tradition and yell at her for hanging the confounded piece of greenery in the first place.

However, he was a coward and he already felt like he had stepped over the line that evening after staring at her in her new dress and then grabbing her hand. So, he stood there like a statue, his hand still on her arm, unsure of what to do.

As Belle studied his face when he finished realizing what was above them, she found no anger or reluctance. But instead, confusion, shock and a whole lot of nervousness. He was just as nervous as she was and she knew in that moment, right now was the time she would tell him. She would tell him about how her heart ached to always be close to him, how her lips burn to be kissed by his, how her skin was always so cold unless he touched her, how she feels so empty when she is not by his side.

Her eyes that had found his milk chocolate ones slowly and carefully flickered down to his mouth. Usually his lips were thin lines on his face because of how often he frowned. But right now, they
were relaxed and fuller than normal. Licking her own lips a little, her little pink tongue darting out to moisten her dryish lips, her eyes trailed back to meet his, telling him exactly what she wanted without saying any words.

She did this a few more times as she very slowly began to lean a little closer and go up on her toes, praying to whatever god above that he wouldn't back away.

She was moving closer to him; it was just a small movement, but very easily noticed. And she kept looking down at his lips, licking her own as well. By gods, she did want him to kiss her, didn't she? He thought so…but then again, he didn't have much experience with women. It could very well be his eyes playing tricks on him or his heart having him see just what he wanted to. That didn't change the fact that she was moving closer-he was certain he wasn't imagining it. Not only that, but he wasn't backing away. No, without thinking about it, he realized he was moving closer to her as well. He didn't know where this sudden urge to kiss her had come from, but he wasn't going to deny it any longer. If anything went wrong, all he had to do was blame it on that stupid mistletoe—that stupid mistletoe that he was forever thankful for right now.

After several agonizing seconds, his head had inched down toward hers and his lips were lingering just barely a mere centimeter away from hers. So close, he could feel her light breath wisp across his lips, making his heart beat faster in anticipation.

When Belle found that Adam was leaning down too, a happy, joyful gleam appeared in her blue eyes. Once he was close enough, she waited a few moments, giving him some time to pull away if he wanted to. But when he instead moved even closer, she let her eyes close as she closed the distance between them, her soft pink lips connecting with his. Her heart practically exploded, causing millions of butterflies to erupt in her stomach. She had never kissed anyone before but it seemed to come naturally to her with her lips on his.

As their lips met for the first time, Adam's immediate reaction was panic. His body stiffened and his palms began to sweat. What in the world was he thinking? Right as he was about to pull away, he managed to catch the flash of happiness shine bright in her gorgeous blue eyes, just before she closed them. The thought that she might truly want this was all it took to keep him from backing down.

After a few seconds, he finally relaxed and his eyes drifted shut to enjoy the kiss. Her lips were so soft, so sweet; they even still had a hint of the tea on them they were drinking earlier. They were better than he had ever imagined and being the greedy man he was, he wanted more.

Wanting to hold her close, he let his cane clatter to the floor to free his other hand. In one swift motion, he wrapped it around her waist and pulled her closer so he could kiss her properly.

Belle was kissing his lips tenderly when he wouldn't kiss her back, almost trying to MAKE him kiss her back. When she heard a loud, crashing-like sound come from beside them, she was about to pull away to see if they had knocked something over but she felt his now freed hand slither around her waist to pull her closer and she knew that it had been his cane. He had dropped his cane in favor of holding her closer.

Smiling against his lips a little, she moved her hands up his chest to wrap her arms around his neck, savoring every second of the kiss as he took over. He tasted like whiskey and tea. A surprisingly delicious mix on his lips. She couldn't get enough of it.

She wanted this! She really wanted this! That was obvious to him now. Not only was she kissing him back, but also she had wrapped her arms around his neck. And not only that…but it felt right, like they should have been doing this all along.

She felt so delicate in his arms, as if one wrong movement would shatter her to pieces. However, her small body seemed to fit together perfectly with his, just like two pieces of a puzzle.

That still didn't change the fact that he was incredibly nervous. He was rusty with this kind of thing—not having kissed a woman since Bae's mother. And he wasn't quite sure how experienced
Belle was, but he moved his lips against hers slowly and gently, not wanting to frighten or overwhelm her. Any moment now she could come to her senses and break away from him. He couldn't see why she wanted this in the first place, but he was going to enjoy it while it lasted.

The only pulling back Belle did was moving her hand from his neck to his cheek so she could stroke it soothingly, feeling that he was still tentative about the whole situation. Her small, soothing movements let him know that this was what she wanted and that she was happy about what was happening.

As she continued to kiss him, a soft, happy sigh fell from her lips. She loved kissing him and she hoped he felt the same. If he rejected her feelings, she didn't know how she would react. She had been smitten with him for months and months and sometimes, she could have sworn he felt the same. She only hoped that if he didn't feel the same, he would let her down gently and he would still let their deal be intact because she still needed to pay for her father's debts.

A quiet, happy hum escaped him when she began to stroke his cheek. Her skin was so soft, but he knew his skin was rough, especially with the stubble that had grown since shaving at the beginning of the day. Did she really enjoy this? He still had his doubts.

But gods…this was amazing. He had Belle in his arms just like he had imagined more than he wanted to admit. As stubborn as he was, he wouldn't admit, even to himself, that he had had some feelings for the girl for quite some time. Feelings were a weakness and he couldn't afford weakness.

However, in that moment he didn't care. It felt like they were the only two people in the world and he was gladly giving in.

Feeling bolder, one of his hands ventured up from her waist and found her cheek, where he gently stroked it, before running it through her perfect brown curls.

Belle pulled herself even closer to him as her fingers laced themselves into the hair at the nape of his neck. The only sounds in the room were the sounds of their slightly heavy breathing, their lips moving against one another's, and the occasional hum and groan of contentment and pleasure. She was enjoying this more than words can say.

When she felt his hand in her hair, she let out a soft groan, her cheeks turning bright red. As her lungs began to burn with the need for air, she pulled back a little and rested her forehead against his, panting softly. Between breaths, she would press small, tender kisses to his lips. How was she going to tell him how she felt? How would she word her feelings?

Keeping her eyes closed, she continued to occasionally press kisses to his lips as she stroked his hair.

Adam wasn't sure what to do once Belle finally pulled away from him. All he knew was he was feeling the loss immediately. He just wanted to continue kissing her, but he knew it was asking too much. With even as little he knew about Christmas, he knew they had already surpassed what was deemed a traditional mistletoe kiss.

However, it appeared she didn't want to go anywhere seeing as she remained in his embrace and rested her forehead on his.

Her actions continued to both amaze and shock him. The little kisses she kept placing on his lips were sending a warm feeling through his body, making emotions erupt inside him that had lain dormant for so many years.

He stood there, watching her carefully as she caught her breath. His one hand still rested at her waist and his other continued to lightly stroke through her hair.

She looked so content and happy and the redness of her cheeks made her all the more beautiful. A tiny smile formed on his lips, feeling a little happiness himself.

When Belle finally caught her breath, she let her eyes flutter open to look up at Adam. When she saw his smile, she couldn't help but smile back. "That was…. That was…” She brushed a piece of
hair out of his face, gazing up at him. "That was amazing… I've been dreaming of doing that for MONTHS…." She leaned into his soothing touch, loving how his hands felt as they ran through her hair. Her heart began to race when she finished speaking, knowing her feeling were out in the open now. Whether he chose to embrace them or trample them, she would soon find out.

"Months?" he repeated, making sure he heard her right. His brow furrowed in confusion. What was she getting at? Had she planned this all along? What was her motive behind it? It couldn't be because she felt something for him. That was impossible. There was no way she could really have wanted this. She had to have just been caught up in the moment, lonely for the touch of another human being.

Belle continued to smile up at him and nod her head when he repeated one of the words she had said. "From the moment you moved me up from the basement and gave me the room with all those books in it, I felt my heart long to be held by you……" She said softly, her cheeks turning a brighter shade of red. "And when you smile, you brighten my day. I don't care if you yell at me or don't appreciate what I do, I can't help but always want to be by your side."

Now he knew she was lying. Why would she feel that way after the way he treated her? He knew he didn't treat her the best. There were times he felt guilty for yelling at her or being inconsiderate, but being the coward he was he would force those feelings away. Then to make up for it, he would only treat her worse, trying to hide how he really felt. Even she admitted to his poor treatment. Why would she not care? There was something else to this, he knew it. She was after something. He just didn't know what.

He hid his skepticism. His head motioned upwards toward the mistletoe. "So was this your idea all along? You set up the mistletoe in hopes you'd find us standing under it simultaneously?"

Belle glanced up at the greenery above them and shook her head. "Actually, no… I just put up a few to make the room look subtly festive without overdoing it. But I can't say that I am not happy with how putting them up turned out…” She brought a hand up to his cheek and stroked it again. "I know that you probably don't feel the same way because we are on two different ends of the spectrum; your handsome, rich and smart and I am just some maid. But I hope that perhaps you could put that behind us and give me a chance… Give US a chance…"

Her hand on his cheek distracted him briefly, causing him to shut his eyes and bask in her delicate touches. He was still so close to her; he could smell the vague scent of the ginger candles lingering in her hair.

Then her words rang in his ears and his eyes popped open. Rich and smart? A maid? Ahhhh…he knew what her ulterior motive was now. She wanted him for his money. Of course! Why did that never occur to him before? It made total sense. This was all an act so she could ensure she would never return to the poor house. That's why she had gone so long without telling him about her past. She feared he would grow suspicious! Luckily, she had slipped up this evening and he now knew the truth.

Still, he didn't let on that he knew what she was up to. He wanted to see if he could coax the truth out of her. "And what feelings would those be?" he queried.

Belle bit her bottom lip a little when she heard his question, her cheeks turning bright red. "I-I… I don't know… I've never felt this way about anyone before. I don't know what these feelings are. I've only ever read about them in books. I think they are… Longing… Love…. I don't know… But I do know that I can't get you out of my mind." She looked up at him. "And don't tell me that you have never felt that way towards me before. I've seen that glimmer in your eyes when I am around or when I smile at you." Her heart kept racing in her chest as she waited for him, desperately, to accept her feelings. She didn't know if she could take not being with him anymore. Belle didn't care what people would think if they ended up together. She felt like she could bring out the best in Adam.
Love? LOVE? How preposterous! Any doubt he had left that she was lying to him completely faded away. He knew for a fact now that she was lying. There was absolutely no chance she felt that way towards him. And now she was trying to tell him how he felt? How dare she! She didn't know the first thing about him.

His small smile began to fade as it was replaced by a pure look of anger. He couldn't keep pretending that he didn't know what she was up to. It was too infuriating. "Who do you think you are trying to tell me what I feel?" he questioned her with a snap in his voice. "Love? Bah! If you're going to try and play me at least come up with something better than that dearie!" His hands fell away from her and hung at his sides.

Belle looked up at him with an extremely confused look. "Adam? What are you talking about? Why would I play you?" When he called her 'dearie', She knew any smidge of tenderness he had been giving her was gone. He only called people he didn't care about, dearie. She swallowed hard as she took a step back, realizing what he meant; he thought she was lying to him and trying to get something out of it. "Please… I let down my walls for you… Why can't you do the same. I'm not lying! I swear on my mother's grave!"

"Sure you're not…" He said with a scowl. "That's why you set all this up." In a flamboyant manner, he motioned around the room at the Christmas decorations and finally at the mistletoe. "That's why you made my favorite foods. You were trying to soften me up!" Every word he said he spat at her like it was poison on his tongue. "Trying to make me believe something so preposterous! I know you could never care for me! I know what you come from…and that means you're only after one thing: my money."

He began stepping toward her in an intimidating manner, but it didn't work out as well as he would have liked. His mind was too focused on Belle's betrayal that he completely forgot he dropped his cane in favor of kissing her. When his bad foot hit the ground, it gave out underneath him and he collapsed to the floor. Unable to catch himself, he landed hard on his side.

Belle felt her breath catch in her throat and her heart break as she heard what he said. He thought she was after his money? She didn't care about money! He could be poor for all she cared. When he stepped towards her, she glared daggers at him, feeling like he had just thrown her into the wall and beat her with his cane, focusing on the area around her heart.

As he fell to the ground, she resisted the urge to catch him and closed her eyes for a few moments instead, tears burning her eyes. She wanted him to hurt. To feel the pain she felt. But that want didn't last long as she jumped over him and ran into the kitchen, grabbing ice pack before running back and falling to her knees beside him, the tears streaming down her cheeks and blurring her vision. She wanted to say so many things to him, but they were cut off by her silent sobs as she quickly put the ice on his bad leg where she knew—from experience—exactly where the pain was.

"Get off me!" He screamed, shoving away from her. He grabbed the ice pack and tossed it forcefully across the room. It landed against one of the snow globes, causing the thing to fall to the floor and shatter into a million pieces. The 'snow' and liquid began to seep out onto the floor. His temper was so out of control in those few moments that he didn't care one bit. It also blinded him from seeing the hurt in Belle's eyes and the tears rolling down her cheeks. "Just go!" He exclaimed, wanting her as far away from him as possible. After pulling a stunt like that, he didn't want to have anything to do with her.

Belle gasped loudly as he pushed her away, causing her to fall back onto the ground. As she blinked away the tears, her vision cleared away just in time to watch the snow globe—her mother had given her the Christmas before to died—fall onto the ground and smash. She sat there for a few moments, unmoving and unable to breath. The only part that had survived was the base and written on the bottom of it was 'To my darling, Belle. May every Christmas you have be merry
and bright.' Her mother had known she was going to die because of a terminal illness so her message to her daughter was there to give her strength and tell her that even if she was not there, Belle would find happiness.

As he yelled at her and told her to leave, she got up on shaking legs and ran to the front door, wanting to leave and never look back. But then she remembered the storm. She wouldn't be able to leave. Letting her tears fall again, she ran up to the room she called hers and slammed the door shut, sliding down it until she lay, crumpled up in a sobbing ball.
Chapter 3

Mr. Gold remained on the floor briefly and closed his eyes attempting to calm down. He was too hard on Belle—he knew it—but that didn’t change the fact that she lied to him and tried to trick him. When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was the shattered snow globe. He had no idea what it meant to her, so he didn’t give it another thought.
Picking his cane up, it took him a minute, but he managed to get back on his feet alone. This Christmas had turned out just like every other one; he should have never given into her. Then perhaps none of this would have ever happened.
Taking a deep breath, he made his way toward the stairs leaving the broken snow globe where it was. He climbed the stairs slower than normal—partially because of his injured foot, but also because what had just transpired with Belle. As he neared the middle of the steps, he thought he heard footsteps behind him. Swinging around to see what it was, he saw nothing. He had to be imagining things because Belle was the only other person in the house. And he had just heard her retreat to her room.

Brushing it off, he continued to his bedroom. On the way he passed by the door to Belle’s room. He stopped right outside of it feeling he should do something. Should he apologize? No. She was the one who tricked him. She should apologize.

He growled under his breath. “I want you gone by tomorrow evening,” he said loud enough to ensure she would hear him. He knew it was snowing heavily outside, but he could care less.

Belle pushed herself up off the ground and took deep breaths, trying to calm herself down. He didn’t want her nor did he deserve her. She kept telling herself that to try to make her heart stop hurting, but it wouldn’t work. When she heard him walk up the steps, she stayed quiet, not wanting him to hear her sobs that were dying down.

As she heard his words, she closed her eyes and turned to her wardrobe, which held what little amount of clothes she had. It would be wise to start packing. But as she began to pack, she let silent tears fall. Where would she go? Her father would no doubt be upset with her for ruining the deal they had made with Mr. Gold.

Gold waited outside her door a minute or so, just to see if she had a smart comeback for him, but when all he heard was silence, he retreated to his own room. Shutting the door behind him, he walked over to the chair next to the fire, the only source of light and warmth.

Since his room was the master, it had a little sitting area with a fireplace adjacent to the bedroom suite. And since a fire was already going, he knew Belle had been thoughtful and prepared it for him.

Collapsing down into the chair, he dropped his cane and buried his face in his hands and let out a few sobs of his own. Belle was about to walk out of his life forever; he would never see her again. Once again he would be all alone. But he wasn’t going to change his mind, not after what she did. Still, it didn’t change the fact that his heart ached terribly, like it had been broken into several pieces. Serves him right for being compassionate and letting her come there as his maid three years ago. He should have just evicted her and her father and he never would have been in this mess. His head shot up suddenly when he heard something behind him fall on the floor. “Belle?” he called. He scowled. “I told you to go. I don’t want to see you!”

Suddenly a horrid, eerie sound, like metal scraping against the hardwood floor, filled the room Adam was in. It was slow and continuous. It sounded like it was getting closer and closer until it was suddenly right behind him. There was another loud ‘thunk’ as a box—that looked much like a jewelry box with a hole in the top sealed off by glass—attached to a metal chain landed beside him. Upon further inspection, one could see that the box contained a human heart.

Soon, another one landed on the other side of him and one in front until the owner appeared from the shadows. It was a woman whom you could see right through. She wore business attire that
was tattered, ripped, and dirty. Her arms, legs and torso were all wrapped in chains, connected to
the boxes, as they scraped across the polished, hardwood floor.
“Guess again…” The eerie, malevolent voice said as it filled the room, her face pale and
transparent. Despite how unrecognizable she looked, Adam would no doubt be able to tell who
she was.

Mr. Gold jumped when he heard the loud noises, frightened but unsure what to do. It was Belle-it
had to be Belle—there was no one else in his house. But what was she doing? Was she trying to
frighten him as some pathetic attempt at getting him back for their argument? If she was, it was
working.
However, when the presence made itself known, it was very clear it wasn’t Belle. Staring up at
the woman looming above him, he let out a small yelp and cowered back into the chair as far back
as he could go. The woman standing before him was Regina Mills—his business partner that had
died several years ago. But it couldn’t be. She was dead. How could she possibly be there?
"Regina?" he questioned, his voice shaking with fear and his eyes wide with shock. "But how…
this is impossible!" It was a dream. It had to be a dream. Any moment now he would wake up
and everything would be back to normal. There would be no ghost of his partner and what
happened between him and Belle never would have happened. She would still be his maid and
life would go on. Yes…any moment now he would wake. Any moment now…

The woman floated inches above the floor, her cold, dead eyes staying locked with his. When he
said her name, she smirked a little and lifted one of her boxes to move, almost dropping it on
Adams foot when she set it back down so that she could sit in the chair across from him like old
times. But reliving the past with a spirit was not a fun activity. It sent shivers up one’s spine and
made them feel as if they were mad.

"You don’t believe in me…” Her voice, dreary and cold echoed through the silent room. "You
can see me… You can hear me… You can smell me.." At that moment, a sudden waft of her old
perfume mixed with the scent of decay, tickled under his nose. "Why do you doubt your senses?"

Gold was still shaken with fear, tenser than ever as he listened and watched her. Her words were
true, but the fact remained she was dead! Yes, she looked like a ghost, but ghosts weren’t real.
Were they?
He took a deep breath before answering her question. “No, but how is it you’re here with me
now? You died…I was there when your body was put in the ground.”

Regina sighed exasperatedly. "Well my body isn’t here, no is it? It is still where you left me, I am
simply a spirit, punished to walk the earth like this.” She soon smirked again." Think about when
YOU die, Gold. Think about how long YOUR chains will be.”

For the first time, he glanced down at the chains and boxes filled with hearts. He had been so
focused on the fact that the ghost of his partner was visiting him, that he hadn’t given them a
thought.
He took a moment to examine them; they looked heavy and burdensome. But why was she
wearing them? Why was she being punished? And what was she talking about, his chains?
His eyes looked up to meet hers again. He still believed this was some sort of hallucination, but
he decided to indulge. “I know not what you speak of.” He was truly confused. “Why do you
even wear these chains?”

Regina picked up another one of her boxes and threw it into his lap. "Each box and chain…
Represents a person whose life I ruined for my own gain… A life WE ruined.” She smirked a
little and let out a bone-chilling laugh. "Remember all those times we wouldn’t let people have an
extra month for rent? And made them live on the streets because we wanted to watch them suffer?
And we STILL made them pay us?”
Adam flinched as the box landed in his lap. His hands instinctively shot out to catch it, but he instantly released it, letting it clamber back down to the floor. His gaze went back up to her and he returned her smile as she spoke about their times together. “Those were some good times,” he agreed. “But I don’t understand. Why would we have to pay for another person’s mistake? If they can’t live up to their agreement, they should have never made it in the first place. It’s not our fault.”

Regina sighed and shook her head. “You really are as dense as I remember you being. It’s a wonder how that woman even fell for you. What is her name. Margie? No… Verna? No…” She glanced over at him. “Besides the point. You ruined people’s lives when you could have instead made them better. You of all people should know about money issues. Remember when Bae’s mother would spend all your hard earned money on liquor? I do. I remember VERY well. And because of you, I have one less chain link. I loaned you money so you and your son could get back on your feet. Yet you never paid me back!” A terrible screech erupted from the spirit as fire burned in her eyes.

Mr. Gold scowled at her, his temper beginning to surface. Every word she said to him struck a nerve. She had always had a tendency to do that in life and apparently in death as well. “I paid you back plenty with all the money I made for you,” he countered.

As much as her bringing that point back up annoyed him, that wasn’t what was really bothering him. He hated how she spoke so fleetingly of Belle. “And her name is Belle and you’re wrong. She doesn’t care for me.”

Regina calmed down a little and scoffed at him, laughing in an amused manner. ”You’re even MORE dense than you were when I was alive. That woman you plan on throwing out tomorrow, her feelings for you are true. But if you don’t believe HER, then there is no way that I can convince you. And seeing as how you can’t even see the faults in how you live your life, some reinforcements are going to have to come in.”

"Reinforcements?" he echoed. "What the hell are you going on about?" He ignored everything else she was talking about. He still refused to believe the truth about Belle and that there were any faults in the way he lived. One thing he couldn’t deny though, was Regina was just as irritating as he remembered-maybe even more.

The woman stood up and stalked over to him, her chains dragging on the ground. "You will be visited by three spirits tonight. Hopefully by the end of it, you will be enlightened. And if not, have fun dragging around chains like me. It’s either you change now, or be damned to this.” She motioned to herself. "For all of eternity once you die.”

Adam’s whole body began to shiver again as she approached him. Even though he still considered this a hallucination, it didn’t make it any the less scary. “W…when will these spirits come?” he asked, showing he was not enthused by the idea at all. One ghost was enough. Did he really have to see three more?

"Throughout the night, Gold. Expect the first one within the next hour, when the clock strikes midnight. The next one two hours or so once you come back from your little journey… and the last one right before dawn. I do hope you learn a few things tonight, Adam. Or expect a restless sleep when you die." Suddenly, she started to get pulled towards his fireplace, boxes entering first as the chains began to pull her back. "Have fun… And Merry Christmas." Suddenly, she was gone with a horrible screech, the flames growing large for a few seconds. Then, it was as if nothing had even been there.

Adam threw his hands up over his face to shield himself from the fire as it seemed to engulf him for a brief moment. But just as fast as it flared up, it went back down.
Slowly, he lowered his hands and opened his eyes. Everything seemed to be normal, just as it was. The fire was low and there was no sign of Regina. There was no sign she had ever even been there at all. “Bah,” he humphed out loud. This was all ridiculous. He had only imagined the whole thing.

Deciding it was best he retired for the night, he stood and went to change into his green silk pajamas. Resting his cane against his nightstand, he climbed in his large canopy bed and shut the thick drapes around it. He enjoyed the darkness.

Pulling the blankets up to his chin, he tried to relax and go to sleep, even though the only thing he could think about was if and when another ghost would be visiting him.
Ding-dong…ding-dong…ding-dong…
Mr. Gold shot up out of bed; the loud noise having startled him. Moving the drapes aside, he peered out and saw it was just the clock on the mantle. It was striking twelve. Twelve. The time the ghost was supposed to arrive. He glanced around the dark room, the fire having almost died down completely. There was nothing there. Even after the clock struck the twelfth cord, the room remained quiet. He sighed and flopped back down on the pillow. So it had been a dream. He was just being paranoid.

As Gold peered out of the curtains, Jiminy flew down and landed on the pillow beside him. When he lay back down, the cricket rubbed his back legs together for a second before he spoke.
"Looking for someone?" he asked, his voice quiet and soft; nothing like Regina's. Jiminy's sounded much more human like and friendly.

Gold turned his head to the side when he heard a voice and literally leaped out of bed when he saw a cricket—a talking cricket. He almost fell because of his bad foot, but managed to catch his balance by grabbing a hold of the nightstand.
His eyes were wide as he stared at the cricket and there was sweat on his brow. "You…you're a…you're a cricket," he stated and both questioned at the same time, his voice shaking with fear.

Jiminy glanced down at himself and shrugged. "The last time I checked." He chuckled softly and hopped over towards Gold a little. "Ghosts come in all different packages. I'm usually a conscience, but today I am your spirit guide to Christmas past. The name is Jiminy."

Mr. Gold looked at him questionably. "So I'm to believe you're the spirit that was foretold to visit me at the stroke of midnight?" he asked. This was all so hard to wrap his head around. "I would have thought you'd be taller."

Jiminy sighed and shook his head. "Don't worry, Adam. No one will see you. If they did, I would lose my job." He got ready to transport them. "How about we go to Christmas twenty years ago?" And suddenly, they were gone in a flash of light.

Mr. Gold didn't have any time to react as the light blinded him. He closed his eyes and waited for it to fade away. They were traveling back in time? But how was that possible? Then again how was it possible ghosts were visiting him?

When the light finally subsided, Gold opened his eyes and gasped. They were no longer standing in his bedroom anymore. Now they were out on the streets, in the snow, looking up a building that
was very familiar to him. It had a large bay window and a wreath hung outside the entryway. A big smile bloomed on his lips. "Why, it's Jefferson's shop! My old boss!"

Using his cane that he had grabbed before they left, he hobbled over to the window to look inside, rubbing some of the condensation off it. There was a party going on…a Christmas one by the looks of it. "And there in the corner, is Jefferson himself. And…” He gasped. "That's me…or that was me!" Sure enough, inside stood a twenty-year younger version of Adam Gold. He was thinner, his hair shorter, with no sign of any grey.

"Mr. Jefferson sir, I have the numbers you requested," Adam said as he walked up to the eccentric man in a top hat and held out a piece of paper.

"Numbers? Adam it's Christmas! We can talk business later. For now, be merry, enjoy yourself!" Jefferson exclaimed, appalled. He placed his arm around the shoulders of a reluctant Adam and began pushing him to walk with him. "Here, I have a lovely young woman I'd like you to meet." He called out to a woman with dark black hair who was chatting with some other guests. "Milah! Come here a moment!"

The woman glanced back over her shoulder when she heard her name being called, a small, happy smile on her red lips and a glass of champagne in her hand. "Yes, Jefferson?" Her voice held a sultry edge and her green eyes held mischievousness.

Jiminy watched Adam's face as the older man watched the scene play out before him. "Christmas twenty years ago and you were still as dedicated to your work then as you are now.. But for much different reasons."

Mr. Gold frowned. Milah. He really hated thinking about that woman. He wished he had never met her. "Yes, but nothing good ever came from that woman," he told the cricket. Pure disgust could be heard in his voice.

Jiminy smiled and rolled his eyes. "I was hoping you might say that."

As Milah began flirting with the young Adam, the cricket and the current Adam were transported to a living room from Adam's old house back when he didn't have enough money for the house he currently owned. Sitting on the floor of the living room was Milah, a still young Adam as well as a toddling child; Bae.

"Are you still sure NOTHING good came from her?"

Gold gasped again as he was transported, having unexpected it once again. He glanced down at himself before looking around the room. His old house…now they were in his old house. He never really cared for it—it was too small—but his thoughts didn't linger on it for long because his eyes landed on his young son. "Bae!" he exclaimed happily. Oh gods, Bae—how could he have forgotten about his son? Of course he was something good that had come from Milah. He was the only thing.

Instinctively, he ran over to the boy, tried to get his attention, and pick him up. However, when his arms went out to grab him, the boy just ran right through them as if he was an apparition as well. He landed in the younger Gold's arms, who embraced him lovingly. No one seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary. "I don't understand," he said looking towards Jiminy for answers.

Jiminy flew off Adam's shoulder and onto a nearby surface when he ran for his child. He chirped a few times to get the man's attention. "I told you that no one would be able to see us. We are simply onlookers from memories of yours."

The cricket took a few seconds to watch the happy family before he flew back over onto Gold's shoulder. "You did love her once… We both know she wasn't all bad. It was just one drink that caused her to become addicted. Mistakes happen. But THIS…was definitely not one of those mistakes. He was your pride and joy until you booted him out and adopted money into your life."
Mr. Gold took a few steps back and became defensive. "I never booted him out! Milah was the one who left! She was the one who abandoned him! I can't help that I had to work hard to make sure he had a good life!"

Mr. Gold sighed heavily and turned his gaze back toward his three year old son and the younger version of himself.

"I love you, Papa," Bae told his father.
"I love you too son," Adam said in return as he hugged the child. Pulling back to look at him, he said with a smile, "Hey why don't you go look under the tree and see what I got you? I need to speak to your mother."

The boy nodded and eagerly ran over to the tree jumping with joy when he saw the toy train. Adam stood to his feet and looked at Milah with a pained expression on his face. "Won't you let him stay here tonight? It's Christmas and I've yet to have him for Christmas," he asked her, practically begging.

Jiminy sighed and shook his head. "I don't mean you literally kicked him out. I mean you turned your back on him in favor of money. And don't deny it, because we both know it is true. You stopped paying attention to him and that was one of the reasons why he left as soon as he turned eighteen. And that is one of the reasons he married Miss. Swan. Because she gave him the attention that you never did."

When Milah heard him, she rolled her eyes and scoffed. "It's not your day to have him over. It never has been and that is why you haven’t had him for Christmas. Maybe if you're lucky, next year I might be working or Christmas might fall on a Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday. But as for now, it's my day to have him over." But then the woman remembered the party she had been invited to but couldn't go to because she had Bae. "Actually, maybe you can have him. I'm feeling in the giving mood and that can be my present for you."

Mr. Gold frowned as he listened to the cricket's words. He couldn't have neglected Bae that much could he? In the memory, the boy looked so happy—it was hard to believe that was the truth.

The younger Adam's eyes lit up when Milah told him what he wanted to hear. But he was still skeptical. She did like to trick him, especially when it involved their son. "You mean that?" he asked narrowing his eyes. "You're not going to return in an hour having changed your mind are you?"

Milah sighed, getting impatient with the man. "Do you want him for the night or not?" She crossed her arms over her chest and looked at him with an exasperated look. "You won't even have to worry about me showing up until noon or one o'clock tomorrow."

Jiminy watched the man as he let the crickets words sink in. Jiminy wasn't an idiot. Just learning about Adam, he knew he would be stubborn. But it seemed that he had finally cracked his stubbornness a little and maybe he would actually listen to him now.

"Yes, yes, of course," Adam said quickly. "He didn't want Milah to change her mind because he angered her. "And come pick him up whenever you'd like tomorrow."

While Milah gathered her things, Adam went over to his son and knelt down on the floor with him. Since it was before his foot injury, he had no problems doing it. "Bae," he said with a big smile. "Would you like to spend all of Christmas with me?"

Bae turned his attention away from his new toy. "Reeeaaalllyyy?" he asked.

Adam nodded and the boy jumped up and down with excitement. Adam chuckled and hugged his son close, ruffling his hair.

Mr. Gold watched the memory closely, scrutinizing every detail. A tear formed in his eye when he saw the happiness on his son's face, but he quickly blinked it away.

Jiminy smiled a little as he watched the sight before him, looking between both Adams as well as
his young son. "You miss those days, don't you. When all you worried about was Bae and making sure he had an amazing life?" the cricket said softly, letting Adam watch the scene for a few more moments before a flash of light engulfed them, taking them to his next memory; one he knew would definitely evoke some emotions from the man. Whether it be sadness or anger, the cricket would soon find out.

Mr. Gold didn't answer Jiminy's question out loud, but he did miss those times. He wished he had had more like that. And he wished he had been smart enough to realize after Milah walked out that evening that she was never coming back. When he glanced around his new surroundings he didn't have to think twice about where they were. He remembered it like it was yesterday. And one thing was for sure, he was not happy the spirit had brought him to relive this memory. "Oh please, no, not this," he begged Jiminy. "I don't want to see this."

They were standing in a bar and in the corner was a group of men and one woman laughing and carrying on—and that woman was Milah.

It was the next day, around ten O' clock at night. Milah should have picked up Bae hours ago but instead, she was recovering from a massive hangover. When the man she had met the previous night invited her to the bar, she couldn't deny him and his sexiness. He was FAR sexier than Adam and understood her more. He understood her love of partying and drinking.

Jiminy glanced up at the man. Should he give in, seeing as how Gold knew what would happen? He wasn't supposed to be hurting the man, but just helping him remember the past. But he seemed to remember this part very well.

Mr. Gold glanced over to the doorway and saw his younger version enter the bar and look around. "Milah?" He questioned as he noticed her over with the group of men.

Milah turned to see who was addressing her and instantly scowled. "Oh, it's you."

"I've been looking all over for you, why haven't you come to get Bae?" Adam asked while he glanced between the other men.

Milah smirked a little when she heard the desperation and concern in his voice. "Well I thought it was obvious. I don't want either of you anymore. Bae prevented me from living my life how I wanted to. And as for you, well, you were just supposed to be a one night stand. But no, you had to go and get me pregnant. Remember when you said that you wanted Bae for Christmas yesterday? Well congratulations. You can have him for all of them."

Adam furrowed his brow in confusion. This was entirely unexpected. "What am I supposed to tell our boy?" he asked once the truth finally sunk in.

"Tell him whatever you like," Milah said uncaring as she turned her attentions back to the man with black hair, a rough, light beard, and dark eyeliner. "He'll learn when he's older that all you care for is money anyway...let him think that's why you drove me away..."

The present Mr. Gold sighed heavily, feeling despair. He could have easily gotten over her if she had just left him, but she left Bae. Bae! How could she abandon her only son? He looked to Jiminy. "Please, please don't show me the part where I have to tell my son..."

If Jiminy was bigger, he would have patted Adams shoulder to comfort him a little. "She never really cared about Bae or for you... But there is someone who does... Someone with a big heart who was willing to give you it until you broke it." There was another flash and suddenly they were standing outside of Game of Thorns flower shop.

"Please don't leave!" nineteen year old Belle said as she ran out of her fathers store and grabbed onto Mr. Gold's suit jacket sleeve, preventing him from walking away. "My father might not be able to pay his debts. B-But... But maybe we can make a deal? Huh? I could... Um... I could work in your shop for free until his debts are paid off... Or maybe... Maybe I could clean your
house once a week for a while," she said, rambling as she gripped his sleeve, determined to make things work out. She would NOT allow her or her father to end up back in that damn poor house.

Mr. Gold turned his head slightly, just enough to where he could look at the pleading girl clinging to his arm. Under normal circumstances he would have shoved her off onto the ground. Groveling was one of his biggest pet peeves. But for some reason he was feeling generous as he looked into those big blue eyes that were sparkling with tears. He had an idea… After a long moment of silence, Mr. Gold faced her and smiled like he always did when he was about to get his way. "I could use a maid…but I have a very very large estate. Once or twice a week would never do."

Belle swallowed hard when she heard him and saw that smile stretch across his face. It was no ordinary smile; it was a malicious one. It reminded her of a Cheshire cat. Chills ran up her spine as she forced back her tears, doing her best to stay strong. "Wh-What do you have in mind then?" she asked the man rather nervously.

"Well I suppose if you agree to come with me as my full time caretaker," he said waving a hand in the air as he spoke, "I would agree to forgive all of your father's debts."

His hand returned to resting on the top of his cane as he stared at her awaiting her response.

Belle let out a ragged breath as she heard the man, glancing back at her father who was practically weeping as he sat on the ground with his back against his counter. Taking a deep breath, the brave girl let go of his sleeve and held out a trembling hand. "Y-You...You've got yourself a deal..." She said, forcing herself to keep her hand out as a silent tear spilled down her cheek. Not only would she have to leave her father, but she would have to live with the town's monster.

Gold tilted his head, leaning toward her ever so slightly. "Are you sure, dearie?" he asked giving her one last chance to change her mind. "I hope you realize this is not some short term deal. If you come with me, then it will be forever..."

The girl glanced at her father again and saw that he was looking at them. He suddenly started to get up, knowing what she was doing; she was making a deal with the devil. "Belle! No!" her father yelled.

Quickly turning back to Mr. Gold, she shoved her hand into his to seal the deal, squeezing her eyes shut. "Yes," she stated as her father came barreling out of the shop. He grabbed his daughter and pulled her away from the man. "What did you just agree to!?" he yelled as he shook her, making her open her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Father... I had to..." She rasped out to him.

"She was always a brave one, wasn't she? Taking risks for the ones she loved... Even if they didn't love her back," Jiminy said softly before bringing them to a new setting. This time, it wasn't as far back. Maybe eight months earlier, maximum. They were in Adam's house again, but it was his current one.

"Yes, she was," Gold said softly as his gaze fell to the ground in shame. His mind was still lingering on the past memory.

"What was so different about her that made you so 'generous'?" Jiminy asked, trying to get Gold to reflect on his actions.

"I was lonely and selfish... Bae had left home a couple years earlier. And that day she intrigued me with her boldness," he admitted with a hint of guilt in his voice. His gaze went back over to Jiminy. "You say she cares for me? But I don't understand how? I took her away from her father on Christmas! I've never even let her visit him! I confine her to my home or shop! She spends all day doing everything I force her to do... She's locked away with a beast." His voice was rising a little with anger, but that anger was directed toward himself.
The cricket smiled a little and moved his gaze towards the pair that just walked right through them, knowing Adam would follow suit.

"Can you PLEASE tell me why you had me pack up all my things? I didn't even do anything wrong!" Belle pleaded with Gold. How could he be throwing her out? She was just polishing his dining room table when he told her to pack everything in her room then follow him. Soon she found him leading her up some stairs. Swallowing hard, she glanced up at him. "Wh-Where are we going?"

"The basement was getting rather crowded," Mr. Gold stated keeping his eyes on the stairs ahead of him and his face neutral. At the top of the stairs he turned to the right and led her down the hallway until he came to a closed door. Reaching out to grab the handle, he turned to look at her. "And I can't have you complaining and slacking off on your chores because of it."

Slowly he turned the doorknob and opened the door, revealing a small bedroom. There was a canopy bed in the corner, as well as a matching dresser. Along the walls were several bookshelves packed with books. Some of them were even spilling out onto the floor. On the far side of the room was a window that looked out onto the front yard.

When Mr. Gold opened the door, Belle's eyes widened and she almost dropped her bags. Walking inside, she looked around with amazement before she set her bags down and flopped down on the bed. It was beyond comfortable. The bed she had been sleeping on for the past two years was practically a army cot with a single pillow and blanket. This room was amazing. The whole room probably cost more than her father's entire apartment. And the books. There were more books in there than she had read in her whole life.

Mr. Gold lingered in the doorway. Now that it was her room, he felt he shouldn't enter unless invited. A small smile formed on his face as he watched Belle's reaction. It appeared she liked it.

Clearing his throat, he made the smile disappear. "Now I know that bed is comfortable, but I still expect my breakfast bright and early every morning," he told her with the best serious face he could muster. "No sleeping in."

When Belle sat up to look up at him, she could tell that he was trying to hide a smile. Her heart fluttered madly from the look on his face and the invisible onlookers could see the gleam enter her eye but the Adam standing before couldn't. That was the moment Belle knew that she had feelings for him. He showed that he actually cared about her subtly and he knew how much she loved books.

A smile crossed the on looking Mr. Gold's face when he saw the look in Belle's eyes. At the time he had thought it was just the euphoria from the bedroom and books, but now he could see the only thing she was looking at was his past self.

Jiminy watched his reaction carefully and smiled as well. "You wouldn't admit it, but you cared for her too, you know... just take a look at all those books."

Gold chuckled. "From day one I could tell how much she loved books." He sighed and shook his head. "I should never had made her go so long without them..."

Belle looked away to hide the happy look and almost loving gleam in her eyes. It just so happened that the painting on the wall where she chose to look was exactly where the invisible Adam was before turning her gaze back to the man standing in the doorway. "Thank you..." she murmured, "For all of this... Giving me a proper, warm place to live with a roof over my head and warm meals to eat, letting me come here to keep my father out of the poorhouse."

Jiminy smiled a little bit. "From that moment on, and even after what you did to her earlier, her heart longed to be with you."

The present Mr. Gold smiled brighter, unable to take his eyes off Belle's. He knew she wasn't
really looking at him, but if felt like she was. He wanted more than anything to go over to her and
embrace her, but he knew that wasn’t really Belle. It was just a shadow of the past.
After hearing the cricket’s words, he was still a little skeptical. "I'm not so sure about that. Anyone
would react that way after staying down in the basement on an uncomfortable bed for so long."

Jiminy shook his head and chuckled a little. "She had been feeling things for you before that. She
didn’t know what they were. Her heart would occasionally flutter when you smiled or you spoke
to her like she was a human being rather than a maid. But this action, that smile on your face she
saw that came from you making her happy, made her realize exactly what those feelings were."

"You can thank me by putting a decent dinner on the table after you settle in," Adam from the
memory told Belle before he turned and left the room.
Mr. Gold couldn't tear his gaze away from Belle. He still wasn't sure if Jiminy's words rang true,
but if anything, the way Belle acted when he wasn't around would help confirm or disprove them.

When Belle watched him leave, she chuckled softly, her cheeks turning a light shade of pink as she
found herself staring longingly at the spot where he had just been. "There is no way I can ever
repay you for what you gave to me…” she mumbled quietly to herself, her hand unconsciously
moving up to above her swelling heart before she got up to unpack.

"Is that proof enough for you? What about all the times, after this, she went above and beyond to
try to impress you and make you see her in a different light?” Jiminy said softly.

"I don't recall anything out of the ordinary," Mr. Gold replied still refusing to see what was right in
front of him. "She has always acted like a maid should…a very good one at that."
Jiminy shook his head at the stubborn man. "Well perhaps her feelings will be more prominent
when you watch what happens here,” he said as a flash of white light once again blinded them.
As the light dissipated, Mr. Gold eagerly looked around. Now they were in the back room of his
shop. His past self was sitting behind the desk discussing business with a very important client-a
very beautiful client. She was tall and slender, with deep auburn hair, and bright green eyes.
"Zelena?" Gold questioned, very confused, "What does she have to do with Belle?” He couldn't
even recall them ever meeting.

Jiminy stayed quiet as he let the scene answer the confused man's questions.

Belle walked into Gold's shop quietly, making sure the bell didn't ring. The girl wanted to surprise
him with a lunch she had made and brought him that was currently in a brown paper bag. She
had expected him to be in the back. What she hadn’t expected was the soft, sultry female voice that
came flooding from the back.
Adam and Jiminy were in the doorway that led to the backroom so they could see Zelena and
Gold as well as Belle.
When she heard what the woman said, Belle’s heart stopped.
"...How about that new little Italian place down the street? I know how much you love your
pasta. Think of it as a date.” With the smirk that was on Zelena’s lips, to someone that was looking
at her it was obvious that the last part was a joke. But to Belle, it sounded like Adam had found
someone to fill the hole in his heart who wasn't her.

"I'm sure I will after I get the bill," Gold replied with dread, "Seven o'clock then?"
"Seven o'clock,” Zelena echoed, confirming the time. She stood up straight and turned to leave,
her heels clicking the floor as she walked. "I do so look forward to it," she added before moving
the curtain aside to walk into the next room.
As she turned her head back to face the front, she came to a screeching halt before almost
colliding right into Belle. "Oh, I'm sorry dear,” she apologized, having placed a hand on her
chest from being startled. "Please forgive me." Her smile was soft, but it appeared to turn a bit
wicked when she took a moment to look Belle up and down. She saw the brown paper bag in
Belle's hand. "Oh, you must be the maid...my aren't you precious?" Her voice was soft and sweet, spoken as if she was speaking to a young child.

The girl's heart got ripped from her chest when she saw how beautiful the woman was. Belle had tried to look her best with what she had, but she knew even if she had all the make up in the world and the most beautiful clothes, she could never measure up to the woman in front of her.

But her jaw clenched when she heard the woman's condescending tone. Belle felt her eyes sting a little as she forced herself to stay in control of her emotions. "I may be the maid, but you still knew who I was. I on the other hand have NO clue who or WHAT you are." Belle looked her up and down with a slightly disgusted look. "And who exactly are YOU?" she said in a bitter tone. 'Some two cent whore trying to steal my man!?' The girl wanted to yell at her but she held her tongue.

Zelena scowled, but managed to retain a wicked demeanor about her. "Seeing as you're the help, that's really no concern of yours," she said snidely, but somehow her voice was still soft. She moved aside so she could get past Belle. "I can't imagine you talk that way to Adam," she noted, revealing that she knew his first name. Her wicked grin returned. She stepped over to the front door and opened it partially. Giving Belle one last glance, she added, "Just like me-he'd never put up with it. I know if I was your boss, you'd be groveling at my feet begging for mercy right about now." With that, Zelena exited, slamming the door behind her causing some of the items close to it to jiggle.

Mr. Gold's fists clenched at his sides. "If only I had known the way she spoke to Belle..." he said, his temper rising, "I would have never been so generous with our deal."

Belle continued to glare at the woman, feeling a sense of pride from the taken back look on Zelena's face. Once she walked out, Belle let the look fall off her face and let it be replaced by the pain she was feeling. Oh god...what if they got married and she had to answer to HER?! Belle would probably kill herself. Not only would she have to see them together, but she would have to do whatever she said or she would make Adam fire her.

Taking a deep breath, Belle decided that she couldn't hold in her emotions anymore and she had to leave. Waiting until she could see properly, she began to walk to the door to leave, glancing back at the door that led into the back room —where Jiminy and Adam happened to be standing again— tears twinkling in her blue eyes. Jiminy glanced up at Adam. "So you DO care about her?"

Mr. Gold was too focused on the tears in Belle's eyes and the devastated look on her face to hear Jiminy. She was hurting—that was obvious—but why? Had Zelena's words really upset her that much? Besides that, he really couldn't understand why Zelena bothered Belle so.
"Eh...did you say something?" Mr. Gold questioned after he realized Jiminy had been talking. He was still looking at Belle.
Suddenly, Adam from the past stepped out from behind the curtain, looking down at the floor as he strolled. Turning his gaze upward, his eyes widened when he saw Belle dawdling in the doorway. She looked like she was about to leave. He called after her, "Belle?"

When she heard her name being called, Belle tensed and swallowed hard, hand on the doorknob. Taking a deep breath, she forced herself to sound normal but her words came out a little strangled sounding. "I-I was just dropping off your lunch I made you..." She kept her back to him as she reached out and placed the bag on the counter near her, a tear falling down her cheek. "...But you were BUSY..." She quickly left, wiping away her tear as she walked past the store window, suppressing sobs.

The Mr. Gold behind the counter was oblivious to Belle's tears but the invisible Adam who was watching was practically forced to watch as she wiped away her tears. Jiminy shook his head, knowing his question was answered already. "It broke her heart to think
you would be going on a date with someone that was not her. Because from what she heard, it
sounded like you and Zelena had agreed to go on a romantic date…And it also scared her to think
that maybe one day she would have to answer to that monster of a woman."

"I remember wondering why she didn't stay to visit…" Gold recalled aloud, watching his younger
self walk over to pick up the bag and stare at the front door questionably. "Now it all makes
sense." He was feeling terrible; he never knew how many tears he actually caused Belle and
seeing them now-really seeing them-was unbearable.
"And do you remember what happened after that?" Jiminy queried, not actually looking for an
answer from the man. "Or were you too oblivious to notice?"
The shop slowly faded away and they were back in Gold's house. The rooms were darker than
normal and Belle was still in the same outfit so Gold knew it was evening on the same day.

The girl paced a little and found things to do to keep herself busy. She cleaned and baked and
made tea all to distract her mind from the thoughts that threatened to takeover. Telling by the
average length of a date, Adam should be home any minute. But for some odd reason, she
couldn't stop herself from thinking that he wouldn't be home for hours.

Every few minutes she would check out the front window to see if he was walking up the walkway,
but he never was. She busied herself with scrubbing all the floors that night. She scrubbed the
kitchen floor, the dining room floor, the hallways, the foyer, everywhere except the basement.
Occasionally, she let a few tears fall, as she would glance over at the front door when she passed
by it.

Everything was speed up an hour in Belle's time seemed like five minutes to the observers. Every
once in a while, it would slow down for a few seconds so they could see the pain on her face.
"When you finished your date and decided it was a great idea to go to your shop for the rest of the
night to work on something and not come back till the next day, little did you know that Belle
stayed up all night, cleaning, worrying, crying. But it wasn't until you came home in the morning
with your hair slightly askew and your tie crooked that she felt the most pain."

Mr. Gold stepped up to the front door early that morning and pulled out his keys. His deal with
Zelena had gone very well the night before and afterwards he had decided to return to the shop to
get to work on it. He had been so engulfed in the project that he had ended up spending the night
there.
That morning, he left David in charge so he could go home for a few hours.
When he opened the front door, he put his things down and immediately went to the kitchen
expecting Belle to have breakfast ready.

Belle had lost all hope when the sun had begun to rise. Her body and emotions had become numb
and all that was running trough her mind was the image of Mr. Gold walking through the front
door looking chipper and bright, a smile wide across his lips.; a smile that she didn't cause. After
she collected herself, she got up to make herself breakfast. She made toast with jam and eggs.

Suddenly, she heard the door open and it almost made her jump out of her skin. Being sleep
deprived, she was a little jumpy, had dark circles under her eyes, and she could barely focus on
more than one thing at a time. Getting up from where she had sat to eat, she walked to the front to
be greeted by the sight she had been waiting for all night. But it was a little different that she
imagined. There wasn't a bright glow around Adam that one got from lovemaking, nor was there
a bright smile on his lips. But there still was clear evidence to her theory. The tousled hair…the
crooked tie…and his suit jacket was open. "Good morning, Mr. Gold."

When Mr. Gold laid eyes on Belle he smiled big. He normally smiled when he saw her, but he
usually tried to hide it and it was never as big. This time, however, he was in a very good mood
from the deal, so he tried to hide nothing. "A very good morning indeed, Belle. I trust you have
my breakfast ready?” he said with a chirpier tone than usual.

Belle almost winced when she saw his smile. She had yet to take a bite out of her breakfast so she planned on giving him hers. "Yes… I’ll just set it on the table..." She turned and took a deep breath, walking back to the kitchen. After grabbing her plate, she took it into the dining room and all but dropped it in front of him. She turned her sadness and pain into anger to hide it. "Enjoy," she said rather bitterly.

He quirked an eyebrow at her, having picked up on her agitation. However, he said nothing of it. Instead, since he was in one of his better moods, he glanced over to the other side of the table. "Why don't you join me?" he asked.

Belle crossed her arms over her chest as she turned to walk away. She suddenly heard him and huffed a little as she turned back around. "Because I currently don't have a breakfast nor am I hungry," she said, motioning to his plate before re-crossing her arms, her jaw clenched slightly.

Adam glanced between her and his plate, scowling. He definitely didn't mistake the hint of agitation in her mannerisms and voice that time. If she kept this up his good mood would surely be soured.

"Have you already eaten?" he asked, still trying to salvage the moment. She didn't always eat with him unless he requested it. However, more and more recently that was changing. He usually came downstairs to find she had waited to eat her breakfast so that they could eat together. Why was this day any different? He may not have come home the night before, but he was still back at his usual time for breakfast.

Belle shook her head to answer his question. "I didn't expect you to even be back until tonight," she said, dropping her gaze as she tried to calm down. "I was just getting ready to eat when you came in, but seeing as how you come before me, I have given you my untouched breakfast." If Belle didn't still care about him, she would have made him breakfast and spat in the eggs. But to stop herself from doing so, she gave him her breakfast.

The pain growing in her heart was almost unbearable. "But if you truly wish for me to join you, I shall make myself a piece of toast."

He watched her carefully as she spoke, scrutinizing her every move and word. He still didn't pick up on her sadness, nor did he realize what her action really meant. But, to him, it did explain her aggravation.

"Bring me another plate and fork," he commanded from her with a neutral face.

Belle's gaze rose as she looked over at him, a little confused by his words. Shrugging off her confusion, she did what he said and brought him the plate and fork, placing it down gently this time. "Anything else?" she asked, her voice less bitter and more numb sounding as she did her best to block out the pain.

Adam remained quiet and kept his eyes on her. Reaching over, he picked up the plate and brought it over to his. Taking the fork he scooped approximately half of the eggs off his plate, cut the toast in half, and put them on the other plate. He held the plate up for her. "Here, now you can join me," he said with just barely a hint of a smile.

When she realized what he was doing, heard what he said, and saw that smile he tried to hide, she wanted to slap him and have him be mean to her so that she could get over him. But no, he had to go and do something like that and win her heart over again. "Th-Thank you, Mr. Gold..." She carefully took her plate and went over to sit in her usual spot, shoulders a little hunched as she waited for him to start eating first like she always did.
His eyes continued to flicker back and forth between the food and Belle as he picked up his fork and took the first bite. "I would have informed you about the possibility I would be out all night, but you rushed out of the shop so fast yesterday afternoon, you didn't allow me the opportunity," he told her.

Belle picked at her food, only occasionally taking bites of it. She was hurting and she didn't want to be anymore. Why could he just yell at her and make her hate him? "You seemed busy so I didn't want to distract you by staying and visiting. Besides… You had a date to get ready for," she said the last part a bit bitterly, her grip tightening on her fork.

"Yes, and it went very well," he replied, not realizing at all she had assumed it was a romantic date. He paused in the middle of a bite and glanced up at her with a furrowed brow. "Wait…how did you know about that?"

Belle sighed softly and shook her head. "Lets just say, I came in quietly to surprise you and heard you and your… Companion making the final plans. She is a very.. LOVELY woman," she practically spat out as she glared at the middle of the table, her face turning slightly red as her jaw clenched.

Jiminy looked up at Adam who had walked into the dining room to watch what was happening. "Do you wish to watch anymore? Because there is one more thing I believe you should see. But it is not a memory of YOURS."

"Yes she was a very lovely woman," the young Adam confirmed. "A very lovely woman who I made a very lovely deal with. I'll be making a lot of money off of her."

Mr. Gold shut his eyes briefly in relief. At least he had made a comment that would allow Belle to realize he hadn't been dating that wretched woman. Zelena had been a business partner and nothing more. The thought that poor Belle ever even considered them a couple broke his heart. He had never meant to cause that kind of stress.

"I don't think you need to show me anything else," the present Mr. Gold said, as he never took his eyes off Belle while waiting for her reaction. He hesitated before saying his next statement, not wanting to admit what he knew all along. "It…eh…it's easy to see she feels something," he finally admitted, but he still refused to believe it was love.

"Belle let his words sink in and suddenly her eyes widened and she felt like the most foolish person in the world. "It was a business meeting..." She said quietly to herself. But that didn't explain where he had been all night."

Jiminy smiled a little when he heard the second thing Adam said. So the cricket had made SOME progress with the man. "I'm glad you think that you don't need to see anymore, but this one is something someone else would want you to see."

Suddenly, they were in a small apartment with a couple curled up on a small, old couch together and a young girl was decorating the Christmas tree. The young girl who was about ten years old had cobalt blue eyes and wild chestnut curls that went past the middle of her back. The man in the room would be the only recognizable person to Adam; Maurice French. And the woman in his arms who looked like she would take her last breath any moment was Collette French. That made the little girl Belle French.

Mr. Gold looked around the small and dingy room curiously. It was very obvious that Belle hadn't been lying to him when she said her family had been poor. He glanced over at the couple on the couch. "Is that Belle's mother?" he wondered aloud, assuming the answer was yes. Jiminy nodded. "And I believe you know that little girl," he said, pointing to Belle decorating the tree.
Gold's eyes finally landed on Belle and he became confused. "I'm afraid, I don't understand. Why would you show me one of her childhood memories? I didn't know her nor the French's at the time." Maybe he had done business with Maurice and couldn't remember?

Jiminy nodded his head and sighed softly. "It is her mother… She was dying of pneumonia because they couldn't pay the heating bill in the coldest of the winters and she gave her extra blankets to Belle to stay warm. They also didn't have enough money to buy her the medicine she needed to get better. And as for the importance of seeing this, you shall find out soon."

The woman wheezed and coughed a little, her husband pulled her closer and wrapping the blanket around her tighter and whispering comforting words in her ear, trying to stay strong. Both Maurice and Collette knew that this would be her last Christmas and they wanted to make it the best one for both Collette and Belle. "M… Moe..." Collette rasped out. "C-Could you get my p-present… for Belle from our room… I want to g-give it to her now…"

Her husband nodded and carefully sat his wife up before he got up and went to their tiny room and grabbed the poorly wrapped gift. Handing it to his wife, he let Belle take his spot. "My d-darling, Belle..." Collette said with a frail smile, handing her the gift. "I've been waiting for the perfect time to give this to you..." She did her best to sound not sick for her daughter's sake. "It was my mother's and she gave it to me and now it sh-shall be yours. Let it be there for you when I am not. It shall be my watchful eyes when I am not there to guide you."

Belle bit her bottom lip and carefully opened the gift to find a beautiful snow globe inside of it. The same one Adam smashed.

Mr. Gold watched the scene carefully, trying to determine how it related to him. When Colette handed Belle the snow globe, it wasn't until Belle held it up and shook it that he recognized he had seen it before. "Oh gods…oh gods no!" he said stumbling backwards. "It can't be the same one-the one I smashed…please no..." Tears began welling up in his eyes. If what he was seeing was real, there was no way Belle would ever forgive him. There was no way she could ever love him-not after this. He had smashed her mother's special gift to her-her gift before she had died. He truly was a horrible person.

He turned to Jiminy with pleading eyes and tears streaming down his cheeks. "Spirit, please, please tell me this is not real…tell me this never happened..."

Gold collapsed onto his knees, falling forward to his hands, and continued begging the cricket to tell him what he wanted to hear. "Please-tell me I didn't smash something so dear to Belle… please!" He shut his eyes tight trying to block everything out, trying to will it to be false. "Please," he continued to beg, as he began to thrash around in anger. "Please....no!"

Suddenly, Adam's eyes popped open and he shot up in bed. He was sweating profusely, panting heavily, and his face was burning with fresh tears. Looking around frantically, it took him a minute to realize he was back home, in his bed, clutching his blanket so hard his hands hurt. Tossing the blanket aside, he buried his head in his hands to try and compose himself. A dream. It was all a dream. Everything was a dream. But was the memory of Belle's mother a dream? Had that snow globe really been a present from her? There was only one way to find out and more importantly there was something he needed to do. Glancing over at the clock, he saw it was close to 1:30 in the morning. Belle would be fast asleep, but he didn't care. This couldn't wait.

Climbing out of his bed, he put on a robe and a pair of slippers before making his way out into the dark hallway. Stepping up to Belle's doorway, he took a deep breath and then knocked on the door hoping she would answer.
Belle lay in her bed, not really asleep. She had been reading with a candle on her nightstand to try to take her away from everything that had happened. She was nowhere near being tired. Everything in the room that belonged to her was packed away at the bottom of her bed. The young woman jumped a little when she suddenly heard a knock on her door. Putting her bookmark into her book, she got out of bed and hugged her arms around herself. She had on a rather plain nightgown that had a little bit of lace on it. It was nothing extremely flattering, but her curls hung over her shoulders with the bow still in it. Biting her slightly swollen bottom lip—from biting it so much to stop crying—she nervously opened the door.

When she found a distraught looking Mr. Gold on the other side, she dropped her gaze. "Mr. Gold… What are you doing awake at this time? Did I… Did I do something?"

When Gold’s eyes met Belle’s, he welled up with emotion. He had so many things he wanted to say—he needed to say. He wasn’t sure what to say first. One thing he knew for sure, however, was that actions spoke louder than words. Without hesitation, he stepped right up to her, grabbed her around the waist, and pulled her right to him. His lips found hers instantly and he kissed her with all the passion and love in his heart, hoping to gods she wouldn’t pull away.

Belle gasped loudly when she felt his arms wrap around her suddenly. As his lips pressed against hers, her eyes stayed wide and her body stayed stiff, but she felt all the emotion he put into it. Soon, she began to kiss him back before she abruptly pulled back, her head dropping and eyes staying closed. "But… But you… You said…” She stammered out, her heart not able to take any more pain. "I—I thought you didn’t want me,” she rasped out as tears began to burn her eyes. "Please.. I can’t handle kissing you but not being with you anymore. It hurts too much.”

"I know…I know what I said,” he told her, trying to tilt his head to look into her eyes. "And I’m a fool Belle, a fool. I’m sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I do want you. I didn’t mean what I said. I was scared. It’s hard for me to believe you could ever care for me—that anyone could ever care for me.” His face was showing all the emotion that he felt and his eyes were red-rimmed. What had HE been crying about?

Belle swallowed hard when she heard him, peeking up to glance up at him. When she was finally able to look up at him, she noticed that his cheeks were tear stained and his eyes were red-rimmed and puffy. Reaching up, she cupped his cheek and wiped under his eye with her thumb. "Have you… Have you been crying?” She said to him softly. His face reflected hers: he dried tears, the puffy, bloodshot eyes. What had HE been crying about?

The feel of her hand on his face was so soothing; he had to resist closing his eyes and enjoying it. “Perhaps,” he replied, feeling uncomfortable about admitting to crying, even though it was entirely obvious. “Belle, I don’t want to hurt you,” he said as he reached up as well to stroke her cheek. “And I know I have done that-more than I ever realized. Do you think you could ever forgive
When she heard him, a small smile bloomed on her lips, her heart fluttering madly in her chest. "Of course, Adam... As long as you accept my heart and are gentle with it, I shall forgive you for everything." She leaned forward and pressed a small kiss to his lips. "And if you'll trust me, I would love to be able to hold yours..." She murmured softly.

He nodded, sniffing, trying not to let more tears fall. At least this time they were tears of joy. He smiled at her softly and stroked a curl out of her face. "My heart is yours— all of it— for as long as you want it."

He paused, still worried about how she was feeling. "But are you sure you can forgive me for everything. Even... even for... for shattering your mother's snow globe?"

Belle let out a ragged breath when she heard his question, looking back down. "Yes... It was very special to me but it was meant to let me know I wasn’t alone; that she would be there to watch over me when I had no one... But... But now I have you to look out for me and keep me out of trouble." The girl looked back up at him with a weak smile, her words being truthful. Then her expression changed to one of confusion. "W-Wait... How... How did you know that was my mother's snow globe?"

So the globe really was her mother's— that was what he was thinking when she asked him how he knew about it. "Eh," he said, not really knowing how to explain it, "you wouldn’t believe me if I told you."

Belle bit her bottom lip and thought about how he could have known. He probably just read the bottom of it. Slowly she slid her arms up and over his shoulders so she could hug herself closer, letting out a small yawn before she shrugged it off. "So I assume you wish to go back to your bed soon... It's not exactly an appropriate time to be awake."

He held her closer in return, unable to believe he really had Belle in his arms. She was forgiving him. She really was forgiving him. "Would you prefer if I did?" he asked, clearing seeing she was exhausted. She had had a long night after all. However, he wasn’t ready to leave her. They had just made up... they had just admitted their feelings for one another. He wanted nothing more to be as close to her as possible. But if she wanted him to go, he would understand.

Belle wasn’t sure of the physical boundaries between them so she decided to push her luck and move her head to rest it on his shoulder, letting her eyes shut for a few moments. When she heard him, she instantly tightened her grip on him a little. "No... But I would understand if you would want to go back to sleep..." She said softly, yawning again.

Resting his head against hers, he began to rub her back in small and soothing circles. He smiled when he heard her yawn. "I can see you want to go to sleep," he observed.

Belle let out a content sigh, feeling like she was complete in his embrace. "I would... But I... I feel bad that we can’t spend more time together after what just happened," she murmured, slowly pulling her head back to look up at him.

Something occurred to him, but he fretted a little about asking her. He didn’t want her to think he had an ulterior motive to confessing his feelings. "If you’d prefer," he started deciding to be bold, "you could join me in my room." His eyes widened as he realized what she might think he was asking. "To sleep! Only to sleep... nothing more," he quickly added before she could get the wrong idea. He would have offered to stay in her room, but her bed was significantly smaller and he wanted her to be comfortable.
Belle looked up at him with furrowed brows for a moment, about to step away and deny what he offered, but then she heard him fret over making sure she knew he meant to only sleep, a small smile grew on her lips as she looked up at him. "I would like that, Adam… Adam… Adam…" Her voice soon began to change and echo, sounding more and more masculine and everything began to become fuzzy.

"Belle?" he questioned becoming increasingly confused and worried by the second. "Belle, what’s happening?"
He reached out to grab her shoulder when suddenly she began to fade away. “Belle!” he cried frantically.
His eyes popped open and he looked around. He was back in his bed…again. And he was hugging his pillow, just like he had been hugging Belle. It was all a dream-everything was dream. He never went and apologized. She never forgave him. It was all just a wishful dream. It made sense to him then; he knew she would never truly forgive him, not for all that he had done.
Suddenly, a bright light flooded through the cracks of the canopy, startling him. “Adam?” He heard that male voice again…the same one Belle's voice had morphed into in the dream. Cautiously he reached over and moved the curtain aside to peek out into the room.
Chapter 6

Anton smiled brightly when he saw Adam finally peeking out of his bed. He sat behind a large table with tons of food on it. "Care for a bite before our journey?" he said, getting up and pulling out a chair for the man. "Come, come, don’t be shy."
The man went over and pulled the curtain open on Adams bed. "I have lots of wonderful food that I know are your favorites. How could you resist!?" he said with a jolly laugh.

Oh gods not again, Mr. Gold thought to himself. Why couldn’t this be another dream? Did he really have to go through all of this again?

As Anton moved the curtain, Mr. Gold’s eyes widened big when he saw the spirit. He was a very large man-no he was huge-a giant! It was a wonder he could even fit in the house! His hair was long, he had a thick black beard, and he was dressed in elegant green and red robes, made out of fine silks and velvet.

This time, Gold managed not to panic. One ghost and a talking cricket had already visited him. He was at least getting used to it.

Sliding over to the edge of the bed, he grabbed his cane, but did not stand right away. "And who I am to assume you are?" he asked politely, but also in a way that said he was tired of these visits.

Anton chuckled at the mans tone, rolling his eyes in a playful manner before he bowed. "My name is Anton and I shall be your spirit guide to Christmas present. But I still do insist on having a bite to eat."

He moved to go back to where he was sitting. "The places we shall be going will have a lot of food and I don’t know about you, but I tend to get awfully hungry when watching people eat."
The giant man patted the seat again before he popped a whole vine of grapes into his mouth. "How about a nice meat pie, hmm? Does that suit your fancy? Or maybe some roast turkey to keep it festive?" His jolly laugh filled the room again momentarily.

Gold stood and approached the table, examining the massive amounts of food that littered it and the floor. There was enough food to feed at least fifty people! Where did it all come from?

Carefully, he sat down in the chair next to the giant. Although Anton seemed very friendly, Gold was nervous. Not only was he sitting next to a giant, but also they were about to embark on yet another journey. "I’m really not hungry…” he told the giant. He had after all eaten a delicious and filling meal with Belle that evening.

Anton smiled down at him and took a bite of another piece of food. "Suit yourself.” He ate a whole chicken leg before he spoke again. "That was a lovely dream you had earlier. I’m sorry that I had to wake you up from it. Hopefully when morning comes, you will still be able to share that moment with the lass. We both know that she is a very forgiving person. You need not fear of her staying angry."

Anton had seen his dream? That felt odd to know he had watched, but it really shouldn’t have, given everything else that had gone on that night.

Mr. Gold frowned and his gaze fell to the floor. He fiddled with the top of his cane. "I fear she may not. I’ve hurt her pretty badly…” He wasn’t even sure if he could apologize to Belle, being the coward that he was.

Anton carefully patted him on the back. "Well, be as bold as you were in that dream, tell her how much she means to you. Perhaps even profess the feelings we both know you have. And if you still feel like not doing it, I have a friend who will stop by later and hopefully she can change your
mind. Besides the point, are you ready to go? Good thing no one will be able to see you because
you are terribly underdressed for where we are going.” Suddenly, they were gone in a poof of
light.

Mr. Gold had to shut his eyes quickly to block out the unexpected light. As many times as he had
done this, he still was unaccustomed to it. He wasn’t sure he ever would be. Then again, he hoped
he never had to be. He hoped this would all be over soon and that it would be over for good.
Once the light faded, he opened his eyes and glanced around to see where they were.

They were back in Gold’s house. Though, it was the next morning this time. The snowstorm had
settled down and left the entire town in a thick blanket of white.
In Belle’s eyes, it seemed like the universe kept telling her to stay. But unfortunately, that was not
an option. She carefully maneuvered her trunk down the stairs. When she reached the bottom, she
noticed Adam was in the kitchen making himself some tea. She forced herself to look away as she
began to pull her coat and boots on.

Mr. Gold watched his present self continue with what he was doing, not even glancing toward
Belle’s direction. Why couldn’t he just stop her? Oh that’s right…because he was a coward. Plus
he knew she would never forgive him.

Walking over to Belle, he couldn’t help but reach out and try to grab her arm to stop her, but his
hand just went right through her.

When Belle finished what she needed to, she walked over to the present Mr. Gold to hand him her
key to the house. "I won’t be needing this anymore.”

When he wouldn’t look at her, she couldn’t help but gaze longingly at him. If he apologized and
professed his feelings, she would run back to him in a heart beat. After a few moments, she
walked into the dining room to grab her snow globes, including her broken one.

"Stop her," Gold tried to will himself. "Stop her!” He cried out angrily, but it was no use. Just like
the past this was a shadow and he had no influence on the events.
It was then he saw the snow globe again-the one he broke-and the memory of Belle’s mother
giving it to her resurfaced.
He frowned and sighed, feeling defeated. “Perhaps, it’s better she leaves,” he told the spirit, “even
if she could forgive me for everything else, I don’t see how she could ever forgive me for
destroying something so precious.”

Anton was normal size now and not the giant he was before. It made it easier to fit into houses. He
patted Gold on the shoulder as the man beside him watched the girl pick up her snow globe.
She wrapped both of them in her two scarves, trying not to look at the broken one. She wouldn’t
have been as upset if he had ended up choosing her and apologizing. Hell, she knew that it was
what her mother would have wanted; someone to love her and take care of her. When she finished
packing them in her trunk, she walked back over to Mr. Gold in hopes of saying goodbye. "M-
Mr. Gold? Despite how things turned out, I would like to thank you for letting me live and pay off
my fathers debt…” She said softly, gaze dropping.

Mr. Gold continued standing there, showing absolutely no emotion. He briefly glanced down at
her from the side, but didn’t turn his head. “Just go,” he said quietly through gritted teeth, “before I
decide your debt has not been repaid.” It was a threat he would follow through with if he had to.
He was retreating back to the man he had been for so many years. It was the only way to push her
away.

When she heard him, Belle’s breath got caught in her throat and her gaze moved up to meet his
cheek, his eyes still going nowhere near her. Her already broken heart ached severely when he
spoke coldly to her. Letting out a ragged breath, she shook her head and looked at him with pain
and disgust on her face. "Fine.” She turned on her heels and stormed out of the kitchen, grabbing
the trunk of her belongings. She struggled a little to get out as fast as she could, slipping and falling down the front steps a little, bruising parts of her legs as she mumbled about how much she hated him even though both she and Anton knew that her heart STILL yearned for him.

The real Mr. Gold stood there and watched helplessly, his heart just as broken, his body aching to go after her. “Where’s she going to go?” he asked Anton. “Back to her father?” He assumed that was the only place she had to go.

Anton looked at the man beside him and shook his head. “Not quite yet. Her father’s home is rather far from here and she would have great difficulty getting there in this snow. Instead, she is going somewhere much closer.” Again, there was a flash of light and they were suddenly in David’s house. It was much like what Belle had grown up in. Then, there was a knock on the front door with a freezing cold, sniveling girl on the outside of it.

Mr. Gold glanced around his new surroundings, not recognizing anything. They were in a house, a very small two-story house that was obviously falling apart. The walls had been patched up many many times. The furniture was dingy and well used.

The room they were in served at both a living and a dining room. There was a table near the front door with mismatched chairs. In the corner was a small fireplace. A fire was lit and there was a cauldron of something cooking on it and it appeared it was about to boil over.

Over in the other corner of the room was a kitchen sink. A woman stood there washing dishes and humming merrily. Gold could see she was a very scrawny woman with short black hair, but he couldn’t see her face because her back was to him.

When there was a knock heard at the door, the woman stopped what she was doing and glanced up curiously. “Coming!” she called out as she wiped her hands on a towel and rushed over to the front door.

Mr. Gold was able to see her face now that she turned around and he did not recognize her at all. “Whose old shack of a home have you brought me to?” he asked the spirit.

Anton glanced over at Adam. “This is the house of your best employee, David. And that over there is his wife, Mary Margaret, who is letting a frozen-to-the-bone Belle in. Your ex-maid is taking shelter in David’s house because her father’s house is too far away and you wouldn’t let her stay any longer. Unfortunately, your tactics of scaring her off didn’t work and later on in the evening, we shall find out exactly how much she misses you and still loves you.”

Belle looked up at Mary Margaret with tears in her eyes, her body trembling. Besides Bae and David, Mary Margaret was her only other friend. And knowing how much she adored seeing people fall in love and be as happy as her and David, she definitely knew about Belle’s ‘crush’ on Gold too. And if it wasn’t for that reason, David had told her. "He threw me out," Belle sobbed out to her.

“Oh, Belle, sweetheart,” Mary Margaret said as she put her arms around Belle in a friendly embrace. "I'm so sorry." She held Belle close for as long as she needed to. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Belle practically clung to the other woman when she hugged her, sobbing softly. When she heard her question, she nodded her head and proceeded to tell her all that happened from setting up dinner all the way to him telling her she would need to leave. "I told him I loved him... A-And... And he threw me away like I was nothing. Why does he have to be so bloody stupid and blind?"

"Maybe he was frightened," Mary Margaret suggested trying to be optimistic. "From all the things I’ve heard about him—I’ve never heard of him being interested in romance. Money has always been his priority." She stopped herself realizing the way her words might have sounded to Belle, so she kept talking, trying to express what she was really trying to say. "Not to say he wasn’t interested in you...but maybe he just didn’t know how to handle his feelings or yours.”
Belle sniffled and wiped her eyes. "That doesn’t mean he had to throw me out into the snow and shun me.” She looked up at Mary Margaret. "I’m sorry I arrived so suddenly. The snow is terrible and you guys live much closer than my father does… I promise after dinner, I will be out of your hair.” The girl said, assuming David had told his wife that Belle would be joining them.

"Oh, no. Don’t worry about it. You’re always welcome here," Mary Margaret said with a smile. She motioned toward the fireplace. "Why don’t you go sit by the fire and warm up? I need to finish up in the kitchen while the baby’s still asleep. David should be home soon with Tim."

Belle nodded her head and moved her trunk of stuff out of the way of the front door. When she was seated by the fire, she glanced over her shoulder to looked at the other woman, a warm smile on her lips. "Speaking of that adorable little man, how is he?” she asked softly, holding her shaking hands out towards the fire to warm them. Belle knew a lot about Tim’s sickness and it always just reminded her of her mother. But she always pushed that thought away, not wanting to think of the child dying.

Mary Margaret returned the smile, but there was a hint of sadness in it. “He’s doing okay for now…but I’m afraid if doesn’t get those treatments…” She paused and closed her eyes to force away the tears, not wanting to say what was inevitably the truth. She picked the dish back up and continued washing. “Well you know…” She finished with a nervous smile.

Belle immediately got up and went over to hug the woman again, letting her know it was okay to let out her feelings in front of her. Mary Margaret was a strong person and was always strong in front of her family to let them think things would be okay. But Belle knew what she was going through unlike everyone else.

After a few minutes, Belle pulled back to look up at her, wiping away her tears. "Hey, everything will be alright. If there is anything I can do to help, I will do it. If you need help with money, I will work every single job that I can and give you the money for him. I will do whatever it takes to help him. I’m not going to let you lose him.” Belle herself had grown attached to the young boy when she used to baby-sit him, while his parents worked, for extra money back when the Nolans’ weren’t shoveling every cent they had into Tim’s treatments; back when they were in the middle class of town, back when Tim was healthier. “Don’t even bother saying no to me because we both know that won’t work,” she said with a small smile to cheer up Mary Margaret.

"Oh but Belle, I couldn’t possibly ask that of you," Mary Margaret told her still remaining strong and composed.

Mr. Gold turned to Anton with a furrowed brow, the conversation having intrigued him. “Tim is their son yes?” he confirmed.

Anton nodded.

"And what is wrong with the boy? Is he dying?"

"It’s an almost incurable illness… It cripples him and David shovels all the money you give him into his son’s treatments. Well, what LITTLE money you give him.”

Belle shook her head and gave the woman another smile. "Mary Margaret, you’re not asking me for anything. I’m offering, if anything I am insisting that I help you."

Mary Margaret offered Belle yet another smile, this one thankful. She reached out and squeezed her hand. “Thank you Belle, you’ll never know what that means to me, means to us,” she added, referring to her and David.

Belle smiled back and squeezed her hand. "Don’t worry about it. But lets keep this between us. We both know David will not allow it. Just tell him that somebody anonymous donated it, okay?”
Just then, the front door opened. “Speaking of David,” Mary Margaret said as she walked over to greet her husband who had just come in from the snow with Tim on his shoulders. David kissed his wife before setting his five-year-old son down and handing him his cane. He was very small and skinny for his age, mostly due to the lack of food and the fact that he was sick. He had a head full of blond hair, looking like the spitting image of his father. “Belle!” the little boy exclaimed and hobbled as fast as he could over to embrace her.

When Belle heard David and Tim get closer, she gave Mary Margaret one last smile before she turned around just in time to see the child they were speaking of. She quickly kneeled down so she could be at his height and held out her arms to hug him. ”Hello to you too, little fella.” She pulled him into a warm embrace and pressed a kiss to the crown of his head. ”Merry Christmas, Timmy,” she said with a smile, pulling back to look at him, calling him by the nickname she usually called him. Sparing a glance, she looked up at a rather confused David. She nodded to Mary Margaret, telling her that she could tell him what happened before she picked up Tim and brought him over to the fire to warm him up and talk to him about what she had missed over the past few months.

David looked at his wife expectantly. “So what’s going on, because I’m having a hard time believing Mr. Gold allowed her this visit.” Mary Margaret sighed and glanced toward Belle. “No, you’re right he didn’t. He threw her out.”

"What?!" David exclaimed a little louder than he wanted to. His eyes widened in shock. “Shh,” she said moving her hands in a hushing motion, “The baby is still sleeping.” David quieted. “Well what happened?” Mary Margaret looked at him with a sad smile and told him everything Belle had told her. Feeling horrible and appalled for Belle, David walked over to her and Tim. “Hey,” he said in a sympathetic manner. “How are you?”

When Belle heard David approach, she knew it was to talk about what Mary Margaret had said. He wasn’t too good at hiding his emotions, especially when he let out that outburst. Belle wrapped a blanket around Tim’s shoulders, subtly covering his ears for a moment, as she glanced up at David, nodding her head. ”What’s done is done. My father’s debt is paid off and I am a free person again. Gold made his choice and I need to respect that,” she said softly before removing her hands from Tim’s ears. She couldn’t help but smile a little when Tim pulled himself into her lap.

David offered her a reassuring smile. “Well, know that you are always welcome here. Stay as long as you need to.” He cared a lot for Belle and hated that Gold reacted in such a way. It was obvious her heart was broken. Despite what he knew about Gold, though, he was quite shocked at what he did. David had no idea if the man had feelings for Belle, or if he had feelings at all, but he had seen how Gold was around her and he never thought he would do something like this.

Belle gave David a thankful smile and nodded her head. ”Thank you…I really appreciate it,” she said to him softly, hugging her arms gently around the boy in her lap. ”But when the snow clears up, I have to go see my father. As for right now, I can’t go anywhere but I promise to be out of your guys’ hair latest tomorrow.”

Tim heard Belle mention visiting her father, but didn’t register the rest of her statement. “You’re not going now are you?” He asked with a hint of worry, “I haven’t seen you in so long!”

Belle smiled down at him and shook her head. ”Don’t worry, sweetie. I won’t be leaving until
probably after dinner. I’m all yours until then,” she said softly before she tickled his sides a little, making sure to still be careful with him.

Tim erupted in a fit of giggles and tried to squirm free of her grasp.
Mr. Gold watched the two carefully with an unknowing smile on his face. Belle was a natural with him and Tim was so precious. It was hard for him to see the boy so sickly; he didn’t want to consider that Tim was really dying. He hadn’t even known David had a sick son-or a son at all. The only thing he knew about David was that he had a new baby and he had only learned that the day before.

Considering the baby, a sudden wail could be heard from upstairs; the baby was awake. Mary Margaret sighed and placed her kitchen towel down so she could go fetch the baby. “So much for that nap,” she said exasperated. “David can you finish up in here?” She was in the middle of cooking some vegetables for dinner.

Belle glanced up at David with a warm smile. “I can do it if you want,” she said softly, wanting to make up for coming a lot earlier than she had intended.

Anton glanced over at Mr. Gold, his heart warming from the sight of his smile. “Want to stay or go to the next scene?” He asked the man curiously, being able to tell that the man was obviously enjoying the scene between Belle and the child.

"I, uh…” Mr. Gold stuttered, not sure of his answer. He could not take his eyes off Belle or the little boy Tim. "Please, I want to see more,” he finally answered. He was really interested in learning more about the family of his long time employee.

Anton smiled and nodded his head before he made them disappear in a flash of light. They reappeared at the dinner Belle had been invited to.

Belle had changed into nicer clothes but refrained from putting on her dress, not wanting to make Mary Margaret and David feel uncomfortable because the dress looked expensive even though it had cost her almost nothing.

"I want to help! I want to help!” Tim said eagerly as Mary Margaret brought the plates over to the table.
She chuckled and smiled at her son. “How about you get the silverware for everyone?”
"Okay, mother,” Tim replied as he made his way into the kitchen to do as she asked.

Belle helped around the kitchen, stirring things, putting things onto large plates to serve; it just came so naturally to her after a few years of doing it every day. She might have just stopped that day, but she still felt antsy not having to do anything: not having to clean, cook, or take care of the house.

"We’ll need six sets dear-forks, knives, and spoons," Mary Margaret called to Tim from the table, "Do you remember how to count to six?” She had been working with him recently, teaching him his numbers and how to count.

Tim nodded and pulled the drawer of silverware open. He pulled out seven forks.

Belle glanced over when she saw Tim come in. Hearing Mary Margaret and seeing how many forks Tim had pulled, the girl chuckled and rolled her eyes playfully before leaning down. “Not quite, munchkin.” She smiled at him as she took one of the forks and put it away. "Now give each fork a knife partner and each knife a spoon partner.”

Tim nodded and did as she said. He had the biggest smile on his face and was so happy. “Can you help me carry them?” he asked Belle. With his cane he was unable to hold onto so many pieces of silverware.

Belle smiled softly at him and nodded her head. “I can do you one better.” Belle carefully picked
him up and held his cane so his hands were free before she moved him closer to the counter so that he could pick up the utensils. "How's that?" she said with a smile.

Tim giggled and grabbed the silverware. "Perfect!" He exclaimed, smiling brightly at Belle. The scene brought a huge smile to Mr. Gold's face as well. Who knew she was such a natural with children?

Belle walked with the child into the room where they were to eat and helped him set out the cutlery. When they finished, she set him back down with his cane and smile softly at David, her mind distracted from her heart break. "So when are Emma and Bae going to be here?"

Mr. Gold furrowed his brow when he heard Belle's question. Had he heard her right? Bae his son and Emma his new wife? He turned to Anton for answers. "Why ever would my son come here?" he asked, entirely perplexed. Bae knew David from seeing him at the shop, but Gold had never considered them to be friends.

Anton looked at the man as if he was crazy. "Are you kidding me? You do realize who your son married, right?"

David glanced over at the clock and shrugged. "My daughter and Bae should be here soon. Bae said he was going to stop by his father's house one more time to see if he could come. I hope for your sake, he said no. If he does show up, I'll turn him away."

Belle's smile faltered for a second before she waved her hand. "Don't worry. If he shows up, I will leave if he so desires it. If he is willing to celebrate Christmas with his son and his in-laws, I don't want to spoil that."

Gold looked between everybody, slack jawed, completely unable to believe what he was hearing. Emma was David's daughter?! But how could that be? She was what eighteen, twenty, twenty five? He had no clue. David and Mary Margaret surely didn't look like they had such an older daughter.

And how could he, Mr. Gold, not know his son was marrying his employee's daughter? Suddenly guilt built up inside of him as reality hit him like a wrecking ball. He really wasn't involved in his son's life at all. He didn’t go to the wedding, he only met the woman once in passing, and he never asked about her. He was lucky to still have Bae in his life at all...he was a horrible father.

Little Tim overheard the mention of Mr. Gold and was confused, especially after seeing Belle's frown. "Mr. Gold is Uncle Bae's father right?" He asked in confirmation. "I thought you liked Mr. Gold, don't you want him to come?" He was directing his question mostly to Belle.

Belle felt her previously broken heart begin to break again as they continued to talk about the man who had crushed her when she had let down her walls for him. When she heard Tim's question, she looked down at him and sighed softly before she knelted down and forced a weak smile on her lips. "I like Mr. Gold, sweetie... We just... We had a fight last night and I don't think he wants to be around me right now. But if he does come and I have to leave, I promise that I will come visit you soon and I will bring you your Christmas present, okay?"

Tim had never really been one to care for presents on Christmas. Although he would be grateful for anything he received, he knew that was not what it was all about. He looked at Belle hopefully and said, "But it's Christmas! Surely he wants to be with you and Uncle Bae on Christmas?" He could not understand why Mr. Gold would ask Belle to leave—even if they had been fighting. Christmas was a time to be forgiving; a time to spend with family and friends.

Belle bit her bottom lip when she heard Tim. She had been knitting him a sweater during her spare time over the past few months and she had a few more things to do to it before it was done. "Unfortunately that isn't the case, Tim... Mr. Gold wouldn't be having a very good time if I was here. And I want him to have the best Christmas with his family. He is more part of this family than I am." It was obvious to see the pain on her face and the tears in her eyes but she hid it well
for Tim with a smile she had mastered over the years.

Tim couldn’t pick up on her sadness, but he was a very intuitive little boy. Something was off, but he wasn’t sure what it was.

He didn’t know the nature of Belle’s and Mr. Gold’s relationship, but he knew she lived with him, so in his eyes she had to be part of his family. Why else would she live there?

"I don’t think that’s true," he told her sweetly, "you’re his family too. Why wouldn’t he want all his family together on Christmas?"

Belle felt as if her heart had just been ripped out again. "I-I don’t know. But we will see. I need to go help in the kitchen, you continue to help set the table." She quickly got up and left as she felt the tears began to burn her eyes and blurred her vision. She went over to the stove and stirred something as the salty tears began to spill down her cheeks. She would never be a part of Gold’s family. She would never be his; he would never be hers. She would just have to suffer for the rest of her life with having to see him around town, knowing they would never have a life together.

"Throwing her out was not the best choice… Neither were the words you decided to use." Anton said to Gold. "She wanted to be part of your life so badly that she was willing to give you everything and risk the ridicule she would get because she loved you. But you refused her and broke her heart that she had bared to you. You broke her heart like you broke her snow globe."

Mr. Gold followed Belle into the kitchen, listening to Anton’s words along the way. This was not what he needed or wanted to hear right now. Nor did he want to see Belle in this state. It was all just too much…especially given the fact that he was the cause of it.

Despite everything, though, he couldn’t take his eyes off Belle. Stepping right up next to her, he watched her carefully, feeling despair as he saw the tears running down her cheeks. He hated to see her cry-and for once he couldn’t ignore it. A few tears stung his eyes as well, but he refused to let them fall. “I’m so sorry Belle,” he said reaching to up grab her shoulder even though he knew she couldn’t hear nor feel him. Did he really mean that much to her?

Belle sniffled and quickly wiped her tears away when she heard people approaching the kitchen. Luckily nobody entered the kitchen because she didn’t want to have to explain to someone why she was crying into the soup. She took a few deep breaths to calm herself down. "Adam,” she whispered as she stirred the soup.

She closed her eyes and pretended to be back in his house, making him dinner as she waited for him to come home from the shop.

Anton looked over at him when he saw the confusion that crossed over Adam’s face. "In the future, she does this a lot. Pretends she is back at your house, making dinner for you as you come home from work. The only different thing that happens that didn’t used to truly happen is that you come up behind her and hug her from behind, peppering her shoulder with kisses."

"I’m right here, Belle," Adam said instinctively when she called his name. But he just sighed heavily as he knew there was no way she was going to hear him.

Adam turned to Anton when he heard the spirit’s last statement. “She pretends I do that?” he asked, surprised.

Anton nodded his head, a sad smile on his lips. "She tries to move on but she never felt more at home since her mom died then when she had been in your arms after you two finished kissing.”

Mr. Gold’s frown only deepened. He was beginning to believe Belle’s feelings were real, but he still didn’t understand why. Why would she want him? There were plenty of other men who were better suited for her-well they weren’t as well off financially. That little fact was still gnawing in the back of his mind and he was having trouble seeing past it. In spite of everything he was seeing, how did he know it was him she would really miss and not his money?

*There was a knock at the front door and little Tim could be heard squealing, “Uncle Bae!”*
Mr. Gold reluctantly went over to the doorway to glance in the living room. He was still in disbelief that his son had married David Nolan’s daughter and he had to see for himself. Sure enough, there he saw Bae—his son—bending down to give little Tim a big hug. A tall blond dressed in jeans and a read leather jacket with long blond hair stood right next to him. Even though Adam had only met her once, he knew it was definitely Emma.

"Hey, how’s my little buddy?” Bae said to Tim with a large smile on his face.

When Belle finally calmed down, she began to actually do work in the kitchen for dinner. She always loved cooking. It helped her relax, being able to control something in her life.

Tim smiled up at his uncle and hugged him back. "I’m great!” He said as cheerily as always.

"How is my favorite uncle?” he asked, leaning on his crutch with a bright smile on his lips. He loved being with all of his family.

"Awesome,” Bae replied.

Emma knelt down and hugged her little brother as well, “Hey, champ,” she said with a smile just as big as Bae’s, “I’ve missed you.” She tousled his hair.

"I missed you too,” Tim said as he returned the hug. He glanced at the bags she was holding.

"What’s that?"

"Just some food for dinner…and maybe a present or two.” Emma gave him a playful nudge and Tim giggled.

Tim looked up at the two of them excitedly, “Belle’s here, Uncle Bae!”

When Belle heard her name, she quickly got snapped back into reality and took a deep breath, composing herself before she left the kitchen and peeked her head out to smile over at Bae. "Did somebody say my name?"

When she had enough strength, she was able to hide her emotions and right now, she felt strength in knowing she was surrounded by people who cared about her. Gods, she hoped Adam didn’t show up for both of their sakes.

Bae looked up, completely and utterly shocked to see Belle standing there. When he had stopped at his father’s house to try and convince him to come, he had thought it was odd Belle didn’t answer the door. It was very unlike his father to do things for himself, but the thought had been only fleeting. Now it made sense…well, except that Belle was here and not at Mr. Gold’s.

Emma placed the bag of presents down under the tiny little Christmas tree and busied herself with her parents while Bae spoke with Belle.

"Belle,” Bae greeted with a smile and stood to walk over and give her a hug. "I’m surprised to see you here. Perhaps you really are softening up my father.” He was giving Mr. Gold the benefit of the doubt, not realizing something was amiss. "Now if only you could get him to come too…but there’s always next year.”

Belle felt her heart ache as she listened to Bae, hugging him back. "I wish I could get him to come, but I think my being here is what is stopping him from coming here…” The girl did not want to have to relive what had happened the previous night AGAIN, but alas, Bae needed to know. "You see…. I might have admitted my feelings to your father last night…And he threw me out along with a lot of horrible words…” she said, her gaze dropping. "He doesn’t believe that I can love him and he has no feelings towards me… I should have just stayed quiet and kept things the way they were… I’m such an idiot… And so is your father…” she said with a sigh. "I ruined Christmas for the both of us.”

Bae pulled back to look at her, her words a complete shock to him. She had finally admitted her feelings to his father? Wow. He couldn’t believe it had actually happened. But what was more unbelievable was his father’s reaction. “My father’s more stubborn than I thought.” he said in disbelief, more to himself than to Belle.

Placing his hands on Belle’s shoulders he tilted his head down to look her in the eye and spoke
softly, “No Belle, you’re not an idiot. Papa’s the idiot.” How could he just throw Belle out like that? Especially on Christmas?

"Did he actually tell you he had no feelings for you?" Bae could not believe it if he did. He knew how his father felt about Belle—he was his son he could read him better than anyone. Why would he deny Belle’s feelings? They were obvious to everyone.

Belle held in her emotions and shrugged, sighing softly as her gaze dropped. "I don’t remember. I couldn’t hear much over the sound of the blood rushing to my ears and my heart breaking in the most cliché way possible… But from what I remember, he just kept yelling at me that I only wanted him for his money… Which is the farthest thing from the truth… Part of me wishes he was poor so he wasn’t so damn paranoid and thick skulled…"

"What is it with my Papa and money?" he thought aloud. Mr. Gold could always seem to relate everything back to money. It really made Bae angry and he wasn’t one who could easily be riled up. "I know you don’t want him for his money—I don’t know why he can’t see that." He sighed and offered her a reassuring smile. "Hey, would you like me to talk to him?"

Belle glanced up at Bae. "You would do that for me? I mean, I really think you shouldn’t.. He’ll just think your conspiring against him to get his money more than he already does…” Belle knew that every time Bae visited Gold, Adam worried that he came to ask for money even though all Bae wanted to do was say hi and maybe ask him to go out for dinner to catch up, even offering to pay for both of them sometimes.

"Of course I’d do that for you Belle. You’re like family to me and I don’t want to see you hurt. Besides, someone needs to talk some sense into my ridiculously stubborn father. I know he cares for you too—he just needs to learn some things are more important than money." Bae took a deep breath, considering her last statement. "And I really don’t care what my father thinks. If he wants to push me away too, it’s his loss. But… I won’t say anything, unless you want me to."

Belle stepped forward when Bae finished speaking and hugged him tightly. She felt bad knowing that his father would so easily choose money over him. No… Over anyone. Even her. "God… Sometimes I wish you and your father were more alike…” She said with a sigh before she pulled back and looked up at him. "You have my permission to talk to him but don’t feel obligated to do so."

"Are you sure?" he asked as he returned her hug. He didn’t want to do anything Belle didn’t really want him to. He also wanted to make sure she knew he wasn’t forcing her into anything either.

Belle gave him a small, but reassuring smile as she heard what Bae said, nodding her head. "I am. Even if he still doesn’t want me, it might help him be able to find someone who he will love and cherish without needing to fear that they are just going to use him.”

Bae nodded at her, resisting the urge to frown. Her words saddened him; to want him to be happy no matter what showed she really did love his Papa. Why couldn’t his father stop being blind and see what was right in front of him? "C’mom," he said, putting an arm around her and leading her into the living room, "Let’s not think about it now and go enjoy Christmas."

Belle nodded her head and took a deep breath as she followed back beside him. Bae was probably one of the nicest people Belle knew that was outside of the Charming family. Well, he was part of the Charming family but he still had the last name Gold.

As she went back out, Anton looked to Adam. "And what do you think you said to Bae when he came and talked to you about Belle? I’ll give you a hint; there was no words and just something
Mr. Gold closed his eyes briefly trying to take everything in. Anton’s words couldn’t be true—they just couldn’t—but deep down in his heart he knew they were.

The buzzer on the oven suddenly sounded, taking Adam away from his thoughts. Mary Margaret came bounding in the kitchen, shut it off, and opened the oven to check whatever was cooking. Adam was about to return to the living room to see what was going on when he noticed the pitiful turkey Mary Margaret was removing from the oven. He stopped short in his tracks and gawked at it. It was so small—barely enough for one person to eat let alone six. "Why not prepare a larger turkey?" he asked Anton, completely confused.

When Anton heard Mr. Gold’s question, he sighed and rolled his eyes. "How many signs do you need to see before you can clue in? They barely have enough money to buy non-stale bread. Do you really think they have enough money to buy a larger turkey? They have to save up as much as they can for their son’s treatments. They don’t get the luxury of having extra turkey for leftovers or being able to pile their plates high and eat until they feel sick."

Adam understood what Anton was saying, but from his experience with the poor he had always thought they wasted what little money they had on frivolous things for Christmas—such as the Christmas feast. Why else would they constantly come to him for extensions during the holidays and use Christmas as an excuse?

"What about that large pot simmering on the fire?" he asked, pointing to the fireplace where the large cauldron still hung. It looked like something was cooking in it.

Anton glanced over at the pot and rolled his eyes. "That is water that they use to wash their clothes and mix with cold water to bathe. Not everyone has someone to wash their clothes, draw their baths for them. And not everyone has warm, running water."

Gold frowned. He felt absolutely horrible. They didn’t have warm running water? Surely this couldn’t be so…he paid David enough to live off of didn’t he?

"Everything looks delicious Mother," Tim said as he took a seat at the table.

Belle came and sat between Tim and Bae. When she heard Tim, a smile fluttered across her lips. Part of her wished she could have just raided Gold’s pantry before she came and gave them whatever she took but alas, the thought had slipped her mind. "It really does, Mary Margaret. It smells absolutely amazing."

"Thank you," Mary Margaret replied as she set a dish of vegetables on the table before taking the seat next to her husband. David and her both exchanged a smile before turning to face their family. "Well should we get started?" she asked.

"Wait, Mama," Tim said stopping her. He smiled big. "We have to at least thank Mr. Gold. After all, if it weren’t for him we wouldn’t have so much yummy food."

Belle and everyone else looked at Tim a little shocked. He was only five, he didn’t understand much but those words seemed to eat away at each of their hearts. Taking a deep breath, Belle decided to speak up first as she turned to look a Tim with a tentative smile on her lips. "And how do you suppose we do that, Sweetie?" She asked in a soft voice.

Tim looked up at her and furrowed his brow. At first he wasn’t quite sure what she meant, but then he brightened as he thought of something. "You know…just thank him, out loud, kinda like at Thanksgiving!"

The girl nodded her head and looked around to get approval from everyone else, not wanting anybody else to feel uncomfortable. She would only be doing this for Tim’s sake. She knew that Gold didn’t care about Bae or the Nolans anymore than he cared about her. But she still wanted
Tim to be happy and if that meant doing this, then she would do it.

David exchanged a glance with just about everyone at the table before managing a smile. Grabbing his glass he held it up in the air and said, “To Mr. Gold, the founder of the feast.” There was sarcasm in his voice, but Tim was too young to pick up on it. Mr. Gold, however, did and it made him feel all the more worse. This wasn’t a feast; it was nowhere near a feast. If only he wasn’t so stingy with his money, the Nolan’s would at least be able to afford a decent meal. No wonder Tim was in danger of dying. It wasn’t just because of the expensive treatments he needed. The poor boy was also probably starving to death. And Mr. Gold was beginning to feel responsible for all this. He had the power to change it-yet he had done nothing.

Belle hid her cringe and lifted her glass with everyone else, keeping her fake smile on her lips. As dinner begun, the girl made sure that she took the bare minimum of each thing to leave enough for everyone else. She even took less than Tim. As the meal continued, they all made idle conversation, talking about random things that kept their spirits light. Unlike everyone else, Belle suddenly became invisible and was glad of it. She was beyond miserable and she looked like it.

"You didn’t eat anything," Tim said to Bae and Emma after he had finished his meal. Bae offered him a bright smile, “That’s because me and your big sis ate before we came over.” Bae had always thrown a party on Christmas Day, but despite his best efforts, he could not get David to agree to attend. The man was very proud and somewhat stubborn. "Oh, okay," Tim said, confused as to why they would do that. "Hey,” Emma said, interrupting, "Are you ready to open your gift?" Tim’s face brightened. “Yes! Yes!” he exclaimed and climbed out of his chair with Emma’s help. Belle smiled weakly as she watched Tim go and run to open his present. She tried to make it look like she was paying attention and her mind wasn’t elsewhere, but she couldn’t. She couldn’t stop think about what Adam might be doing. She wondered if he was celebrating that she was gone. Or maybe he had taken up someone’s offer to seem nice and went to the Christmas party that was always at Granny’s. Or maybe he was sitting in front of the fireplace with a cup of tea and a glass of scotch. She only hoped that he felt a tiny bit of pain from what he had done.

David strolled over to stand next to Belle having noticed she was struggling to be involved. “How you doing?” he asked knowing very well what the answer was. “Would you prefer to be alone? I can offer you the room upstairs if you’d like to lie down.” Belle looked up at David and when she heard him, a small but genuine smile forming on her lips. ”Thank you David, but I think being alone is the last thing I need. Being around everyone and feeling all the happiness in the room is really helping me. It probably makes no sense, what I am saying, but thank you for the offer anyways,” she said with another smile before she stood up, beginning to put everything away while everyone conversed and had a merry time while watching Tim open his present.

David sighed as he watched Belle walk away, feeling down because he knew there was nothing he could really do to make her feel better. He turned his attentions back to son just in time to see Tim rip open the wrapping paper and squeal with delight as he pulled out a big brown stuffed teddy bear. Tim clutched the bear to his chest happily before hugging both Emma and Bae. “I love him!” he exclaimed. “Thank you, Emmy, Uncle Bae!”

Anton looked over at Adam with a curious look. ”Are you ready to go to the next scene? Or would you like to go and gawk at Belle one more time while she is alone,” he said in a slightly joking tone before he moved them to the next scene.

In this one, Belle was putting Tim to bed, tucking him in and telling him a bedtime story. In the
living room in front of the fire, Bae, Emma, David and Mary Margaret sat with a warm drink in hand. They were talking idly about random things until Emma spoke up about something she knew was all on their minds. "So what was with what Tim said before dinner. No offense, Bae, but we all know that your father did NOTHING for you let alone this part of the family. Who put the idea in Tim’s head that Gold was the good guy and somehow the savior of Christmas?"

Gold walked a little closer so he could hear well. Mary Margaret was the first to speak. “Oh, Emma, you know Tim. He always sees the best in people—even Mr. Gold. And he doesn’t really know how he treats David.” She took a sip of her drink then added seriously, “But it’s best we not speak of Gold—not while Belle is here.”

Belle finished her story and smiled as she saw that Tim was asleep before she began to quietly walk downstairs.

When Emma heard her mother, her brows furrowed confusedly. ”What are you talking about? You think she is going to go and tell Gold what we said when she goes back? I’m still surprised he even let her come.” Emma had no idea about the events that occurred the previous night.

Mary Margaret frowned and looked between Bae and her husband. It was obvious she felt she had said something maybe she ought not have. Her gaze rested on Bae. “You haven’t told her?”

Emma looked between Bae and her father, awfully confused by what was going on. She always knew everything. What didn’t she know?

Belle heard somebody say Gold then her name so she stopped dead in her tracks, hidden behind a wall as she listened to what they said.

Bae’s gaze fell downcast, his expression showing shame. He sighed before turning to Emma. “My father didn’t let Belle come here tonight. He kicked her out,” he said, not elaborating on the issue, hoping that would be enough for Emma.

Emma looked at her husband a little confused for a moment before she chuckled and shrugged. "She should be glad to be free of her duties at his house. And plus, everyone knows that she was treated very poorly by the man.” Emma took a sip of her drink and looked over to her father. "Don’t you think? And her father will be ecstatic to have her back. I’m glad she is free of that wretched man. Again, sorry, Bae.”

Belle swallowed hard and brushed a curl behind her ear. That’s what people thought? Well that was a lie. Practically all the time he treated her very fairly.

David didn’t agree with Emma, but he knew it was best not to bring up the truth—at least not with Belle in the house. That would only raise more questions. He would leave it to Bae to tell her when they were alone. “Still, it's best not to mention him when Belle’s around. Wouldn’t want to upset her,” he said, hoping that would be the end of the conversation.

Belle sighed softly before she turned and went to sit on the stairs, staying out of their conversation. Her heart began to ache again. She desperately wanted to run back to Mr. Gold and beg him to give her a chance. To tell him EVERYTHING he wanted to know, do ANYTHING he wanted to prove to him that she truly had feelings for him and wasn’t just after his money.

Mr. Gold didn’t care to hear any more either. He already knew what people thought of him, but it wasn’t easy hearing it first hand. Especially from people he knew or cared about like his son. Oh gods—he had to get out before his son said something he didn’t want to hear. “Spirit, I’ve seen enough,” he said to Anton bluntly.

Anton looked over at the man, recognizing the look of anguish that spread across his features from
having to witness all that he had. First he had to watch the woman he felt things for stand up for the man she wished he could be and cry because she knew he could never be him, and then listen to people rather close to him talk poorly about him. Nodding his head, they were soon engulfed in a flash of bright light.

Chapter End Notes

Just a note, Emma is around 18 in this. David and Mary Margaret had her when they were young and they are also a little older than they are in the show.
When Mr. Gold opened his eyes again, he hoped more than anything that he would be back home in his warm bed. He just wanted all of this to be over; he didn’t want to see anymore. It was too hard.

Yet, disappointment was the only emotion he felt when he saw they were not back at his home. However, they were no longer at David Nolan’s either. They were standing outside a little shop—one he knew all too well: Game of Thorns.

Belle had left David’s house early in the next morning before anyone in town was even awake. She trudged through the snow, taking few breaks as she dragged her trunk of belongings behind her. By the time she reached her father’s shop, the sun was just beginning to rise and her cheeks and nose were pink from being nipped at by the cold air and from exertion. She missed her father and knew he would always be there for her, but she worried about if she would ever be able to feel at home with him again. Taking a deep breath, she began to knock on the door rather loudly. Since her mother had died, her father and her had been living above his shop, wanting to save expenses. There were two small storage rooms that they had turned into bedrooms and one room in the middle with a table in it had become their dining room. Hopefully now that she had cleared up his debts, he would have cleaned up his act and hopefully gotten himself a proper home.

Gold watched sadly as Belle came up to the door where he was standing. He could easily see the toll the past day had taken on her. Just like all the other times he wanted more than anything to reach out and hold her, to tell her it was all going to be alright, to apologize, but he remembered his place now. He remembered this was just a shadow and actions would do nothing.

"Yes, yes, hang on!" a male voice, Maurice, called loudly from inside. Some rustling could be heard, along with footsteps, and then the locks clicking. "Who in the world is out at this hour," he mumbled to himself as he opened the door. "Yes?" He asked before he glanced up and saw his daughter standing there. His eyes instantly widened and his mouth fell open in shock. "Belle!" Stepping out the door he pulled her into an embrace. "Is it really you? It's really you..."

Belle was very thankful that her father had welcomed her with a hug. She was freezing cold and his embrace began to warm her up immediately. "I-It is..." she said between chattering teeth. "I- I'm back f-for g...good..." she said to him, her whole body practically shaking.

Maurice pulled back to look at her, but only for a second before he ushered her inside. "You're cold, hurry, come in, come in."

Gold and Anton slipped in right behind them before the door shut. A large smile bloomed on Maurice’s face as he took a moment to look at Belle. "I can't believe it- Belle I haven’t seen you in so long. You say you're back for good? How is that possible?"

Belle looked up at him and waited until her teeth stopped chattering before she spoke. "Well... Mr. Gold kicked me out... I did something I shouldn't have... I overstepped my boundaries and he got upset. More than upset... But that doesn’t matter anymore... Because I am home." Despite what she said, it was written all over her face how much it hurt to say those things. Luckily, her father was a very oblivious man.

"You're right Belle, it doesn't matter," he replied not noticing the hurt on her face. He wrapped his arms around her for another hug. "And you are home...that monster will never get his claws on you again. I will make sure of it."

Belle hugged Maurice back and smiled softly, happy that he was welcoming her back into the home so eagerly. But then she heard what he called Gold and she had to bite her tongue to prevent herself from saying things she might regret. She would not let him know about her
infatuation with Adam.

"Come," Maurice commanded, putting his arm around Belle's shoulders. "let's go upstairs so you can warm up and I'll fix us some breakfast." He began to lead her toward the stairs in the back of the store.

She almost forgot how controlling her father was. Sure he did it with his best intentions, but sometimes they didn't have great outcomes. Like when he would try to set her up with some of his friend's sons so that they could support each other. But all the men he set her up with were either not interested, obnoxious or just plain pigs.

Maurice ushered her to sit on the couch while he went to the kitchen to prepare some eggs and toast. As he cooked, he spoke across the room to Belle. "I find it hard to believe that beast let you go so easily. What in the world did you do?" he asked fishing for more details.

Belle sat in front of the little fire that her father had going, warming up much like she had done at the Nolans' house. When she heard her father's question, she swallowed hard and looked down. He was going to find out eventually. "I-I…. I… um… I kind of… Maybe… Kissed him?" She braced herself for what he was going to say. "But before you yell, Let me explain myself. Mr. Gold and I were having a nice dinner and there was mistletoe and I had some wine and I… I just got caught up in the Christmas spirit like mom used to, okay?"

Maurice instantly dropped the plate he was holding, not caring that it shattered on the floor. All he could concentrate on were Belle's words. He turned to face her, his face full of surprise and confusion. "Christmas or no Christmas, what in sevens hell possessed you to do a thing like that?" he asked her. It was evident in his voice that he wasn't even quite sure he had heard her correctly.

Belle swallowed hard and flinched at the sound of the plate before she jumped up and instinctively began to clean up the mess. "I-I don't know. It just happened. Please don't be mad, Papa… It was simply a kiss. It is not like I gave the man my virtue," she stammered out, her heart aching as she kept her eyes on what she was doing.

"Thank the gods for that," Maurice muttered; feeling relief to get the answer to a question he didn't quite know how to ask. "I don't think I could live with myself if he had touched you—my only daughter." After Belle had agreed to the deal, Maurice had assumed that was all that man really wanted from her. Every day had been like torture to think that monster was doing wicked things to his Belle.

Belle practically winced when she heard what he said. She hated that he kept calling Adam such horrible things. "Well you need not worry… We did nothing… I was nothing more than his maid…" There was a hint of disappointment in her voice as she threw away the shattered plate; still wishing this were just a bad dream and Christmas eve had turned out how she actually wanted it to.

He went back to cooking, watching her carefully as he did so. Something seemed off about her. "You don't seem happy Belle. Are you sure he didn't hurt you?" Maurice couldn't understand why his daughter wouldn't be happier to be home. After all, he hadn't even seen her but in passing in three years.

Belle nodded her head and moved to sit back down. "I have just had a lot happen within the last twenty-four hours… Besides, it kind of feels odd to be back… Like… Like this isn't my home anymore. "She said, an obvious confused tone in her voice. "I don't know… It must be from my lack of sleep."
Maurice finished the eggs and placed them on a plate before going over to her. He held out the plate for her to take and took a seat next to her. "Belle, what are you talking about?" he asked not understanding. Nothing she was saying was making sense. "This is your home-this will always be your home..." He paused as something came to his mind-something dreadful. He took a deep breath to prepare himself to ask her what he hoped to all the gods was not true. "Belle please tell me it's not true....you didn't fall in love with him, did you?"

Belle felt her heart stop for a second when her father caught on. She couldn't let him know. He might throw her out too and then she would have NOWHERE to go. "No.... I mean, I saw sides of him that NO ONE has ever seen. I've seen him happy, sad, angry, vulnerable... I just... I just see him in a different light now. Besides, if I did fall in love with him, nothing could ever happen now because he hates me..."

Gold strolled over a little closer to Belle so he could see the look on her face. Is that what she really thought? That he hated her? But that most certainly was not true. There was no way she would know that though...after the way he acted, he was surprised she still had any positive feelings toward him at all.

Maurice sighed heavily, closing his eyes briefly to remain calm. If she did fall in love with him? What, did she think there was a possibility? No, there was no possibility, because he was sure it had already happened. There was no mistaking that look in Belle's eyes as she spoke of Gold. Oh gods, what was he going to do?

"Belle," Maurice started, speaking very softly to his daughter, "you know that monster is not capable of love. It's good he made you leave because now you can move on with your life. You can find someone who will actually love you and treat you how you're supposed to be treated."

Belle's jaw clenched a little as she nibbled on a piece of toast. She wasn't sure what she would do if he kept calling Adam such horrid names. "Please Papa.... Can we just not speak of him?" she asked, glancing up at him. "And who says that I need to find someone to 'treat me properly' and love me? I don't need a man to support me in life. I am a very capable woman. I don't want to be some stay at home wife. I can do anything a man can do. I am even much more literate than most of them. Plus, all the single men left in this town are complete pigs and believe woman are still things and not actual people. Besides, I have you to love me."

Maurice smiled at how sweet his daughter was being. And if she didn't want to talk about Gold, that was fine. He despised the man more than anything and preferred never to hear about him again.

Maurice stood to walk back to the kitchen to fix himself something. "I don't know...what about that Gaston fellow? He's a handsome guy and was asking about you before...well he had asked about you."

Belle tried not to choke on her food as she heard what her father said and whom he was referring to. Gaston was a vile and conceited person. If her father tried to set her up with him, she wasn't sure what she would do. He was the exact opposite of what she looked for in a partner. "And what exactly did he ask?"

"Well," her father started, trying to sound happy, "he was hoping to court you."

This time, Belle did choke a little, her breath getting caught in her throat. "He what?!!" Belle wanted to practically slap her father for what he said, feeling as though he was okay with that idea. It was such a horrid thought to think that her father might make her say yes to him if he asked again. He was rich and it would help her family, but she would rather go and work for him as a maid than be his wife. "Thank god I wasn't here for that. There is no way I would ever give my heart to such a dimwitted brute. I mean, do you remember all those times he called my books insipid? I mean he used other words because we both know he probably has no idea what that
"Belle, don't you think you're being a little rash?" Maurice asked as he took his food and sat at the tiny little table in the corner. "He would make a good husband and he could take care of you." Maurice sighed sadly and turned his gaze to his food. "Much better than I could," he added softly. He was referring to money of course; he only wanted what was best for his daughter.

Belle rolled her eyes at first but then sighed as she got up and walked over to her father to hug him. "I can take care of myself, Papa. Besides, all Gaston wants in a relationship is a body and a vessel to bear his children. He told that to Ruby Lucas when he tried to court her however long ago."

Maurice wasn't sure he believed that, but he returned Belle's hug anyway and didn't say anything else on the matter. "I love you my dear Belle. I'm so glad you're home."

Belle hugged her father a little tighter, pecked his cheek before she pulled back, and smiled at him before she went and sat back down to eat. "Thank you, Papa..."

Anton turned to look at Gold. "Do you actually hate her for what she did?"

"No. No!" Gold replied without hesitation. His gaze remained on Belle as he explained himself. "I could never hate her...but..." He sighed as he watched her and her father hug and then he held his head in shame. "...I should have never taken her away. She belongs here, not with me. It's better this way."

"Are you so sure about that?" Anton asked, not expecting an actual answer. Placing an arm around Gold's shoulder, he ushered him to walk with him. "Come, I have one more thing I want to show you."

As the light engulfed them one more time, Gold found they were once again standing outside his house.

Belle slowly walked down the street, hands tucked inside her jacket pockets, scarf wrapped around her neck. As she neared his driveway, she began to shuffle and trip over her own feet a little almost as if somebody was dragging her unwillingly. It was the other half of her who NEEDED to see Adam again; he other half who wanted to risk rejection again and beg him to take her back. The other part was scared to get hurt even more and knew she would start to cry just from the sight of him.

Gold glanced over toward the driveway when he noticed someone out of the corner of his eye approaching. Squinting, he tried to make them out, but it wasn't until she was closer that he could see clearly through the falling snow. "Belle? What's she doing here? Why has she come back?" he asked the spirit, completely perplexed. It couldn't have been more than a day or two since he threw her out. Why would she brave returning, especially so soon?

Her father had kept bringing up Gaston and it was starting to scare her. He told her that he was going to set up a dinner for her and Gaston. Despite the screaming match it ended in, Maurice refused to cancel the dinner. Adam was her last chance at being happy and if he rejected her again, she would have no choice but to be with that horrid brute.

"Well remember the man her and her father spoke about? Lets just say, their courtship starts tonight and Belle is coming to find you to beg you to take her back whether it be your partner or even your maid again. She is just very desperate for your help and to be near you," Anton explained, smiling for some unknown reason.

"She's coming back to me?" Gold said, disbelievingly, "After everything I've done...she's really coming back to me?" A smile bloomed on his face and happiness swelled up inside of him. Maybe it would all work out and he didn't need to worry...
Anton didn't reply as Belle began to walk up Adam's walkway, stopping right in front of them. The part that was scared was in control now. "I can't do it... He'll never take me in... He hates me..." Her hopeful part perked up a little. "But maybe it was an act... Maybe he was just as scared as I was." She began to have a small, quiet but thoughtful tug-of-war battle with herself.

Gold's smile faltered a little bit. "Belle you can...I don't hate you..." He knew she couldn't hear him, but he couldn't help talk to her shadow. "Please Belle..."

Suddenly a very loud crash could be heard from inside, startling both Gold and the spirit, along with Belle. Gold instinctively rushed up to the window to see what was going on. As he looked inside he saw himself going through the room on a rampage, smashing everything in sight, screaming and yelling things he couldn't quite make out.

Belle gasped rather loudly and jumped when she heard the commotion. Biting her bottom lip and swallowing hard, she ran up to the front window, staying hidden and glanced inside, standing next to invisible Adam. As she saw what Gold was doing, her heart sank and she felt a little scared. She had never seen this side of him before. "Please tell me this is just a dream... A horrible, horrible dream..." She murmured to herself, her hands beginning to shake.

The Adam inside continued to smash everything, mainly with his cane. Finally after there was nothing left, including Adam's energy to go on, he collapsed in a nearby chair. His head fell to his hands and he began sobbing loudly.

As Gold stood outside and watch the shadow of himself lose control, he knew what it was all about. Belle. This shadow of himself-this present self-was devastated that Belle had kissed him. He still believed her feelings were not true and now he had lost her forever.

The first thought that came to Belle's mind when she watched Adam throwing a fit—breaking all the things she remember cleaning with such delicate care—was that perhaps Bae had come to talk to his father about her and what she had thought would happen, did happen. He was upset that he had now lost Bae and he was alone now. She had no idea that this was about her. Feeling tears prick her eyes, the cowardice part of herself took over as she found herself tripping over her own feet as she began to move backwards, away from the window. She knocked a shovel over in the process, creating a rather loud sound. Jumping, she gave the man in the window who was sobbing, one last look before she began to run away, not caring when she fell a few times because of the ice. She couldn't face him. Not when she might be the reason for him losing his son.

The real Gold turned around and gasped as he watched Belle run away. No...why...was she scared of him? Maybe...after what they had just both witnessed through the window; she had never seen him act that way. Yes, he must've scared her off. But he knew that all he needed was her...if she just been strong enough to knock on the door... perhaps it would all work out.

However, he knew that wasn't quite true. She was right to run, because the version of himself in the window still didn't believe her, unlike the real him in the moment now. "Belle!" He called after her, momentarily forgetting again that she couldn't see nor hear him. He began to run after her the best he could. "Belle, come back! I'm ready to make it right! I need you! Belle, please!"

But it was no use, she was a shadow, and he stopped in his tracks once he remembered that, watching as she disappeared off into the distance. "I'm ready to make it right," he said again, "Spirit I'm ready to make it right, take me home." Swirling around to face the spirit, he started to say, "I need to fix this," but stopped mid sentence when he saw there was no one there. He looked around questionably. "Spirit?" He called but received no answer. Suddenly, it was eerily quiet and the seconds seemed to morph into months as the sky darkened, the snow disappeared, and a hazy fog began to surround him. Gold was still standing outside of his house; only it was dark and quiet now. Was he back home to his time? No he couldn't be. There was no snow on the ground. He was in the same place,
different time, but when?
Chapter 8

The new spirit walked out of a cloud of fog, heading towards Adam with a black hood over her head, black cloak billowing behind her. "You're not ready yet..." she told him, her voice echoing yet she barely spoke in a whisper. Her voice sounded so distant, as if she was at the far end of a tunnel rather than right in front of him. "You have only come to realize your feelings for that girl. You have not yet learned about what your cheapness with money will do besides chase your loved ones away." With that being said, she lifted her head to let him see her eyes that looked like they were sewn shut. The girl looked no more that seventeen years of age.

Mr. Gold inhaled a sharp breath when he got a good look at this spirit—the one he presumed was the ghost of Christmas future. She was so young, with long red hair...and her eyes....why were they sewn shut? How could she see? Given the atmosphere around them and the situation, she was by far the scariest yet, but he did well to remain calm. None of the other ghosts had harmed him; he didn’t think this one would. "I am ready," he said after working up the courage to argue, "I can see now Belle does love me...I can make it right..."

Suddenly the girl’s hands lifted when she heard him argue back, open palms facing him. In the middle of her hand, a glowing eye fluttered open. "You know not of what your actions will cause if you do not change your ways. My fellow spirits and I have not come here to help you find love, but to see the error in your ways. And I can see that you will still continue your ways if I let you go now." Closing her fist, she held out her arm for him so she could transport them.

Mr. Gold stumbled backwards as his eyes widened in shock. Her hands...her hands had eyes...what the hell was she? At least the other ghosts resembled something he knew—Regina, a human, Jiminy, an insect, and Anton, a giant. Well the giant was a little odd, but at least he knew of them from storybooks. This spirit was beyond odd and resembled nothing he had ever read about. Perhaps it had to do with her fate-like the chains on Regina. He gulped thinking about the invisible chains Regina had mentioned he carried. Was he really bound to end up like them? Letting his curiosity get the best of him, he couldn’t help but ask. “Spirit, what has happened to you? Why are you like this? Am I doomed to turn out like you?”

The spirit only ignored him, saying nothing, and continued to hold out her arm for him. "Will you not answer me?"
Nothing.

After deciding the answer was no, Mr. Gold hesitantly reached out and grabbed her arm. Soon, they were outside of Adam’s shop. It looked a little unkempt and slightly worn down. Like many of the other scenes Adam had witnessed, it began with a familiar woman walking towards them.

"She had an envelope in her hand that contained the money her father needed to keep the flower shop open. Taking a deep breath, she walked into the shop like she did every month. It had been nearly half a year since she had returned to her father’s house and things had barely gotten any easier.

"David had been working in the shop that day, as he did almost everyday, but some recent news called for him to close up and leave for the day. Just as he was stepping out the door, Belle was stepping in."

"Belle!" he said when he saw her, stopping her from colliding into him. Almost instantly he frowned, knowing she may not have learned what had happened yet. Seeing the envelope in her hand he knew she was there to deliver the rent, which she always gave to him since her and Gold’s falling out. Gold had refused to see her, but even if he didn’t, he was rarely around these days. Recently David was pretty much running the place—with no increase in
pay of course. But none of that mattered now-not after what he had just learned. The only question was, had Belle heard?

"David!" Belle said back, a smile growing on her lips. She had grown accustomed to just seeing David rather than Gold. It almost barely phased her that she never saw Adam anymore, but she always wished that she could just get a small glimpse of him one more time.

"Going for an early lunch?" she asked with a little smile. She was completely oblivious to the news that David had heard.

David's frown only deepened when he saw Belle smile at him. He knew for a fact now that she didn't know-otherwise she wouldn't be this happy. He also knew she hadn't completely gotten over the man, but he wasn't quite sure how much she still cared. He was pretty sure she'd be devastated, however, and now he was going to have to be the one to tell her. Oh gods, how was he going to do that?

"I'm afraid not Belle," he told her and paused. He spoke a little softer, trying to gauge her reaction, "I take it you haven't heard?"

Belle's brows furrowed in confusion when she heard what David said. "Heard what?" She started to get nervous. Oh no… Was something wrong with Tim? Was he in medical care again and that was why David had to leave? "Wh-What happened, David?" she asked in a more serious tone. She could tell by the look on his face that it was very bad, terrible news.

David sighed and put his arm around Belle's shoulders, gently coaxing her to follow him. "Why don't you come inside? We need to talk."

After he shut the door, Gold looked to the spirit. "What happened?" he asked worriedly, "Is it Tiny Tim? What's going on?"

The spirit did not shake her head but only kept it bowed. Her recognizable voice began to softly echo out in an eerie way. "It was not the boy, but another fell into the depths of illness and the result was grave."

After she said that, they had a clear view of Belle and David from outside the shop to watch. Suddenly, Belle's hand came up to her mouth and her head began to shake vigorously, refusing to believe whatever David had said. Her eyes began to water up and blur her vision. Soon she felt as though she couldn't breathe and her legs began to wobble. She quickly ran out the front door only to have her legs make her steps falter until she finally fell to the ground, beginning to sob hideously. She had never cried that hard since her mother died. The sobs wracked her body and her face immediately became red.

David didn't hesitate to run out the door after Belle, going right to her side and pulling her up off the ground and into his arms to comfort her. Nothing he could say would make it better, so he just sat there with her, letting her cry for as long as she needed to.

Mr. Gold watched the painful scene from afar. Oh he wished he could be the one holding Belle instead of David. He should be the one to comfort her; he should be the one to make whatever it was better. But what was it? What had happened?

Belle couldn't stop crying even if she wanted to. He was gone. He was gone and he was never coming back. There were so many things that were running through her mind but all she could really think about was the pain in her chest. It felt like somebody had reached into her chest and ripped out her heart with their bare hands. David's grip helped her stay whole but all she really wanted was to lie on the ground and wait for herself to succumb to death. That was the easy way out of everything. All the pain and what her future now definitely held for her.

After sitting there for a very long time, David tried to ease Belle up on her feet, but her body
seemed limp, like she had given up completely. “Belle, perhaps I should get you home,” he said
softly to her, wanting to get her off the streets and out of the cold.

Belle quickly looked up at David. ”N-No!” She clung to him, afraid that if she would let go she
would just crumble to the floor again. ”G-Gaston i-i-is there... Papa w.. Will question m-me... He’ll f-fi..Find out,” she said, referring to her feeling for Adam. Her father couldn’t know. He
would think she was tainted. She truly did want to give up on everything and go to a place where
her true loved ones were.

"Find out?" Gold pondered aloud. "Spirit what is happening?" he asked again, but still received
no answer from her.

"Okay, okay," David said trying to calm Belle after feeling how tense she got after he said
something about her home. "What if I take you to my house? Mary Margaret is home and Tim is
at school."

Belle sniffled a little before she nodded her head. "If th-that is okay... I d-don’t want t-to be in the
way,” she said between her sobs. "But I-I’m scared to be al-alone right now...” She whispered
rather numbly, feeling so much pain that her body began to reject any feelings. A large part of her
was still in denial and didn’t want to believe David.

"Don’t worry," he assured her, "you won’t be alone. I’m here for you. Mary Margaret, Bae,
Emma, we’ll all be here for you." David was unsure how Bae was holding up. He had been on his way to visit him before Belle had
showed. Now that would have to wait until he got Belle safely to his house. Once again, he tried
to help her to her feet so they could go.

This time, Belle went with him willingly and didn’t put up much of a fight, though she still had a
little bit of trouble walking.

"Losing a loved one can do this to a person," the spirit said to Gold in her whispered voice.
"Especially when that loved one takes up so much of your heart that it physically pains them to
leave the other person but in their eyes, it is always worth it in the end."

Lost a love one? But whom did Belle lose? Mr. Gold didn’t have much time to ponder it because
he suddenly found himself in yet another scene of the future.

It was evening and they were standing in Granny’s diner. Over in the corner booth sat Belle with
a man Gold didn’t recognize. The man was tall and handsome with dark brown hair and
smoldering gray eyes. He was saying something to Belle, so Gold walked closer so he could hear
their conversation.

"Belle, what’s with you? You’ve been acting like this for several weeks now," the man said in a
little bit of an accusatory tone. "And I’m getting sick of it."

Belle flinched a little from Gaston’s tone but still kept her head down, looking at her folded hands
in her lap. She was still grieving over Adam, having found out about his death nearly a month
ago now. Gods, how she HATED Gaston right now. Couldn’t he show at least a bit of sympathy?
Oh, that’s right. He didn’t know.

"I-I’m sorry... I’m just going through a hard time right now.. But I shall try to be better...” She
glanced up at him. Her father had decided it would be a great idea to run their family into the
ground again so now the only thing she could do to save them was to be with the brute in front of
her. There was no Mr. Gold to help this time.

"Well I know what will make you better," Gaston said arrogantly. He set down his fork and
threw his napkin up on the table. Reaching across to the other side, he roughly grabbed Belle’s
hand. "I’ve been wanting to do this for a while, but the moment never seemed right, at least not
until now.” He cleared his throat and smiled smugly. "A beautiful girl like you and handsome man like me—we belong together. I want you to marry me, Belle.”

Mr. Gold scoffed, unable to help the little chuckle that escaped him. Belle, marry this guy? How ridiculous! Just by looking at him, Gold knew he wasn’t for her. Yes he was handsome, but his manners were horrible. He was rude and conceited. And Gold couldn’t imagine this kind of guy would ever be all right with Belle and her books. He knew these kinds of men; he had dealt with many in his lifetime. He may look the part of a gentleman, but Gold could tell right off the bat he was scum.

Besides, Gold could also see Belle clearly wasn’t interested in the man. There was no way she would say yes, ever.

Belle’s breath got caught in her throat as she heard what the man across from her said. Marriage? With him? Why on earth would he assume she would want to marry HIM? Hell, her heart didn’t even somewhat belong to him. She hated him and was only doing this for his money so her father and her would be able to eat and pay bills and such. But that meant she would have to marry him too. It meant she would have to become Mrs. Gaston. It meant that she would have to bear his children. It meant that she would have to pretend to love him. “Marry you? Gaston, I-I… I’m flattered, but we’ve been courting for only a few months. And besides, I’m not sure my father is ready to give me up yet. I mean, he just got me back after THREE years,” Belle stammered out, trying to find every and any excuse to delay her having to say yes. It was obvious on her face how much she didn’t want to but she knew Gaston was too self-absorbed to notice.

"But I’ve already talked with your father and he has given us his blessing," Gaston purred, excited at the prospect. He didn’t notice at all the way Belle was reacting. "Christmas is only a couple months away. We could have the wedding then…sooner better than later.”

Belle’s heart dropped. How could her father do that? He knew how much she disliked Gaston! Her hands began to shake as tears stung her eyes. The only person she EVER wanted to be with was Adam… She felt a if she was being not loyal to him. But then again, he never loved her like she did him. Taking a deep breath, she began to reluctantly nod her head. "Then married we shall be," she practically whispered, rasping it out through her now tight throat. She had once sunk to the level of becoming a man’s maid for her father’s sake. Now her papa was taking advantage of her love and making her marry a man she despised. "Christmas shall be perfect.” This only tainted the holiday even more for the girl. It was now her least favorite holiday of the year. She HATED Christmas…

"EXCELLENT!” Gaston exclaimed smacking his hands against the table, creating a loud noise that caused the other patrons to jump. Finally he was getting what he had sought after for years. Clearing his throat he stood to his feet and turned toward everyone in the diner. "Everyone, I just want to say, the lovely Belle French has agreed to marry me!” He stepped over to Belle and roughly pulled her to her feet planting a wet sloppy kiss to her cheek. "We will have a Christmas wedding and it will be a wonderful, spectacular event!”

WHAT!? Adam almost collapsed on the floor. Belle was going to marry that dim wit, that oaf, that brute? What was she thinking? Oh gods…but she didn’t love him, she couldn’t love him, could she? It didn’t seem like she did, but maybe he was wrong. Suddenly it was like she shattered his heart into a thousand pieces, just like he had shattered her snow globe.

He became a little woozy and had to sit down. Oh gods…was this what it felt like for her when he denied her love? It was the worst feeling he had ever felt, almost like he couldn’t go on. But he had to remember that this was just a shadow of things to come—he could still change it. There was still time.

Belle gasped loudly and jumped when Gaston’s hands slammed down on the table in his excitement, gasping again when he suddenly pulled her to her feet. When she felt his lips on her
cheek, she tried to pull away, hating the feeling of his disgusting lips on her. She received some shocked looks as Gaston made his announcement. One of the people gave her a very disappointed look. That person was Ruby— the only person that she had been a friend with since she was a child. Ruby wasn’t upset at all that Belle was going to be with someone she had been with briefly. She was far from that. She was disappointed in her for practically selling herself to him. Belle’s cheeks turned to the color of cherries and she felt like her airways were being constricted. “G-Gaston… Please. Let’s not make it a big deal… You know I hate being the center of attention,” she said quietly to him, her shyness taking over.

"Please," Gaston grumbled, brushing her off. "You are to be my wife and every one shall know it! You should be proud to have snatched a man like me! Every woman in the town will wish they were in your shoes!"

With both hands, he grabbed her and pulled her closer. “How bout a kiss for your fiancé?” he asked leaning down wanting a proper kiss this time and not one on the cheek.

Belle’s eyes widened and her breath got stolen from her as he suddenly pulled her close, uncomfortably close. When he leaned down to kiss her, she reacted quickly and held her finger up to her lips. "Gaston. I wish to save my first kiss,” she swallowed hard, remembering how amazing her real first kiss had been. "For our wedding day. It will make it much more special. Besides, I’ve been coming down with something since my father stopped being able to pay for heat. I do not want to get YOU sick.”

"Oh, nonsense," Gaston scoffed. "Come here baby, we’re engaged now. I’m not waiting another two months for a kiss.” He kept leaning down toward her and using his hands to pull her closer, oblivious to the fact that she was dodging him and trying to pull away. "Unless you want to move the wedding closer?” He waggled his eyebrows, indicating there was an ulterior motive to his statement and continued speaking a little softer so no one else could hear him. "Then we could do a lot more than kiss…”

No one else in the room could hear Gaston, no one else except for Gold because he had stood and moved to stand right next to them. And he did not like what he heard. His fists were clenched at his sides and he was gritting his teeth. Oh if only Gaston was real and not a shadow, he would certainly become close friends with Gold’s cane.

Belle’s eyes widened again and she felt her heart stop. No way in hell was she moving that wedding closer willingly. Leaning up on her toes, she pressed a quick peck to his lips before pulling back and trying to step away from him.

The spirit spoke up a little bit. "Her father is practically selling her to that man all because you cared too much about your money to let somebody into your heart.”

"Does that man not love his daughter?” Gold asked. How could a father do that to his child when it was so obvious how miserable she was; when it was so obvious how much she hated Gaston? And not only that-Gaston was so self-absorbed and cared only about looks. Anyone could see he was not going to treat Belle as anything more than a pretty trinket.

The spirit continued to keep her head down. "When his daughter came back, he slipped back into his old ways and became unable to pay bills. Gaston’s family is rich and that means if Belle marries him, she would become rich too and could support him. You could have done the same if you were not so cheap. Just remember, that all we are going to see together are consequences of your actions from a few hours ago. You may think that you rejected her love, but you did SO much more…”

And with that said, there was another flash of light and they were standing inside Maurice’s flower shop. Belle was behind the counter when a familiar face came in; David.
David stepped into the shop, shutting the door quietly behind him. He glanced around until his eyes landed on Belle behind the counter. “Hello, Belle,” he called to grab her attention.

Gold smiled just a little when he saw David was the one who came in. Despite how Gold acted, he did like David. The man worked hard and rarely complained—something he enjoyed in an employee.

Belle looked up from what she was doing when she heard someone say her name. A small smile bloomed on her lips when she saw who the voice belonged to. "David," she said as she stepped out from behind the counter and walked over to him, giving him a warm, welcoming hug. "What are you doing here?" the girl said softly. She never had people come and see her anymore. She rarely got to leave the house unless it was to run errands or to go out with Gaston.

David returned her hug. “I came to see you. It’s been a while,” he said as he pulled back from the hug. He smiled at her a little unsure. “I heard some news around town… about you and Gaston.”

Belle smiled softly up at him, but her smile faltered when she heard him talk about her recent engagement. She swallowed hard as her gaze fell to the floor. "Ahh… I see… Gaston likes to be the center of attention… I on the other hand hate it…" She looked around to make sure no one else was there. "You know that this is a forced marriage right? I’m not a gold-digger like everyone says and I still haven’t got over HIM…” She told him, referring to Adam.

David placed a hand on her shoulder and looked at her seriously. Belle didn’t have to tell him this wasn’t what she wanted; he knew how she felt. Besides the relatively recent news of Gold was probably still haunting her. “You know you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, Belle? You don’t have to marry him no matter what your father says.”

Belle’s shoulders slumped a little. "But I do have to… I have to do what I can to survive… My father will run me into the ground like he did my mother if I don’t marry Gaston. He has enough money to feed me, clothe me, and give me a wonderful home to live in. Plus, he is going to help support my father and he is the only man in town who will ever want me… You wouldn’t understand. When you and Mary Margaret fell in love, you guys were both at the higher end of the middle class. I’ve been at the lowest of the lower class my whole life. This is my chance at a better future for me and my possible children. And when his money becomes mine, I can do what I want with it. That means I can pay for Tim’s treatments.” She told him with a smile, trying to make him and herself see the bright side of the situation. Besides Gold, Gaston’s family was one of the richest families in town.

"Belle, no you don’t have to," David countered without hesitation. "I know you don’t love him—you will be unhappy, no matter what he provides for you. And I do understand. Mary Margaret and I may have come from middle class, but look at us now. We can barely even buy a decent meal, but that doesn’t matter, because we make it. We’re happy and we love one another. Our children don’t have much—but they’re happy. All the money in the world will not fill that void in your heart—you’ll be miserable.” He paused taking a deep breath considering whether or not to bring up his next point. He knew it would be the only example he could use that would allow her to see reason—the only one she would relate to. He hoped to gods it wouldn’t upset her that bad. “Just look at Gold. The man had more money than he ever knew what to do with and he may have never had a happy day in his life.”

Belle let out a ragged breath when she heard what David said, her heart aching. “I may be miserable when I marry him, but I shall feel the exact same if I were to be alone. Besides, I will never be able to love another man… And if marrying him will save my father and perhaps even Tim, it will bring me some happiness in my life. You should understand this when I say that I don’t want to be alone… I don’t want to sleep in the same old, uncomfortable and cold bed the
rest of my life, nor do I wish to work in this damn shop until the end of my days. I may not love Gaston, but maybe, just maybe I will be able to one day. Maybe one day I will be as happy as I wish Gold could have made me…” she said with a sigh.

David knew that would never be true-it was just wishful thinking. He knew Belle well and he had also had a few run-ins with Gaston. That was not a man she could ever love; David couldn’t even understand how she ended up dating him in the first place. "Belle, I understand you won’t be able to love another man…” he started, trying to tiptoe around the subject of Gold as little as possible, "I’m not saying you should, but I just don’t think this is a good idea.” He paused, trying to think of a solution. "If things are too hard with your Papa, you are always welcome in my home, you know that right?"

Belle shrugged and shook her head. "I don’t want to have to depend on someone, David. You don’t need another person in your house and I can’t live with my father anymore. I’m getting sick and I fear that what happened to my mother will happen to me, okay? That is the truth. I don’t want to scare anyone, so I haven’t said anything about it. Gaston’s money will save me just like how it will save Tim."

David sighed, feeling like he wasn’t getting anywhere with Belle. She was only trying to do what was best for everyone like always. He knew the best thing to do was to give her time-she was smart, she would figure it out. But now that she had admitted she was sick-well he was more worried than he was before. It only made him think of his struggles with his own little boy. “Just think about it Belle,” he told her, “Living with us, getting your life together, it wouldn’t be forever-marrying Gaston would. And I know your thinking about the money, for you, your father and for me-but that won’t solve the problem. And please Belle, I don’t want you to feel responsible for paying for Tim’s treatments. He’s my son, my responsibility-I will find a way, but I don’t want that way to involve you marrying some brute you don’t love.”

Belle looked over at him and sighed, shaking her head. He would never understand. Walking back to behind the counter, she sat back down on her stool. "I want my life to have some meaning… And Tim is like the son and little brother I’ve always wanted. I don’t care if you don’t WANT me to help, I will do it anyways…” She opened her book, signaling that she was done having to explain herself.

David smiled half heartedly, knowing this was a lost cause for now. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate Belle’s help; he knew how much she cared for his boy, but he didn’t want to sacrifice her happiness. “Mary Margaret also wanted me to invite you to dinner tomorrow night. Bae and Emma will be there as well. We all want you to come. We miss you.”

Belle glanced up at David, a slight smile appearing on her lips. "I’ll.. Um.. I’ll see if it is okay with my father and Gaston.” She turned to leave the room, needing to do some stuff in the back. ” Thank you, David. For everything. You’re a true friend, she said softly before she went into the back.

David nodded, waving goodbye to Belle before leaving the shop.

Gold watched the whole scenario carefully, having gained a lot of insight to Belle’s decision to marry Gaston. It all made sense-she was just trying to be the hero. His Belle, she was indeed a hero. But this wasn’t the way to go about it. Why could she not see that? And why had she not tried to come back to him if she really cared for him? Perhaps she had, but after the Gaston incident, he knew it would have only enforced his assumptions that she was only after money and that her feelings were untrue. Oh gods…how had he reacted when he found out about her engagement? The spirit had yet to show him. He knew it wouldn’t be good and would hurt a hundred times worse than it hurt now. Yet, he understood it was only a vision, so he was going to try not to worry about it.
What did worry him a little though was Tim. David and Belle kept mentioning him and his treatments. It was obvious they still hadn’t found the money to help him and it had almost been a year. “Spirit, what about the boy, Tim? What will happen to him?”

The spirit herself felt a little ache where her heart should have been when she heard his question about the young boy. ”He does not have a bright future ahead of him. Not while his father is unemployed.”

The scene suddenly seemed to flash forward to a few hours later. Gaston and Maurice walked into the shop, smiling and laughing together. Gaston had treated Belle’s father to a few drinks at the tavern to once again celebrate his engagement with the man’s daughter.

When Belle heard them come in, she took a deep breath before she walked out. “I see you two had fun.” The girl gave them both a disapproving look. She had her arms crossed over her chest as she watched them, waiting for their answers. While they had been out drinking, Belle had been working and filling out orders.

"Unemployed?” Gold wondered. Oh gods—he had fired David! But why? He didn’t have much time to think on it though as he suddenly found himself watching the next scene.

"We sure did!” Gaston exclaimed, patting Maurice on the back. Maurice chuckled before walking over to Belle and giving her a kiss on the cheek. “Hello, Belle. I hope you had a good day. I’ll be upstairs if you need me.”

Belle didn’t even acknowledge her father as she continued to watch Gaston with narrowed eyes. Once her father was gone, she shook her head and walked over to the little schedule to see who would be working and when. Grabbing a pen, she began to write down what she would be doing.

"Friends? Dinner?” Gaston questioned as he walked over to her. He grabbed her around the waist and pulled her to his chest forcefully, bending down and giving her a wet and sloppy kiss on the lips before she could pull away. There was a thick fowl aroma of alcohol radiating off of him and it was clear he was a little drunk. "No, you can take the night off and come over to my house for dinner,” she explained to him when she knew he would question what she was doing.

"No, I said I want you to come over to my house tomorrow night,” he said with a little bit of a slur. "You can go to the Nolan’s another time.”

Belle glared at him slightly as she heard what he said and at the fact that he wouldn’t let her go. ”But Gaston, tomorrow they are having their whole family over and they haven’t done that since the night before I came home. Now I don’t care about what YOU want, I have had to do that since the day we started courting. Now PLEASE let me have one day to myself. For all I care,
you can go to the tavern and drink ‘til your heart’s content. Now please, let me go. You are drunk and you know how much I hate the smell of alcohol."

"Don’t care about what I want?!” Gaston was beginning to get angry. "You are to be my wife and you will do as I say! If I want you home with me, then you will be with me. Not gallivanting off doing God knows what!” He paused taking a deep breath and a little smile returned. "Besides, you had plenty of time to yourself today."

Belle’s jaw clenched and she cowered in fear slightly when he began to shout at her. Could her father not hear this!? Did he not truly care about her safety!? A few tears pricked her eyes and she had to quickly look away so he couldn’t see how weak she suddenly was. Gods, she needed her mother now more than ever. She could have prevented this. "I had no time to myself,” she said back to him bitterly. "I had to take over my fathers shift. Because you took him out to get drunk! You know alcohol is my fathers weakness!” She turned her eyes back up to him, showing him her tears as she yelled at him. "You’re gonna turn him back into an alcoholic!” She began to beat on his hard chest with her small, dainty fists. "Now let me go!"

Immediately, Gaston reached up and grabbed Belle around the wrists to stop her from beating on him. Maurice had passed out on his bed upstairs and was unable to hear anything that was going on.

Gaston gripped Belle’s arms tightly and forcefully jerked her forward where she was right in his face. “You will do well to remember your place, Belle,” he said in an eerily calm and quiet manner, but it was easy to see the rage burning in his eyes and hear the threat in his voice. “I will not put up with this behavior once we are wed. You will act appropriately and do what I say. So tomorrow night you’ll be joining me for dinner.”

After staring at her long and hard to make sure his point had come across, he released her and his signature bright smile returned. "And besides, I was only taking your father out to celebrate, no harm done."

There was an immediate flash of fear in Belle’s eyes when she heard what he said. The threat was a promise; a promise that next time, he wouldn’t just use words to put her in her place. Shrinking back into her shell, Belle began to shake a little. How could a man be so cruel? Everyone thought that Adam was a beast and fawned over Gaston when they had it completely wrong. Gaston was the monster. He was a malevolent beast who needed to be stopped. But no one cared about her enough to do that.

When he finally let go, she rubbed her wrists and dropped her gaze. Walking over to the schedule, she picked up the pen. She hadn’t finished writing down what she had planned on doing so there was only ‘Dinner with.’ She hesitated before she finished filling it in with Gaston’s name, her hand shaking as she wrote.

She kept her back to him when she finished, trying to stop the tears that were stinging in her eyes.

"Yes, that’s right,” Gaston said with a smug tone as he watched what she wrote. His demeanor instantly changed back to his usual arrogant personality. "Now I’ll be going. Wouldn’t want to stay here and risk the chance of creating wrinkles on my perfect face because my little bride keeps getting on my nerves."

After walking over to her and stealing yet another kiss from a reluctant Belle, Gaston left the shop.

The moment she heard the door close behind Gaston, Belle crumpled to the ground and started sobbing softly. During all of that, how come her father did not come down? Gaston had been assaulting her! Did her father not care about her one bit? Was he using her as much as Gaston was? Soon enough, she was sobbing hard to the point where she could barely breathe. She had no one left in the world to help her. David had tried but she had stopped him. He was going to run out of care eventually. Suddenly, Belle found herself with a pair shears poised at her jugular.
"She feels so alone in the world with no one left to care for her. Just like she thinks, David’s well of caring has almost run dry. She has refused his help with Gaston because she has been so afraid of turning Gaston down and having exactly that happen,” the spirit told Adam. "That is one of the only reasons she hasn’t broken off the engagement yet. She is too afraid.”

The shears shook in her grip as she tried to force herself to take the plunge. But she just couldn’t find the strength in herself to do it. Finally, the shears clattered to the ground rather loudly. Belle felt like too much of a coward in her mind to go through with it.

"BELLE NO!” Gold exclaimed when he saw what Belle was planning to do. He stumbled forward and tried to grab the shears from her hand, too determined to even hear what the spirit was saying. His hand came down to snatch the shears from her, but it just went right through it. He stared a moment at his hand then at Belle, panting from worry, looking at everything as if he was processing for the first time this was only a vision—not real. He already knew that, but it only brought little comfort because he also knew these visions could become truth.

He was only able to breath again when Belle finally came to her senses and dropped the shears. “Gods, Belle…” he said. She couldn’t do this and she couldn’t marry that brute Gaston. He would not allow this to happen; he could never live with himself. If only he could get his hands on Gaston—the man would get what he deserved.

Gold turned to the spirit and began begging. “I have to change this. I can’t let this happen! Tell me how! Will an apology be enough? Please spirit…I want her to be happy…”

"Being together is the only thing that will make either of you happy. But what about the others? What about the Nolans? Can you stop cheating David out of money now that you know about his son and his family’s condition? What about everybody else in town who might have similar stories to David’s? People you over looked?"

When the spirit finished speaking, there was a flash of bright light and suddenly they were standing in a large warehouse, surrounded by many things. It was obvious that it was the town auction they had every few months.

Just when Adam had taken it all in, a familiar couple walked past, arms linked and only one smiling face. "Gaston," Belle said, softly, trying to subtly pull her arm back. "I don’t see why you wanted to come… There is nothing neither of us will want,” she told him with a sigh and a shake of her head.

In all honesty, she hadn’t been looking. Why? Because most if the stuff in there was HIS. People had raided his house like the parasites they were and were selling whatever they got their hands on.

Gold’s gaze lingered on Gaston, a large scowl crossing his face. He wanted nothing more than to beat the man to a pulp with his cane, but he couldn’t because it wasn’t really him. However, it didn’t stop Gold from hating the man and wishing he could.

Tearing his gaze away briefly, he looked around the warehouse. It was filled with tables of all sorts of small less expensive things, mostly household items, which people could buy before the auction. Anyone in town could bring their items to sell and the bigger more expensive items were usually the ones actually auctioned off.

Adam had always attended the auction in hopes of finding that rare item for next to nothing to sell in his shop for triple the price. Did that mean Belle was bound to run into him here? He could see no reason why he would miss an auction. But what would his future self do when faced with Gaston? Oh please, please, let him see the man for who he really was and do something about it. This may be a shadow of the future, but it would give Gold a lot of pleasure if he could watch himself knock some sense into that buffoon.

When Gaston didn’t reply and simply continued to look around, the girl sighed. It pained her to look at all the items that belonged to Adam and she still refused to let Gaston and her father know
about her infatuation with her ex-master. As her eyes landed on curtains that she recognized, she felt her heart flutter and sink all at once.

The girl ripped her arm out of Gaston’s grip and quickly went over to them. She grabbed them and ran her hands over them. They were thick and dark red velvet with gold patterning on it. She subtly inhaled and almost immediately started to cry but fought back the tears; it still smelled like him. It all smelled like him: the books, the bedding, the furniture.

Gaston just shrugged Belle off, not wanting to bother with her right now. He was more preoccupied with looking around, so he left Belle with plans to find her later when he needed her for something.

Gold watched Belle carefully, furrowing his eyebrows in confusion. Why were his curtains here? And his books, some of his furniture and other things? Was he selling it? That was very unlike him. It wasn’t easy for him to part with his things. Everything had sentimental value or it was worth too much.

Perhaps he was getting rid of them because of the memories they held that reminded him of Belle. Yes that had to be the reason. If Belle wasn’t in his life anymore, he knew he wouldn’t be able to bear looking at anything that reminded him of her.

"Belle!" came a familiar voice from behind and Gold turned around to see Bae approaching. He had a smile on his face and was looking well. Gold briefly wondered if they had made up since Belle left.

As Belle heard her name being called, see jumped a little and quickly put the curtains back before the owner of the voice could catch her in the act of practically cuddling Adam’s drapery. When she turned and saw Bae, relief washed over her and a friendly smile bloomed on her lips. "Bae.. It’s so great to see you.” She quickly glanced around to make sure Gaston wasn’t looking before she pulled Bae into a hug.

"You, too," Bae replied, returning her hug. It was clear he was very happy to see her. "Been a while." He pulled back and looked at her carefully. "How you doing? I never expected to find you here,” he asked, referring to more than just her general health. After everything that had happened to her in the past few months and from the things David had told him, he was really worried about her.

Belle shrugged her shoulder and kept the smile on her lips as her eyes would occasionally glance away from Bae for a moment, checking to see if Gaston was looking. If he was, she feared what he would do to her for talking to another man even if he was just her friend. "I’ve been fine.. Busy working at my fathers shop again. And my um… My fiancé and I are here to look for things for our new home when we get married… Well at least that’s what he said.”

Gaston was busy talking to some friends he had run into and could care less what Belle was doing at that moment.

"Fiancé, huh?” Bae said trying to sound happy for her. He had heard of Belle’s engagement, but he had a hard time believing it. He wasn’t even sure if she was over his father. He didn’t know much about Gaston though, so he had no idea how he treated Belle. Maybe she was just moving on and trying to be happy. However, he couldn’t help asking his next question, although he instantly regretted it. "Won’t you think that will be weird…to have my father’s stuff in your house with your new husband?”

As soon as Belle heard what Bae said about her having Adam’s stuff in her husband’s house, she felt the air being taken from her lungs. Of course she had already thought about that, but she felt her healing heart break all over again. “I-I… I just need one thing… One thing that will remind me of him.. One thing that will make me happy when I see it… Something to make it feel like… Like home…” she whispered, her gaze dropping. It was obvious to anyone who knew about her
infatuation with Adam that she considered his house home more than she did her own.

"I’m sorry," he said immediately as he wrapped a supportive arm around her, "I didn’t mean to upset you, it just kind of came out."

It was clear to him now that his instinct about her feelings were correct. If that was so, then why was she getting married? But he didn’t want to ask and make it worse. Maybe David or Mary Margaret knew more and could enlighten him.

He decided it was time to change the subject. “David and Mary Margaret will be here soon,” he said hoping the prospect of seeing her friends would cheer her up, “Emma went over this morning so she could help with Tim and Neal.”

Belle bit her lip when she heard Bae talk about David. She still felt horrible for lying to him about WANTING to be with Gaston, but she worried he would talk to her fiancé and make him or herself get hurt. Gaston didn’t like people trying to stand up to him. "That’s good… Are they going to get Tim a new book? Or just coming to look like everyone else?"

Bae sighed heavily. It was no secret David was short on money and these past months had been such a struggle since losing his job. He knew Belle was aware of that as well, so he didn’t want to come out and say it. “Well, you know…I think they’re just coming to look…you know, get away from the house for a while, take a break from the children.”

Belle nodded her head understandingly and brushed a curl behind her ear. "Well I will make sure to keep an eye out for them,” she said softly as she turned back to look at the curtains, running a hand over them. "Do you… Do you think he would be mad if I bought them?" she asked Bae nervously. "I think all three of us would find comfort in knowing they will be taken well care of and not bought just to burn in spite of him.” She knew that is what most people were gonna do with his less valuable things.

Bae looked at her sympathetically. “I think you should do what you feel is right,” he told her softly, referring to more than just the curtains. “But I’m sure my father would take comfort in knowing a loved one had his things and not some bitter stranger.”

Gold looked at the pair curiously as he listened to their conversation. Was he here or not? It was hard to tell. He hadn’t seen the future version of himself walking around, but it was hard for him to believe he would be selling his things without supervising.

The auctioneer spoke up, indicating the auction was about to start. Gaston looked up to find Belle, seeing her standing with Baelfire. He narrowed his eyes at the man talking to his fiancé and decided it was time for Belle to join him. “Belle, here, I’ve found our seats!” He yelled loud across the hall making sure everyone heard him. It was a way to show he was dominant.

Belle opened her mouth to respond to Bae when she heard Gaston. Her eyes snapped over to him and her cheeks turned bright red when she saw people looking at her. Gods, she hated that man. Glancing back at Bae, she gave him a sad smile and wished him farewell. ”It was nice seeing you again. Have nice day.”

Almost immediately after she finished talking, Belle reluctantly but quickly made her way over to her fiancé. ”Gaston, I believe I found some lovely curtains over there what would look wonderful in our future home.”

Bae waved bye and disappeared into the crowd, but not before noticing the way Gaston acted toward Belle. He had things he had to attend to during the auction, but he made a note to himself to keep a watchful eye on the pair.

Gaston looked at Belle and shrugged before ushering her into the seat. “We’ll see, as long as they match all my trophies and prized bucks, but let’s just watch the auction for now. Curtains are the least of our worries. I’ve already got my eye on several pieces and I don’t want them to get away.” He plopped down in the seat next to her.
Belle let out a ragged breath and sighed a little as she heard him, her gaze dropping as she sat down on the chair. "Why am I not surprised," she mumbled as she crossed one leg over the other, leaning away from the man beside her as she waited for the man in front of the crowd to begin the auction. Knowing Gaston, he was probably going to spend as much money as he needed to to get what he wanted.

As the auction began, Gaston bid on everything that he had wanted, not caring whether Belle liked it or not. Most of the stuff was gawdy masculine items or furniture, and none of them were from Gold’s house or shop.

Bae was sitting a few rows ahead of Belle and Gaston with two empty seats next to him. Every once in a while Bae would glance back at the entrance looking to see if David and Mary Margaret had arrived, flashing Belle a nervous smile whenever his eyes met hers. Despite how engulfed he was in the auction, Gaston did not fail to notice Bae locking eyes with Belle and he instantly felt jealous. “Who is that guy?” Gaston whispered to Belle.

Belle was barely paying attention to the auction as it went on. She mostly scoped out things that belonged Adam and mentally slapped every person running the stupid auction. When she caught Bae’s eyes, each time, she smiled shyly back at him before quickly looking away.

When she heard Gaston question her, she couldn’t help but roll her eyes. “It’s Bae Gold. He’s Emma Swan’s husband and Mr. Gold’s son. While working for Gold, Bae and I became close friends. He always checked on me to make sure that his father was not being horrible to me.”

Gaston turned his attention entirely to Belle. He moved so he could look directly at her. “Gold’s son? Why would he care how that bastard treated you?” Gaston questioned before a realization hit him. He scowled and basically growled his next words, ready to pounce on the guy. “Was he your lover?!”

Belle sighed and shook her head, opening her mouth to explain to Gaston that Bae cared because he knew how his father normally treated people and he didn’t want her to get hurt. But when she heard his next question, her eyes widened. ”What?! You think… That I?!” She tried to wrap her head around what he had thought up. "With him? Gods, no. He’s like a brother to me. And I have been a lover to no one. Besides, he is a married man. Married to a beautiful, kind-hearted woman at that. Now before you go and hurt someone unnecessarily, just stop assuming things.” She shook her head and turned back to the auction, crossing her arms over her chest. She would need to warn Bae about Gaston soon.

Gaston glared at Belle, not believing a word of hers, especially since she was getting worked up about his statement. He flashed another glance to Bae before going back to watching the auction, vowing to himself he would take care of that man later.

The auction continued on, but the Nolans never showed up and it was beginning to make Bae wonder if everything was all right. As the auctioneer moved on to the next item, Bae suddenly felt a buzzing in his pocket. Pulling out his phone, he glanced down to see a message from Emma. ‘Bae it’s Tim, meet us at the hospital.’

Jumping up, Bae whirled around to leave, stopping off at Belle’s seat to grab her. “Belle, something’s wrong with Tim,” he said, the urgency and worry clear in his voice, “everyone’s at the hospital.”

When Belle saw Bae heading over to them, she tensed and tried not to look over at him. She didn’t want him to get hurt. Gaston would throw him onto the ground in a blink of an eye and not even care. She didn’t want that to happen to Bae. He had already gone through too much because of her.

But when the words left his mouth, she felt her heart stop. ”Wh-What?!” She jumped up onto her feet and threw on her jacket. Her heart began to race and worry filled her to the brim. ”Okay.
Let’s go,” she said, beginning to walk away and not even paying attention to Gaston.

Gaston was on his feet in an instant, going after Belle and grabbing her arm to stop her. “Belle, what are you doing?” he asked angrily, “You’re not going anywhere with this man!” He glared down at Belle showing his words were more than just words, but a threat.

As Gaston grabbed her arm, she gasped and tensed. Reality set back in and her heart stopped. No. He wasn’t going to stop her this time. It wasn’t until she turned and saw the look in his eyes that she felt scared. “Gaston... It's not like that. Emma’s little brother is in the hospital and they need me there. Please. I can’t abandon them at a time like this.”

"Like I’d believe a pitiful little excuse like that," Gaston replied, his voice beginning to rise with anger and his grip tightening. People were starting to turn around and look at the scene that was unfolding. "You’re staying here with me.”

Bae stepped in, not liking the way Gaston was treating Belle. “Hey buddy,” he said sternly as he reached out to push Gaston away. “Take your hands off her.”

Belle winced as Gaston’s grip tightened on her arm. She opened her mouth to tell him to loosen his hold on her, but Bae cut her off. She flinched and turned to look up at the man standing up for her. "Please, Bae... Don’t get involved." Belle gave him a pleading look, begging him silently. She didn’t want him to get hurt by her fiancé.

Belle felt eyes burning in the back of her head. When she saw all the people watching, She quickly turned her gaze to Gaston. ”Please, Gaston. Let all of us step outside, people are watching.”

"I’m not going to stand by and watch this man treat you like this," Bae retorted to Belle, standing his ground. His eyes set sights on Gaston. "I don’t know what your problem is, but Belle is only accompanying me to the hospital to visit her friends."

Gaston completely ignored Belle’s pleas to go outside. Forgetting about her, he released her arm so he could step right up to Bae. He towered over him by at least a foot or more, but that didn’t cause Bae to back down.

"I don’t know who you think you are, but Belle’s mine. She does as I say and I say she stays!” Gaston growled possessively.

Belle’s eyes widened as she watched Bae stand up to her fiancé. Grabbing Gaston’s arm, she tried to pull him away. "Gaston! Stop this! You’re being foolish!” she yelled at him, still trying to pull him away. No matter how hard she pulled on him, he wouldn’t move. Why was this happening? Why wouldn’t he just let her go see Tim? Then it hit her. He wasn’t holding onto her anymore and she wasn’t about to let him think that he could do all of this. She was sick of him.

"Bae.. Please, let’s just go. He can’t tell me what to do.” She quickly moved behind Bae and grabbed his arm.

Bae obliged even though he was ready to fight Gaston if need be, but he knew it was more important to get to the hospital. Following along with Belle, they left a screaming and very angry Gaston behind.

"Belle get back here this instant!” Gaston hollered, not caring if everyone was watching or not. He grit his teeth together as he watched the pair retreat. If only they were alone, then they wouldn’t have gotten away so easily. Well, whenever Belle got home, he vowed to put her in her place and find out who this 'Bae’ really was to her.

Gold watched the entire scene in horror. He already had seen what Gaston was capable of, but to think the man wouldn’t allow Belle to go to the hospital when little Tim needed her most? Oh gods, Tim! What had happened? Was he dying? Please no… “Please spirit, please tell me the boy is not dying! I couldn’t bear it!” He wanted to make everything right. He wanted the boy to live. If only the spirit would just take him back he wouldn’t have to see anymore; he could fix
The spirit remained quiet as there was another flash of light and they stood inside of an unfamiliar room that seemed like it was falling apart. It had a small bed, books scattered around, and a small wooden wardrobe. But the thing that gave away the room most was a girl with long brown curls tied up into a bun and blue eyes that held so much sadness; Belle.

She stood in the corner in front of a mirror, flattening her black dress as tears spilled down her cheeks. One of her tear stained cheeks had a very faint blue coloring on it but Belle reapplied more make-up to it to make it as invisible as possible.

"Belle! Baelfire is here!" Her father yelled from downstairs. With a shaky breath, she slowly made her way downstairs.

Gold did not have to ask the spirit what this scene was about or even wonder why Belle was crying. He didn’t even want to give a thought to why Belle’s face was blue either. He didn’t even want to give a thought to why Belle’s face was blue either. He knew-in his heart he knew everything that had happened. “Spirit please, don’t show me this. I don’t need to see this. Please, I can fix it; I can make it where this never happens-Tim will live.” He was sure he could make everything right; there was still time. Yet, the longer the spirit stood there, more quieter than ever, the more he began to doubt himself. It was possible to change these visions of Christmas’ yet to come wasn’t it? Or were they inevitable despite the decisions he makes?

Hearing Adam, the spirit decided to take pity on him and take them forward a couple of hours. They were in a graveyard in front of a small gravestone that had ‘Timothy Nolan’ engraved into it. Only Belle, David and Mary-Margaret were left.

Belle placed a couple flowers she had snuck from her father’s shop onto the freshly placed earth. The sun began to sink into the sky and Belle had yet to run out of tears and she had long forgot about the make-up she had smudged off. After a while longer when the sun was no longer in the sky and the Nolans wade their way back to their car, Belle stayed. She had another grave to visit.

She began to walk up and down the rows and rows of tombstones until she found the one she was looking for.

From the angle the spirit and Adam stood at, they could not read what name was written on it.

Tim…no…Adam’s instincts were right. And no matter how much he knew it to be true, no matter how much he kept telling himself this was all just a shadow of things to come, it still hurt more than ever to stand there and look at that grave, to watch the Nolan’s cry over their dead son. A few tears pooled in the corners of his eyes and he tried to wipe them away with no luck. He hadn’t cried in years, yet it seemed the past evening he had cried more than he had in his entire lifetime. And most of the things he had cried over weren’t even real-well not yet. He just couldn’t let this happen-he wouldn’t. This journey couldn’t be all for naught. When he returned he would be able to change it, he was sure.

As Belle moved to go to another grave, he watched her curiously. Who else was she going to visit? Her mother perhaps? Oh gods-that was a mess he would have to work out too when all of this was finally over.

Belle stepped forward and ran a hand on the top of the gravestone with almost a loving touch. Slowly, she got down onto her knees and reached out to trace the letters of his name. "I-I.. I miss you,” she rasped out, speaking to the man below the earth.” Gods… It feels good to say that.” Her hand began to tremble a bit as she took a deep breath. "Why did you abandon me? Why did you have to leave? Why wasn’t I enough?” A new wave of tears stung her eyes. "I could have prevented this from happening…” she whispered the last part, her throat tightening. "I loved you… And I still do and I hate you for it. You left me here with all these feelings and they won’t go away! Make the pain stop! Please! Please… I just want to be happy again…” The tears began to fall down her bruised cheek.
Belle’s words were heart-wrenching and they only raised more questions. Who could she possibly be talking to like that? At first Gold thought it might have been her mother, but the longer he listened to her, the less sense that made. It was possible Belle could have thought her mother abandoned her…but it didn’t make sense that her mother wouldn’t think Belle was enough. From the one scene where he saw them together, Gold could tell Colette loved her daughter very much.

Unwilling to deal with the suspense any longer, Adam stepped up closer to the grave behind Belle so he could read the name. What he saw there was more than shocking. Suddenly the world around him began to spin as he tried to register what he was reading: Adam R. Gold. No…NO…It couldn’t be! But it was! Suddenly it all made sense…suddenly all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. David being out of a job, Belle choosing Gaston, all Gold’s belongings at an auction where he was nowhere to be found. And everyone in town except Belle seemed overjoyed at some horrible news. He should have realized it earlier. All the evidence was right in front of him.

Swiftly he swung around to face the spirit. “Spirit please…I have to know…are these the shadows of things that will be or things that may be only?”

But the spirit didn’t answer him. He couldn’t even see her face as she had the cloak pulled down too far.

"Please spirit answer me!” he begged with more tears in his eyes. He fell to his feet to grab the bottom of her robes. "I have to know…I want to make it right. I’ll be a better man, I promise! I promise!"

He buried his face in her robes as he continued to plead. “I will do better-I’ll live in the past, present, and future. I will always remember the lessons learned here tonight-please! Spirit please just tell me can I still make it right?!"

Slowly he pulled his face back to look at her, the pain having overtook him, not even noticing the darkness around him as it began to brighten. “Please spirit, please!”

Then, the light began to shine brighter than ever, briefly blinding Adam. As it faded away he opened his eyes to see he was no longer gripping the spirit’s robes, but the bottom of his bed skirt. He glanced around in disbelief. He was home; he was in his own bedroom and the little bit of light streaming in from behind the curtain told him it was morning.

Quickly he clambered to his feet, grabbed his cane, and hurried to the window, throwing the curtains open and looking outside. It really was Christmas morning! But was he back in the present? Or was this another vision?

Noticing one of the neighbor’s boy’s trudging down in the sidewalk through the snow, he opened the window and called out to him. “You, there! What day is it?”

The boy had his hands stuffed in his pockets as he walked through the snow, a small smile on his face. But the smile disappeared when he heard someone yell at him. Confusion flooded his features as he looked up to see Mr. Gold. He really was as bonkers as people always said. "Why it is Christmas day, Sir!” he called back, still as cheery as he was before. How could he not be? It was Christmas!

Everyone in town was awake and bustling about. That was, except for one young woman, who was down the hall from Adam and had been up all night crying while trying to cheer herself up by reading.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

I ended up splitting this chapter because it was getting too long, so there will be one more. Not sure if there will be an epilogue or not.

Christmas Day! It was Christmas Day! It wasn't too late. Adam could fix it-he could fix everything. Shutting the window and hurrying over to his closet, Adam quickly dressed in one of his nicer suits with a red tie and handkerchief for the occasion. He had an idea of how he could apologize to Belle, but if she had already woken and left he knew he would have to find another way. He hoped to all the gods that she was still asleep. Glancing up at the clock he saw it was early so he was optimistic.

Tip toeing out of his room, he listened for any signs of Belle being awake, but heard none. Smiling to himself he walked down stairs, trying to not to allow his cane tapping against the floor to make a lot of noise.

Making his way into the kitchen, he glanced in the pantry and the fridge; happy to see Belle had fully stocked it recently. Pulling out everything he needed, he set to work fixing the most extravagant breakfast he had made in a long time.

Once all the food was finished cooking, he lit extra candles in the dining room, opened the curtains, and added a few more Christmas decorations to the ones Belle had left up the night before. He had a few that had been stored in the basement. Most of the décor he had disposed of ages ago, but there were still some things left over from Bae's childhood. They would have to do.

Lastly, after setting the meal out on the dining room table, Adam walked over to the spot where the shattered snow globe lay. He frowned as he stared down at it, pieces of glass strewn everywhere and a stain in the carpet from the liquid. If there was anything she wouldn't forgive him for he knew this would be it.

Using his cane he knocked some of the bigger pieces of broken glass out of the way so he could reach down and pick up the base to examine it. The figurine on the inside was still intact and when he turned the knob a beautiful melody still filled his ears. He flipped it over to glance at the bottom and saw the inscription Belle's mother had written. It caused him to sigh heavily but also sent a shiver up his spine. It was from her mother. His dream or vision or whatever happened to him the night before had been right.

After cleaning it off, he carefully placed it on the table near Belle's spot and headed up the stairs to wake her.

Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to scowl as he knocked on her bedroom door with the top of his cane. Hopefully she would answer and she hadn't left in the middle of the night. It was unusual for her to sleep this late.

Belle had been in a rather deep sleep from about three in the morning until now. But she woke almost immediately as she heard the banging on her door. She was still dressed in her attire from the night before and a large part of her wished that the fight she had gotten in with Adam the previous night had just been a horrible dream. But as she saw her things packed, she knew it wasn't suddenly it hit her. What time was it?

Her eyes snapped over to the clock that was beside her bed and saw that it was MUCH later than when she normally woke up. Quickly making herself look somewhat presentable, she opened the door and found a scowling Mr. Gold. She wanted to scowl back, but her eyes just fell to the floor, trying to hide her tear stained face.
"I'm sorry I slept in… I promise to be out of your house as soon as I can." Her voice was hoarse as she spoke and her heart ached tremendously. Just like the part that wished that the previous night had just been a dream, it also wished that he had come to apologize and take her back. But thoughts like that only made her heart hurt.

"Out of my house?" he questioned putting on the best act he could muster, trying to sound angry. "Is that why you think I'm banging on your door, waking you at this hour? No, dearie…" He knew the use of that nickname would really crawl up her skin and make this all more believable. "I'm here because you so thoughtlessly slept in while I arrive downstairs only to find my breakfast has not been prepared."

Belle physically flinched when she heard him call her dearie. It had once been endearing to her until she found out he only called the people he used that nickname. She was just a pawn in his little game and it made her already shattered heart quiver in pain. "I'm sorry. I thought you throwing me out entailed that I was no longer your maid…" She glanced up at him and still saw the anger on his face. "But I shall make your breakfast before I leave," she said as she stepped forward, eyes still on the floor as she closed the door behind her, shoulders hunched forward, feeling broken beyond repair.

Mr. Gold watched her carefully, almost breaking the act when he could see how much pain she was in. Perhaps this wasn't the best way to go about this, but it was too late. Besides, she would be downstairs soon enough and see the surprise he had laid out for her. That was, if she couldn't smell it already as they descended the stairs. Oh gods, the moment was near, what was he going to say? What would she do?

It took Belle a few moments to pull herself from her thoughts to finally realize that there was a certain smell in the air. It was a pleasant smell that made her stomach rumble a little. It smelled like breakfast. But hadn't he told her to just make breakfast? The girl walked into the kitchen and saw dirty dishes in the sink that were not in there the previous night. Belle turned around to look up at Adam. "Where did those come from?" she asked, highly confused by why it smelled like food and why there were dishes.

Adam looked at the sink full of dishes and then at Belle. He forced back a smile and a chuckle, somehow managing to hold up the image he was still trying to keep. "You're the maid, you tell me. I was under the impression that you were doing your job, but it appears not." He took a few steps toward the dining room. "Am I to assume you left my dining room in shambles last night as well?"

Belle was slowly getting more and more confused as he played off her questions. Shaking her head and sighing, she made her way to the dining room. "I'm sorry, but I do believe that you were the one who destroyed the r…" Her voice trailed off as she saw the condition of the room. The table had breakfast on it and the room was even more decorated than it had been the previous night. Now she was even more confused. "I-I… You…" she stammered out, taking in the sight before her.

Gold stepped up behind her, unable to hide his smile any longer as he watched Belle take everything in. Briefly he considered reaching out and putting his arm around her waist, but he decided against it. He wasn't quite sure how this was going to go and he didn't want to over step his bounds. "Merry Christmas, Belle," he said softly still smiling brightly.

Belle turned to look at him when she heard him wish her a Merry Christmas. What on Earth was happening? In her three years of working here, he had never done ANYTHING like this before. She stumbled backwards a little as she saw his smile. He was going to be the absolute death of her. He was going to be what made her believe she was crazy. But she couldn't help but notice how handsome he was when he smiled. No. She couldn't afford to think like that. "B-But… But
last night... You... You rejected me and told me to leave. Is this some kind of good-bye meal? Because if it is..." Pain spread across her face as she turned to look away, not wanting him to see the hurt on her expression. Was he just going to laugh in her face about how stupid she had been the previous night and tell her good riddance? She wouldn't be able to handle being in the same room as him for too long.

"No, no, no, no, nothing like that," he said, continuing to speak softly. He dared take a step toward her even though she was backing away. "It's meant to be an apology." He so desperately wanted to reach out and grab her hand, arm, something, but he resisted, letting his hands rest atop his cane. "I was a fool and I never should have acted as I did. My whole life I've been a fool and I know I've made mistakes, but I want to fix them-if that's still possible. I don't want you to go Belle, I want you to stay." He had more to say, but he paused wanting to see her reaction.

When she heard him, her broken, crumbled heart quivered and she felt a few pieces being put back together. But she tried not to let it show. "Is this some kind of cruel joke? I mean, I appreciate your apology, but how am I to be around you when your mere presence makes my heart hurt? I-I... I can't be here with you but not... be... Be with you..." Her voice cracked a little. "I know I should be mad at you and wanting to slap you before storming out and never looking back... But I... I can't. My heart can't stop yearning for you."

"I know, I know, Belle," he said reassuringly. If there was one thing he learned from his journey, it was her heart was and would always be his. Hearing her voice crack, he feared she might start crying. "This isn't a joke. This is real," he started. Unable to stop himself any longer, Adam stepped right up to her and slowly reached out to caress her cheek, letting his thumb stroke it gently. He gazed down into her big blue eyes and smiled, feeling a few tears pool at the sides of his. For once he was letting everything he felt show, instead of hiding behind a mask.

"I want you Belle, I want you here with me, I want you to be with me...I've wanted it for longer than I can admit. I can't change what I did or who I was-the past is the past, but I want to be a better man for you now. I want a future with you..." He paused taking a deep breath before he said his next words. "...I love you and I want you to be my wife."

Belle nearly flinched when he stepped closer to her, barely inches apart. But when she felt his warm, leathery skinned hand caress her cheek, she couldn't help but lean into his soothing touch, eyes lifting to meet his chocolate brown ones that held so much warmth in them.

Her breath caught in her throat as his words sunk in. He wanted her to stay... He wanted them to be together. He wanted to be a better man for her... He loved her. She had dreamed for so long about him saying those three words to her but she never thought he actually would. "R-Really? Do you really mean what you say?" She was still a little taken back by what he had said about him wanting her as a wife. Surely he wasn't truly asking her for her hand.

"Aye," Adam replied with a nod, "I'm a man of my word." He stepped even closer to her now that he knew she wasn't going to back away. Their lips were an inch a part and while he wanted so desperately to kiss her again, he knew he couldn't. Not until she forgave him. He began to beg a little with her, worried that she really might not forgive him. "Don't leave me Belle, please. My life is and will be nothing without you. I promise I'll make it right...everything." He glanced over at the table briefly, his eyes landing on the broken snow globe. Releasing her face, he walked over and picked it up, twirling it in his hands, before turning to speak to her. "I had no idea how much this meant to you. If I had..." More tears welled up, but he fought them back. He wanted so desperately to say if he had known, he never would have broke it, but part of him wondered if that was even true. After seeing what kind of man he really was, he wouldn't be surprised if he had broken it out of spite. He no longer doubted Belle's feelings, but now that he understood what kind of life he led,
he just couldn't understand them. Finally the tears came, like a flood, and he his eyes darted from Belle's to the snow globe. "How could you Belle?" he asked in disbelief through sobs, "How could you have fallen in love with someone like me? When I do horrible things like this?" He shook the figurine in the air to indicate he was referring to it.

Belle's heart fluttered in her chest, the pieces so slowly coming back together, healing themselves bit by bit. He did want her. He wanted a future together; one that involved both of them finally being happy for once. Happy together. She pushed back the tears in her eyes until she saw him pick up the base of her mothers snow globe. The bottom part was still intact luckily so she knew that she could hopefully get it repaired.

She couldn't help the ache in her chest that she felt as she saw the tears well up in his brown eyes as he thought so horribly about himself. This just proved his words to be truer. What had happened that night that FINALLY made him see the error in his ways?

The girl walked over to him and slowly lifted her own hand up to his cheek, giving him time to back away if he truly wished to. But when her hand gently connected with his cheek, she used her thumb to wipe away the tears that had spilled from the corners of his eyes. "Because I don't always see the man that made those mistakes. Living with you and being treated like I was invisible had its perks sometimes. I've witnessed you crying over a fight you had with your son, over a book you read... I've seen you sitting in front of the fire, so deep in thought that you show your emotions on your face. Sometimes you smile, sometimes you scowl but you always look handsome. Plus, when you gave me my room with all those books in them, I knew that you truly cared. You wear a mask to protect yourself from pain but I have seen behind that mask many a times. THAT is why I love you."

"Oh, Belle..." More tears came to his eyes as he listened to her beautiful words. He gave the snow globe another glance. "I'll have it fixed, I swear it. I never truly meant to break it..." His eyes floated back up to Belle's. "Can you ever forgive me? For this? For everything?"

Looking down at the snow globe, still keeping her hand on Adam's cheek, the girl smiled a little and nodded her head. "I do believe that I can forgive you..." She looked back up at him, love shining in her eyes. "On one condition... You place your trust in me and believe that I will stay loyal to you and am NOT in this for your money... I grew up as poor as could be and came out just fine. Money means absolutely nothing to me."

Closing his eyes briefly, he relished in her touch and listened to her words carefully, considering them. If he had never gone on the journey he had had that night then he knew for sure that he would never be able to accept her conditions. He knew he would have never believed her and she wouldn't be standing there with him in that moment. She would have walked out of his life forever.

But the visions had enlightened him and he knew in his heart that Belle's feelings were true. "Yes Belle I can do that. I was stupid before-to assume that of you." His eyes opened again to meet hers. "I'm unaccustomed to being loved-or loving for that matter. It all just took me by surprise, but I can see clearly now. I know you're not after my money. I know you just want to be happy and I'm prepared to give that to you...to the best of my ability."

Belle smiled when she heard what he said, relief washing over her like a tidal wave. With a happy sigh, her hand moved down to rub his neck a little in a soothing manner. "Thank you... I will ask for nothing more than your love... Even that is more than I could ever ask for..." Her eyes flickered down to his lips as her tongue came out over lips to wet them a little. They had sealed their last deal with a handshake; this time she hoped they would seal it with a kiss—that is, only if he wanted to.
"Oh, Belle…” Gold breathed before he crashed his lips to hers in a deep and passionate kiss. He wrapped his arms around her so he could pull her close while he poured all the love he had into the kiss.

This was happening…this was really happening. Belle was forgiving him. It wasn't a dream; it wasn't a vision; it was real. She was real, standing there in his arms, lips pressed to his.

As he pulled back, he rested his forehead against hers and just held her, never wanting to let go. "So does that mean you're saying yes," he finally asked her, "Will you be mine forever Belle? Will you be my wife?"

Belle felt tears of joy fall from her eyes as she kissed him back, arms wrapping tightly around his neck as she smiled against his lips, cherishing every moment. He wanted this. There wouldn't be a repeat of last night. At least she hoped so.

When he pulled back, she kept herself close to him, sniffling a little as she rubbed his neck and played with the hair at the nape of it. As she heard his question, she smiled and squeezed him tighter. "Yes… Yes, Adam Gold. I will become your wife," she whispered to him, happiness filling her voice as her throat tightened from her suppressed tears. She loved him with all her heart and never wanted to leave his side.

Yes. She said yes. Adam could almost not believe his ears. Belle. His wife. And she loved him. It was like a dream come true.

Gently, he set the snow globe back down on the table so he could hold her properly, letting their lips meet again for another kiss as tears of joy streamed down his face causing it to be wet, but still sweet.

Belle moved one of her hands to wipe his tears as she continued to kiss him back, tears of her own falling onto her cheeks. It was as if everything she had dreamed of growing up was coming true: being happy and being with the person she loved and who loved her back.

She didn't mind that his lips trembled in the kiss and stretched a little as he smiled against her own lips. She loved the feeling of his kisses. He knew how to kiss much more than she did so the girl simply followed his lead like a dance only they knew the steps to.

When they finally pulled away, gasping for breath, both their faces were red and puffy from the tears and lips swollen from the kiss. He wanted more than anything to spend the entire day doing that, but he knew there were other more important things he needed to do; things that would ensure those awful visions of the future never came true. He had already ensured Belle would stay by his side, somehow getting her to miraculously accept his apology and marriage proposal, but she was not the only one he needed to make amends to.

Keeping one arm around her he motioned toward the table with his other hand. "Why don't we enjoy this lovely breakfast I have prepared for the two of us? Then you can dress, because we have much to do today."

Belle lowered her hands when he finally pulled back, loving the feel of his suit under her hands. It was just then that she noticed how festively dressed he was. She smiled softly and nodded her head when she heard his request.

As they ate breakfast together, they carried on idle conversation, just cherishing and appreciating one another's company. Belle couldn't help but still wonder what had caused his change of heart the previous night and what it was they had to do after breakfast.

"Just leave the dishes," Adam told Belle once they were finished eating. "We can clean up later. Mustn't waste any time." He set his napkin down on the table and stood to his feet. "Go ready yourself to go out and then meet me in the basement," he told her.
Belle raised a curious brow but then nodded her head before she went upstairs to her room. First she washed her tear stained face before getting dressed in her warmest clothes, putting on her boots and jacket after brushing through her curls and retying the ribbon in her hair. Once she was happy with how she looked, she went down to the basement to look for her fiancé. It was strange but delighting to think they were now engaged. "Adam?" the girl called out softly.

"Here, Belle," Adam called from the back corner. He was standing near two large boxes he had dug out from behind some other things while Belle was upstairs. "Do you think you could help me carry these upstairs?" he asked when she approached. "I'm afraid with my ankle..." He sighed. He hated feeling so worthless when it came to things like this.

Belle couldn't help but smile a little when she heard his request and the sad look on his face. Walking over, she pecked his cheek softly. "Don't worry about it, love. I'm a strong woman." She chuckled and stacked one box on top of the other before letting out a breath. "Where to?" Belle was very thankful that being his maid for three years was a sometimes a physically demanding job and had helped her build up muscles.

A small, surprised smile formed on Adam's face when Belle kissed his cheek. This would definitely take some getting used to. "Just upstairs where it will be easy for us to go through them," he told her, motioning for her to go first.

The girl nodded and carefully made her way back up the stairs before putting it in the living room so that Adam could sit in his chair to look through whatever filled the two boxes. When she placed them down, she turned his chair towards the boxes before sitting on the ground across from them.

Adam walked over and sat down, resting his cane against the little side table. Bending down he opened one of the boxes and smiled when he saw the contents. It was full of toys; older, vintage ones that had clearly been well played with, but they were still in great condition. He reached down and pulled out a small toy plane and twirled it in his hands, looking at it lovingly. "These were Bae's toys when he was a boy," he explained to Belle.

Belle smiled a little as she listened to him explain what the toys were. She picked up one of them and looked over it before she looked up at him. "You kept them all these years?" she asked softly, obvious affection shining in her cerulean eyes. She found it so endearing, how much he cared about his son even if he wouldn't show it outwardly.

Gold nodded as he placed down the plane and picked up a toy car. "These toys brought many wonderful memories to his childhood when there weren't many. But now I think it's time for them to bring happy memories to another family. I only hope Bae won't mind that I pass them on. I believe the Nolan's will get better use out of them then I will."

Belle smiled more and felt her heart flutter. "You are giving these to Tim and little Neal?" she asked, absolutely loving this new, caring, compassionate side of Adam. "Oh I'm sure Bae won't mind that I pass them on. I believe the Nolan's will get better use out of them then I will."

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"I only hope your right," Gold said trying not to sound sad as he pulled out the toy train, the same one from the past, the one he had gifted Bae the night Milah had left. It brought a single tear to his eye, especially since the memory was so fresh again after having relived it. "Perhaps, you could find a bag to put these in?" he asked Belle, trying to deter her from noticing how emotional he was getting over it.

Even though he tried to hide it, Belle could tell that these toys truly meant something to him; especially the toy train that was in his hand. Getting up, Belle nodded her head and walked over to
lean down to kiss his temple softly. "Remember, these are going to Bae's nephews." Belle knew Neal and Tim were technically Bae's brother-in-laws, but they always called him Uncle Bae. "It's not like he won't ever be able to see them and I know it would mean a lot to him to see you trying to mend things. And if there are a few that mean a great deal to you, you can always keep them and add them to your collection of random knick-knacks." With that said, Belle walked up to her room and took her clothes out from the trunk she had packed them in, leaving them on her bed for now as she walked back down with it. "How about a makeshift toy box?"

"That should do just fine," he told her as he began to sift through the toys and put them in the trunk. Even though it would be really hard to let go, Gold knew she was right. He could do this and Bae would appreciate it.

Gold was still a little in shock that they were actually related to the Nolan's by marriage. Up until now, he had wondered if that was true since he had discovered the news in the vision, but from Belle's words he could decipher it was. The more he learned to be true, the more shaken up he was, and the more he realized what he went through was not a dream.

Belle carefully packed the toys that he wanted to give away into the trunk, making sure to give him encouraging smiles every so often when he began to doubt himself. She also kept reminding him that he didn't HAVE to do what he was doing. That just showing up and smiling and showing his change of heart through the way he acted would be enough- just like it had been enough for her.

"No, Belle. I WANT to do this," he assured her. Just the thought of seeing a smile on little Timmy's face would be worth it.

Once all the toys were ready to go, Gold turned to Belle to let her know there was more he wanted to do for the Nolan's. "It's Christmas and I want them to have the most wonderful Christmas dinner." He knew there was plenty of food in his pantry, enough to cover most of the basics and feed them well, but he also knew there was no turkey. There was no way he would have let Belle waste money on such a frivolous thing before, especially when it was just the two of them. But where could he get one on Christmas Day? "Do you know if any shops will be open today so we may buy a turkey?" He asked her, knowing she knew more about it than he did. He hadn't shopped for himself in years. As his maid, that had been Belle's job.

Belle thought for a few moments before she nodded her head and smiled softly. "The butcher's shop just down the road. I saw he had a prized turkey in the window yesterday that was roasting away but nobody bought it because it was much too big and nearly twice the price of a normal turkey. He might have a few smaller than average ones but I am not sure. I could go down and see if he has any normal turkeys left if you wish," she told him with a warm smile.

He reached out and grabbed her hand, squeezing it ever so slightly as he offered her a soft smile. "We'll go together. I need to stop at my shop as well," he told her. It was already afternoon and luckily the snow had ceased for the time being. They wouldn't be able to drive there because there was too much snow on the roads, but the walk wouldn't be terrible. Even though his foot was a little sore from the previous evening, he would manage.

Belle looked down at their hands, still not quite believing that this was all real and that she was his and he was hers. But she loved thinking of it. "Alright. Shall I leave the trunk here then?" The girl asked as she rubbed her thumb over his knuckles in a soothing, loving manner. She did truly love him. Especially this new him who actually loved her back.

Gold glanced over at the case full of toys. It would be quite cumbersome to lug all over town. But if they left it to come back for it, would they be walking more than they needed to? He didn't want to make their journey too long given the weather and his ankle.

Then it hit him. He honestly had no idea where the Nolan's lived. On his journey, he had been to
their house, learned they lived close by, but still had no idea where it was exactly. Its location would certainly influence his decision. He looked at Belle sheepishly and embarrassed. "Eh..." he started, feeling foolish for asking this question, "Where exactly do the Nolan's live?"

Belle rolled her eyes affectionately, trying to hide her shock about Adam not knowing where his best employee lived. Smiling a little back, she closed the box and looked up at him. "Well, from the butcher's shop, it will be about a ten minute walk in this snow. Hopefully, it will be so cold that it numbs the pain for you," she said with a slight dry chuckle in her voice, worry blooming onto her face as she glanced down at his ankle. "Maybe it would be best if I went and got the turkey and then came back for you and the box. You already hurt yourself yesterday."

"No, no, I'm fine Belle. I'll come with you." He was accustomed to his injury and had done much worse. The walk to town wouldn't be a problem. Besides, he really needed to get something from the shop and although it could wait he didn't want it to.

Belle looked up at him for a few moments, studying his expression before she nodded understandingly. "Alright. But if it starts to hurt too much, just tell me and we can take a break from walking. Okay?" It was obvious how much Belle cared about him. And these feelings did not just how up. She had been caring about him for a while. It only heightened now that they were truly together.

Mr. Gold nodded with a smile, before standing. "I will."
Walking over to the front closet he pulled out his thick wool jacket, gloves, and scarf to ready himself to go out.

Belle picked up the trunk that was luckily not too heavy. Placing it down while Adam dressed warmly, the girl looked between herself and him for a few moments before she bit her bottom lip. All she had on to keep her warm was a jacket that he had graciously bought her a while back. "Do you... um... Have any extra gloves by chance?" They weren't even outside but she could already feel her fingers going numb from the non-heated rooms. "If you don't it's fine. I can tough it out."

Adam glanced over at her from the side as he slipped his own gloves on. Suddenly he felt a pang of guilt as he listened to her question. Belle didn't really have any clothes, let alone warm ones and it was entirely his fault. He frowned. He needed to take better care of her. "I think there may be some in here somewhere," he said as he dug through a basket in the closet. If he couldn't find any, he would just give her his, but luckily there was an extra set. "Here," he said as he handed the gloves to her, "They're a little big but they'll do for now. First thing in the morning I'll take you out to buy all the clothes you need."

Belle took the gloves with an appreciative smile before she kissed his cheek. Now that they could be together, she couldn't stop kissing him. "Thank you, but you really don't need to, Adam. I'm fine with what I have," she said, not wanting him to feel obliged to buy her things now that they were together. That was what his huge scare was about the previous night: her being after his money. Belle worried he would start thinking that again if she said yes to it. Slipping on the gloves, the girl tucked the ends into her sleeves to keep them on.

Adam reached over, softly stroked her cheek, and smiled at her. "I know you are," he told her. "But you don't even have the essentials. It's about time I take care of you."

Belle leaned into his touch, loving how his warm leather glove felt on her skin. When she heard what he said, she looked up at him and couldn't help but smile. "If you believe that is what's best..." Gazing up at him, she couldn't stop herself -even if she wanted to- from leaning forward and brushing her lips against his.

Gold tried his best not to be taken by surprise when she kissed him. It was all so new to him; he
definitely needed some time to get adjusted to these freely given affections Belle was constantly bestowing upon him. He also had to control himself and not grab her by the arms and kiss her how she was meant to be kissed. There would be plenty of time for that. They needed to get on with what they were doing. Gently he kissed her back, but didn't allow the kiss to linger on for very long. He offered her a smile as he pulled away. "Shall we?" he asked, motioning toward the front door, asking if she was ready to go.

Belle smiled softly and nodded her head, heart still fluttering from the short and sweet kiss, before she picked up the trunk of toys and motioned for him to go first with her head because her hands were full and she couldn't open the door. Once outside, she carefully made her way down the slippery steps and pathway, making sure not to fall or drop the box.

Adam helped her when she needed it, careful not to let her fall down the steps because she was trying to carry the toys. Gods, he wished there was nothing wrong with his ankle. He should be carrying that trunk, but since there was nothing he could do about it, he would just have to accept it.

The walk to town was not terrible. It was only snowing lightly and the snow on the ground wasn't that deep, which made it easier on Adam's leg. As they arrived near the downtown area, there were only a few people out here or there and most of the shops were closed. Hopefully, the butcher's shop would still be open.

Once they neared his shop, Adam turned to Belle. "You can leave that with me," he told Belle, referring to the trunk of toys, "And go get the turkey you saw. I'll wait here for you."

He reached in his pocket and pulled out a little change purse filled with money and then handed it to her.

Belle found this walk to town actually bearable and she didn't feel as alone as she usually did. If his ankle bothered him later from all the walking, she would gladly care for him like she had on many occasions before.

As they arrived at his shop and she heard his directions, she nodded her head and took the coin pouch after putting the box down. "Shall I meet you back here when I am done? It will probably be best on your ankle because your shop is closer to the Nolan's house than the butcher shop."

Adam nodded before squeezing Belle's hand and retreating inside. Setting the trunk down, he glanced around a moment, his eyes landing on David's empty desk. The man worked so hard and never reaped any benefits. Gold would have to fix that and he knew exactly how to do it, but what he needed from the shop had nothing to do with David; it was for Belle.

Making his way to the back of the shop, he pulled out a set of keys and unlocked a glass cabinet full of very expensive jewelry. Taking out the rack of diamond rings, he took a moment to look at them, trying to decide which one would be perfect for Belle. Anything would make her happy, but he wanted to give her the biggest, most expensive one. However, he didn't want to make her uncomfortable or even make her feel like he was buying her love. So, he decided to stick with something simple.

After finally choosing a ring, one with a two-carat princess cut diamond and a gold band that was braided all the way around, he put the rest of the rings up. He then took a seat in the back to rest his foot while he waited for Belle to return.

Belle quickly made her way to the butcher's shop and she couldn't keep the smile off of her face as she walked. It wasn't just because it was Christmas day. It was because she finally felt truly happy for the first time since her mother had passed away. Her father always tried but their family was never the same after Colette's passing. Her father became a slight drunk after her mother died which then turned into him becoming addicted. Luckily, he had been staying clean, hoping the fates would reward him for good
behavior by making sure his daughter stayed safe. After buying the roasted turkey from the butcher -which was surprisingly on sale because it was the last day it was be fresh and juicy- she made her way back to Adam's shop, the smile still never leaving her face. She was to marry the man she had been in love with for a while. It might have been a not quite thought out plan, but her and Adam would get through it together. Entering the shop, she stomped off the snow from her boots before entering. "I'm back!"

A large smile formed on Gold's face when he heard Belle. Standing, he moved the curtain aside to go back into the front room. "Were you able to get the turkey?" He asked before he could see that she was holding it.

Belle held up the rather large bagged turkey when she heard him. "All roasted, hot and seasoned and ready to eat," she said with a soft chuckle before lifting it to place it on the counter. "Are you going to carry the turkey? Or do you have something else to carry? I can make two trips if you like," she said softly, used to doing as much as she could for him.

"No, I can carry it," he replied. Even though that was a huge turkey she bought, he could manage and it would be easier than the trunk of toys. He stepped over to the counter near the turkey. It was probably best to leave as soon as possible since it was already hot. He didn't want it to get cold, but that would probably happen on the walk anyway. It could be warmed up in the oven if needed.

First, he wanted Belle to have her present. Smiling softly at her, he reached out and took her hand. "There is something else," he said looking at her with love shining in his deep brown eyes. "I have a present for you."

Belle nodded her head understandingly, chestnut curls bouncing a little with the action. But when he gently took a hold of her glove covered hand and informed her of a present he had for her, the girl's brow lifted in slight confusion. "Present? Adam. You really shouldn't have. I mean, I didn't get you anything. That is far from being fair," she said softly, frowning a little. Because he did not pay her, she was not ever able to buy him or anyone else a Christmas gift during the past few years.

He continued to smile at her. "That's not true, Belle. You've given me more than I could ever ask for. You've given me your heart, your love. And you've agreed to be my wife…” He reached down into his pocket and pulled out the ring. Momentarily he held the ring out for her to see, before he slipped off Belle's glove on her left hand and then gently slid the ring on her finger. "And my beautiful, loving wife deserves a beautiful ring."

Belle's heart fluttered and a deep scarlet blush bloomed over her already slightly flushed cheeks. He had called her beautiful and she couldn't stop her heart from racing in her chest. Nobody besides her mother and father had ever called her beautiful.

When she saw the ring that he had pulled out of his pocket and then moments later slipped it onto her finger, her eyes widened a little in shock. Now THAT was something worthy of being called beautiful. Why he felt that she deserved something so elegant and beautiful was beyond her. After he slipped it on, a smile rose onto her lips and tears filled her eyes. This was making it official. It was no longer just words anymore. "I love it, Adam…” She looked up at him, trying to fight back her tears. Now she didn't want to put her glove back on.

Adam inwardly breathed a sigh of relief. He was worried she would turn it down, but she didn't. No she loved it. "I'm glad," he said with a smile as he dared step forward and wrap her into a warm embrace.

Even though they had revealed their feelings for one another and she had even agreed to marry him, he was still nervous about showing affection, no matter how much he wanted to. It wasn't something he had done in a very long time and given his and Belle's somewhat distant relationship
as Master and Maid, he still feared she may reject him. It was such an abrupt change.

Belle had been waiting for moments like these for quite a long time, so any time he showed her affection, she openly accepted it to encourage him and help him feel less afraid that she would reject him. She could tell by the occasional tensing of his shoulders and flustered look in his eyes that he was nervous and felt as though he had forgot how to love. Belle on the other hand had no experience but went by what she had learned in books.

Hugging him back, she wrapped her arms around his neck and rested her cheek on his collarbone, breathing in the surprisingly soothing scent of his cologne that she had gotten faint whiffs of throughout her years of working for him. "Thank you, Adam. For everything," she whispered softly, hoping he would never let go but knew he soon would have to.

"No Belle, thank you." Adam pulled back so he could look down at Belle, examined her lovely features up close. He smiled softly down at her and reached up to run the back of his hand along her cheek. "You have made me happier than I have ever been."

Belle sighed happily from his touch and closed her eyes to lean into it and cherish it. When his hand was low enough on her cheek, she turned her head a little and kissed his knuckles softly before letting him resume. "I could say the exact same thing about you…" she murmured softly before she let her blue eyes flutter back open to gaze up into his chocolate brown ones.

Adam chuckled lightly at her little affection, enjoying it more than anything. He let his gaze linger on hers for a moment longer before he pulled her into another kiss. Her lips were so smooth and silky and she still tasted of honey from the pancakes that ate at breakfast.

Belle could still taste the lingering sweetness of his favorite tea on his lips as she eagerly kissed him back, eyes closing once more as she pulled herself closer to him, letting out a happy sigh against his warm, slightly chapped lips. She could feel the stubble on his face tickle hers a little bit as their chins rubbed against each other momentarily.

Smiling against her lips as she continued to kiss him, Gold couldn't help but let one of his hands wander up into her hair, running it through her soft curls gently. Gods he wanted to deepen the kiss and stay like that forever, but he knew they needed to go. Reluctantly, he pulled back and sighed. "It's best we get on our way."

Belle's cheeks were flushed and her heart was racing by the time Gold pulled back. She let out a small sigh of her own, fighting back a frown as she nodded her head. She looked down at the ring on her hand for a moment before she slipped the glove that Adam had lent her back on. This time, she couldn't even stop the smile from blooming on her lips as she picked the trunk of toys back up.

"I suppose it is."

Before walking over to her, Adam picked the bagged turkey up off the table. "We have the rest of our lives," Gold told her with a smile, "but right now there are others to think of."

He opened up the front door and held it open, letting Belle step outside first. After locking the door behind them, they set off toward the Nolans, Belle leading the way since he wasn't quite sure where they were headed.

As they neared a familiar crossing, the road where a little flower shop was that they both knew all too well, Gold felt a pang of guilt. He reached out and grabbed Belle's arm to get her attention. He hesitated before he said what he wanted to say. "Belle…if eh…if you want to stop and say hello to your father…I'd be more than happy to oblige."

In all honest to gods truth, Gold wasn't sure he wanted to see Maurice, not after the way the man had treated Belle and tried to force her to marry Gaston. However, he had to keep reminding himself that those things never happened. It wasn't real. As of right now, Maurice was still a broken man who cared deeply for his daughter. And Gold no longer wanted to stop Belle from
seeing him.

Belle turned her head too look back at the man behind her when she felt him grab her arm gently to get her attention. She had been trying to make herself not think about where they currently were but the words Adam said made her remember rather painfully. She glanced over at the flower shop and bit her bottom lip. Part of her worried that if she went in, her father may never let her back out. But perhaps he would be understanding. Or maybe he would shun her for her decisions. "Is it… Is it a wise idea right now? I mean, I know it's Christmas and all, but what if he gets upset and refuses to let me come back to you?"

"I honestly don't know, Belle," Adam told her. He barely knew the man besides what he saw in the visions and most of those were false. Belle would know better than he. "But it's entirely up to you. Do what you think is best." He reached out and squeezed her hand. "I'll stand by whatever choice you make."

Belle took a deep breath and nodded her head, taking a moment to think. Of course she wanted to see her father and tell him of the wonderful news, but perhaps that news could wait. "Why don't you choose Mary-Margaret a poinsettia? My father will definitely give it to either of us for free so you have no need to worry about spending anything on it," she said softly before making her way with him towards her father's shop.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Here is the last chapter, but there will be an epilogue that I will post after Christmas. I hope you liked the story, it was very fun to write. Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays!

Slowly, Gold followed along behind Belle, feeling more nervous and uncomfortable than ever. So she wanted to see her father…it shouldn’t have surprised him, but it did. Especially since it was a spur of the moment decision.

But that wasn’t what was making him feel anxious. No…he had no idea how Maurice was going to react, especially when he learned of his and Belle’s engagement. And he really hadn’t had any time to prepare himself for this meeting.

Before they entered the shop, Belle turned to Adam with a pleading look, having come to her senses. "For my father’s and my sake, let’s pretend what happened today didn’t happen. Today is just another day and I am nothing but your maid. Okay? I don’t want him freaking out. But I promise to tell him another day."

Although he agreed that was a good idea, he couldn’t help but feel a little hurt that she didn’t want to tell her father of their relationship right away. Briefly he considered she might not sincerely want to marry him, but quickly his dismissed those thoughts. It was no secret that Maurice hated him. Everyone in town hated him. Belle was only trying to ensure their Christmas wouldn’t be ruined.

He gave her a small nod. "As you wish."

Stepping over to the side, he remained out of direct sight, so Maurice could only see his daughter when he answered the door. He didn’t want to sour the mood right off the bat.

After giving him a loving smile to make sure he didn’t take her words the wrong way, she put down the box of toys and lifted her hand to knock on the door, loud enough for her father to hear. Nervousness fluttered around in her stomach as she waited for her father to answer. Of course his shop was closed today. It was the holidays.

The girl couldn’t help the ache she felt in her chest from not being able to proclaim her love for Adam to everyone. Plus, he probably didn’t want people knowing. It would no doubt taint his reputation.

Maurice was inside fixing a bite to eat when he heard the knock at the door. He furrowed his brows in confusion, but only assumed it was a customer. "We’re closed!" he called out loud enough for the patron to hear. "We’re closed!” he called out loud enough for the patron to hear, but didn’t go over to the door.

Belle frowned a little when she heard him deny her, her heart aching. Lifting her hand, she knocked again and this time spoke up. "Papa! It’s me!" she called out, hoping he would hear her. "I need to get some flowers and there is no other place in town!" she continued, praying that he wasn’t still mad at her for leaving with Adam to be his maid and not listening to him.

Maurice dropped the loaf of bread he was holding when he heard the voice at the door…the voice he would know anywhere. “Belle?” he questioned aloud. No it couldn’t be…could it?

Coming out of his stupor, he rushed over to the door, undid the locks, and opened it to find Belle
standing there at the threshold. Briefly his mouth hung open in shock…his mind trying to tell himself that his eyes were playing tricks on him, but no, there she was. Belle, his Belle. A giant smile formed on his face and he didn’t wait another moment to grab her and pull her into a hug, squeezing her tight, not ever wanting to let go. “Oh Belle! Belle! Belle! I can’t believe it!”

Belle smiled when she saw him open the door, hoping that he would not slam it back onto her face. When he pulled her into a hug, she eagerly hugged him back, her chest aching with how much she had missed her father. But she hoped he didn’t think she was coming back for good. She had said that she needed to buy flowers. “I can’t stay for too long, but I have someone who needs a poinsettia and said I could come along to see you.” She really wanted to tell her father about the engagement, but she worried he would think the wrong thing and call her a whore.

Maurice pulled back from the hug, but did not release her. He heard what she said, but at the moment he was too overtaken by the euphoria of seeing his daughter again. “Oh, Belle, just let me look at you,” he said as he continued to stare at her in disbelief. “I still can’t believe it…but how…how did you get away? That monster has never let you come visit me before…”

Adam rolled his eyes when he heard Maurice and decided to step out of the shadows before the man could say something else that would only make the situation worse. Coming up right behind Belle, he placed both hands atop his cane. “That monster, is standing right here,” he said with an emotionless face. He was going to try as hard as he could to be nice to the man—after all he hadn’t done anything yet that earned his hostility.

Belle smiled up at her father, blue eyes gleaming with happiness. That was until she heard her father call Adam a monster. Her smile faltered and she couldn’t stop from stepping back a little. “Papa.. I…” This was why she was afraid of telling him about the engagement. But another part of her wanted to step back, wrap her arms around Gold and confess to her father about their love.

"Papa, he is not a monster and I am only here to visit."

Maurice looked between Belle and Gold, taken completely by surprise. He didn’t realize Gold was there with Belle. All of a sudden he wasn’t sure what to do, what to say, or how to act. What did this man want from him? Why after three years had he shown up on his doorstep on Christmas Day no less? He never allowed Belle to visit…EVER.

"Belle…I don’t understand…” he said in dismay.

Belle bit her bottom lip and looked down for a moment before glancing back at Gold, silently begging him with her eyes to help. She didn’t know what to say anymore. She didn’t know what to tell her father. Especially since it seemed like he was all alone on Christmas. Maybe she should tell him the truth and invite him to the Nolans’? Now that Adam was supplying some more food and toys, there would be plenty for everyone.

Gold saw Belle’s plea for help and spoke up. “Well as your daughter has informed you a few times now, we are here for poinsettias. That is if you still have any in stock?”

Maurice stared at Gold wide-eyed and unsure, not accustomed to interacting with Gold…not since the day Belle left. And she was back now…or he had thought she was back, but it was clear she wasn’t. Why would Gold do this? Was this some cruel joke? Was he here just to dangle his daughter around in front of him for a little while before he snatched her away again for a few more years?

He sighed and motioned for the two to come inside. “I have a few left in the back.”

Belle let out a quiet sigh of relief when she heard her father say that he still had some of the flowers in stock. Walking in first, she stayed by her father before she lead Gold to where she remembered the poinsettias being. When they were alone for those few moments, she whispered a quiet thank you to him before walking back over to her father. "I’m sorry I have been unable to visit, Papa. But Ad… Mr. Gold and I have… um… Worked something out so I should be able to
"Really?" He questioned, not sure if he believed her. He didn’t want to get his hopes up only to have that monster snatch them away. He glanced over at Gold who had his back to them. Gold was trying focus on picking out a flower, wanting to get out of the shop as soon as possible. He was beginning to feel like this was a mistake. If they left now, he could let Belle come back alone.

"How did you manage that?" Maurice asked looking back at his daughter.

Belle’s hands began to get too warm as they stood in the heated flower shop. It was the only part of the entire building that got any heat. Biting her lip, she tried to think of a way to explain to her father the truth but to skip around the parts that would scare or upset him. "Well, I guess you could say we made an agreement of sorts.” As she spoke, she took off her gloves so that her hands wouldn’t sweat.

An agreement? Oh gods...he hoped Belle hadn’t done anything against her will. That man had already taken advantage of Belle enough. Maurice opened up his mouth to ask her something else, when the glimmer of something caught his eye, causing him to look down. Then he saw it…it was unmistakable there on her left ring finger…a large diamond ring…but that could only mean one thing… He gasped, stumbling backwards a few steps before he looked at Belle pleadingly. “Belle, please tell me it isn’t so!” he exclaimed, pointing at her finger.

Belle looked at her father extremely confused when he began to suddenly stumble backwards and panic over something. What he was panicking over, she had no idea. Or at least she didn’t until he pointed at her hand and reminded her of the ring that was on her finger.

Belle cursed under her breath before she lifted her right hand and placed it on her father’s shoulder, trying to steady him. "Papa, it’s not what you think. I mean, it kind of is, but it is not as terrible as you are assuming. He is not forcing me to do anything, okay? Calm down. I can explain myself if you just calm down.”

Maurice’s bottom lip trembled as he tried to remain calm and not have a panic attack. No this couldn’t be so. Belle and that man… No. They couldn’t be engaged…they just couldn’t. The thought of it was starting to make him feel faint. “I…need to…sit down,” he stuttered out not looking directly at Belle as he spoke.

Belle nodded her head and led her father over to the steps, that being the closest thing. Helping him sit, she stepped back and took a few deep breaths. "Okay… What I need you to know, is that this is not another deal that I made with him. I said yes to the engagement because… Well… Because I love him… And he loves me.” She glanced over at Adam before looking back at her father. "Papa… Please don’t hate me.”

Gold glanced over at Belle at her father from across the shop, curious what was going on but unable to hear what they were saying. He wasn’t going to intrude however, not unless Belle invited him over. He assumed she was just catching up with her father and he didn’t want to ruin that for her.

Maurice shot a look over at Gold then turned back to Belle. He smiled weakly at her, but it was only to show that he loved her. He was not happy at all about this arrangement. “Belle I don’t hate you...I could never hate you. I just can’t understand. How could you love him…after everything he’s done, after he ripped you away from me?”

Belle moved to sit beside her father, wrapping her arms around his shoulders in comfort. "Because while I was working for him and living in his home, I got to see sides of him that nobody else sees. I’ve seen him cry, smile, laugh, weak. I was able to see the man behind the bitter, angry, tough facade; I was able to see the man behind the mask. And if you give him a chance, I am sure
you will be able to as well. In fact, we are taking most of his son’s old toys and giving them to the Nolan’s as well as a wonderful turkey dinner. I don’t know how David and Mary-Margaret will feel about this, but I want you to come with us. I don’t want you to be alone on Christmas again.”

Maurice listened intently to everything Belle was saying. Once she was done he remained quiet, it all being a lot to take in. His daughter and Gold? He still couldn’t believe it. He took one of Belle’s hands and looked at her compassionately. He spoke softly. “Belle I would love to spend Christmas with you…but are you sure this is what you really want. Are you sure Gold hasn’t tricked you into falling for him? He’s holding nothing over your head?”

Belle squeezed her father’s hand and smiled softly at him, nodding her head. “Yes, Papa. I have seen a change in him that I cannot wait for others to see. And if you don’t believe me, ask him yourself and see if you think he is being honest.” She looked over at Gold and saw that he was watching. She used her free hand to wave him over. "We both know that I am a good judge of character. And I have yet to be wrong about someone,” she told Maurice. "And I know you just worry about my safety. Try asking him some questions and see for yourself that his heart is true.”

When Gold saw Belle wave him over, he assumed she was ready to go. From where he was standing, he hadn’t been able to hear any of her and her father’s conversation, so he thought she had stayed true to her word and not told Maurice anything about their engagement. Picking up the poinsettias he had chosen, he strolled over to Belle.

He could see Maurice looked a little distraught, but he considered it was only because Belle was about to leave again.

Belle but her bottom lip as she looked up at Adam. "I forgot about what was on my finger so I took off my gloves and somebody might have seen it…” Belle looked down, feeling extremely embarrassed. "My father here has something he would like to talk to you about.” Belle lifted her hand with the ring on it, indicating to what he wanted to talk about. The girl felt awful for even considering hiding the engagement from her father, but she was afraid of how he might if reacted. So far, it is a lot better than she had expected.

Mr. Gold’s eyes widened as he saw Belle’s mistake. Taking a deep breath, he braced himself for what was coming, feeling unsure of how he was going to handle the situation.

At least Maurice had not jumped up and started yelling…that was a good sign. But what was he going to say to the man whose daughter he had stolen away and kept from him for three years and now wanted her hand in marriage?

Maurice looked down into his lap for a few moments, trying to think of what to say instead of ‘What the hell do you want with my daughter, you bastard?!’. When he gathered his thoughts, he looked back up at him, heart racing a little. He worried about his daughter more than he could ever say. ”Are your feelings for her true or is this just some ploy you’re pulling to upset me and hurt her?” he asked Gold, letting go of his daughter so he could stand, not wanting to look up at the man in front of him.

"I can assure you this is no ploy. My feelings for your daughter are true." Gold’s eyes Wandered over to Belle and he smiled. "I want nothing more than to make her happy. That’s why I let her come here today. I don’t want to keep her from you any longer-I shouldn’t for as long as I did, but I let my anger blind me. Not anymore. I’m prepared to be a better man for her-be who she wants me to be.” He looked back at Maurice. "And I want to start by helping you get on your feet-find a better home. You’ve lived here long enough."

Belle smiled softly back at Gold when he looked at her, doing the same. As he continued to speak, her heart fluttered madly and a lovely shade of red crept up onto the porcelain skin of her cheeks. Both Maurice and Belle’s jaws dropped when they heard him say that he was going to get her father a new home. A REAL home. Maurice stood there, shocked for a few moments. Both from
what he had last said and from what he had said about his feelings for his daughter. "You… You want to get me a new home…? Also, do you promise to keep my daughter happy, safe and cared for?"

Gold nodded. “It would be my pleasure. I’ve held onto my money long enough. It’s about time I use it for good. And as for your daughter…” He took a step toward Belle and reached out to take her hand. All the love he held for her was obvious in the way he was gazing at her. “I want nothing more than to do all those things.”

As Adam walked over to her and held out his hand, Belle got up off the stair she was on and gently slipped her hand into his, smiling up at him and gazing back with the same loving look in her blue eyes. Her heart beat fast and hard in her chest. She mouthed a subtle ‘I love you’ before turning to look at her father who was still standing there looking awestruck.

Maurice blinked a few times to pull himself out of the little stupor he was in before he spoke. "Is this house going to be part of a deal? Am I going to have to work for you now?" he asked. He could easily see the type of look that was in Gold’s eyes directed towards his daughter; it was the same way he used to look at Collette.

"No, it’s a gift," Gold told him, "but if you’re looking to leave the flower business, I’m sure we could work something out…" He wasn’t implying one of his usual deals, but offering Maurice the chance to let him find a job he would enjoy more if he chose to.

Maurice couldn’t help but let the corners of his mouth quirk up a slight bit in a smile. The flower shop had been his wife’s, but maybe he could find someone to run it that would take better care of it than he. "I’ll get back to you on that," he said, looking over at Gold, not as reserved anymore. He wasn’t ready to be all buddy-buddy with him yet, but he was willing to be less hostile.

Gold was feeling relieved that the situation hadn’t escalated like he had predicted it would and he was very glad to seemingly have Maurice’s blessing. It made everything so much easier and he was sure they could work things out.

But he also needed to work things out with another important person in his life and time was getting short. “Perhaps we should be on our way,” he said to Belle, squeezing her hand.

Belle looked up at Adam and nodded her head. She let go of his hand reluctantly to hug her father once more, giving him a big squeeze before she spoke. "I will call you after talking to Mary-Margaret about you coming over, okay?” she said softly, a warm smile on her face. "But whatever happens, I won’t allow you to be alone on Christmas again.” She pecked his cheek before digging into her pocket to grab money for the poinsettias from the change purse Gold had gave her to pay for the turkey. "I’m sure this will cover the flowers…”

Maurice’s mouth hung open when he realized how much money Belle gave him. It was way more than enough. “Belle are you sure…” He asked feeling a little uncomfortable taking that amount even if it was from his daughter and even though he had basically just agreed to let Gold buy him a house.

Belle glanced back at Adam and when she received confirmation that it was okay to give the money to him, she put it in her father’s hand and nodded, pecking his cheek again. "Get yourself a new tie or dress shirt for tonight,” she said softly before hugging him once more. When she finished, she walked back over to Gold and picked up what she needed to carry. "I’ll pay you back. I promise,” she murmured to Adam as they walked out of the shop and down the street.

"No, Belle, you won’t. You’re to be my wife, so it is our money now. I want you to help your father get back on his feet," he said honestly.

He strolled beside her at a moderate pace, both of them having picked up a little speed because the snow was beginning to come down a bit heavier than earlier.
Belle nodded her head understandingly and moved a little closer to him as they continued to walk. Her heart felt like it would soon grow wings. It was unbelievable how many feelings he could successfully make her feel.

As they neared the Nolan’s house, Belle’s arms got tired and she couldn’t get the snow out of her face that had fallen onto it. But still, she pushed herself onward, not wanting to complain, knowing that Adam was probably in pain too. When they finally reached their destination, Belle put down the trunk and stretched out her aching arms while simultaneously trying to blow the snow off her face.

Gold chuckled lightly as he watched Belle fight with the snow. To him, she was absolutely adorable in that moment, but he wasn’t going to continue to let her struggle. He stepped toward her and held out his hand. “Here, let me help you,” he said softly. Taking his hand, he lightly brushed the snow off Belle’s face, pushing her stray hair out of the way, all the while gazing down into her bright blue eyes. Once the snow was all gone, he let the back of his hand linger on her cheek, unable to break eye contact.

Belle blushed a little when Adam took over, brushing the snow off her face with ease. Gods, she must have looked like such a fool. Despite her slight embarrassment, she smiled a little up at him, heart fluttering in her chest. She knew she would never get over his touch. It would definitely always make her feel butterflies in her stomach.

When he finished but just continued to gaze down at her, she gazed back until she realized how many times that day that had just been caught in each other’s eyes or touch. Chuckling softly, she pressed a kiss to the hand that was on her cheek. "How many more times today will we forget about the world around us and get lost in each other?" she whispered to him in a joking manner, love filling her cerulean eyes.

"I’m sure plenty more," he told her with certainty. "Now that I have you, I almost can’t believe it." This was all real and he was still coming to terms with that. Every time he looked at Belle he was filled with both shock and wonder. It was quite distracting.

"But I think you have a point…” he glanced over at the Nolan’s front door and took a deep breath. "We should worry about the Nolans for the moment."

Stepping up to the door, he raised his hand to knock, but paused and swung back around to face Belle. He looked at her sheepishly. “I don’t suppose you would be willing to play along…” he asked, implying he wanted to pretend like nothing had changed, just like he had done with her when he had woken her that morning.

Belle chuckled again and immediately felt the loss of his closeness, already missing it greatly. But she was glad he had caught onto what she was hinting at. They would be able to gaze at each other and kiss each other later.

When she heard his question, she quirked a brow as she nodded. If that was what he wanted, then she would be fine with it. "For how long? The whole night? Or just until somebody sees my ring again?"

"No not the whole night," he told her. He knew he wouldn’t be able to keep up the act for that long. He would be lucky to do it for several minutes. "But just follow my lead. For now, for all they know you are still just my maid and we are here on business." Turning back around, he took a moment to wipe the smile of his face, looking as gruesome and angry as ever. Then, when he was ready, he knocked on the Nolan’s front door and waited for an answer.

Belle lifted the box back up and suppressed a groan from how sore her arms still were. She would
go along with Adam’s little plan for as long as he wanted, but she knew that on the inside, she would not last very long. At least if she gazed at him, it will just seem like she was smitten, which they all knew she was.

As David heard a knock, he was helping Mary-Margaret prepare dinner. Wiping his hands on a dishcloth, he kissed her cheek before leaving to kitchen to open the door. When he did, he was shocked to see who was on the other side. “Mr. Gold... Belle... What are you two doing here?” He asked, looking between them. Sure he had invited them, but Gold looked like this was the last place he wanted to be.

"What are we doing here?" Gold retorted with a grimace. "No, I believe the question is what are you doing here?" He pointed a finger at David’s chest. "You sir, were not at work this morning."

David stepped back when he heard Gold. His mind wracked for a second before he stood up a bit straighter. "You told me I could have today off, Mr. Gold. Last night you told me this," he said, getting rather defensive now. How dare Gold come to his house after he clearly told him to have the day off?

Gold looked appalled. He pulled his hand to his chest in mockery. “Me? Give you the day off? You really think I would do something like that?”

David’s eyes narrowed a little as he listened to what Gold said. "Well actually, yes. I had thought that you would have had a heart enough to let me spend Christmas with my family.” He did his best to stay calm, knowing this job was the only source of income his family had. “And besides, I was in town an hour ago and your shop was closed. So you didn’t show up either.”

"Christmas, bah," he replied, the words coming out as if there was something sour in his mouth. "A poor excuse for one to be lazy. And perhaps you should pay better attention to your surroundings. I was at my shop earlier. Belle here can vouch for my word, because it just so happens she was there too." He was still managing to hold a straight face; he just hoped Belle wouldn’t give anything away.

Luckily, the trunk Belle was carrying was hiding most of her face. When she heard Gold refer to her, not even knowing what he had said, she nodded her head in agreement, trying her best not to giggle at the act Adam put on, knowing that what David currently looked like, was what she must have looked like.

"Well I find that hard to believe because I tried calling both your house phone and the shop to see if you would allow Belle to come over for Christmas dinner. I got no answer from either and you NEVER let a call go unanswered." David put his hand on the door. "Now if you excuse me, I have a FAMILY to get back to."

"You know, I’m getting quite fed up with this, with everything, with you," Gold said, causing David to pause and look back at him. Mary Margaret and Tim had migrated into the living room as well to see what was going on. Gold had to really hold back his smile when he laid eyes on the boy. The look on David’s face was pure panic and he was about to say something, but Gold stopped him before he could.

"So unfortunately you leave me no choice….it’s about time for you to have a new job." Gold managed to keep the scowl on his face still and it sounded like he was about to fire David.

David felt his heart stop and his breath catch in his throat, his world shattering around him. No… No! He needed this job! He needed to pay for Tim’s hospital bills! "Wh-What…? I can’t… I can’t lose my job, Mr. Gold! I have a family with mouths to feed! I have bills to pay!" he stammered out, trying to say things to change Gold’s mind. "I-I have my son’s treatments to pay for.. Please,
Mr. Gold. Don’t do this… Don’t fire me.” David wasn’t one for begging and letting his everything-is-going-to-be-okay facade drop. But right now was an exception.

"Who said I was firing you?" Gold replied, letting a very small smile creep up on his face. "No… I said it’s time for you to have a new job…and with a new job comes a higher salary. A much higher salary, enough to pay the mortgage on a new house, buy anything your family needs, and pay for the best doctors money can buy so your son can get better. You David Nolan, are going to be my new partner."

When David saw the sudden creeping smile on Gold’s lips, he expected it to turn into a sneer but it didn’t; it stayed a smile. An earnest looking smile. Confusion washed over David in waves as he listened to Mr. Gold talk to him. No. This couldn’t be true. This had to be some kind of cruel joke. "You want me to be what? Are you kidding? Is this a joke?" There was obvious hope in his voice that Adam was being honest. But he wasn’t quite sure that type of change could happen overnight.

Gold’s smile only continued to grow. “Yes, David. My partner. It’s time your hard work for me be rewarded.”

As Gold and David spoke, little Tim had walked up and he was peeking up at Gold from behind his father.
Gold flashed the boy a smile, “And you…”
Tim bashfully cowered back a little, clutching to his father’s leg when he realized Gold was addressing him.
Gold turned around to look at Belle. “I believe Belle here has something special for you and your little brother.”

David just stood there in shock as Belle gently pushed past him, smiling brightly and she put the box down to see Tim.
The little boy hadn’t even realized that it had been Belle standing beside Uncle Bae’s daddy. The boy’s eyes widened and a smile bloomed onto his lips when he watched Belle put down the box and kneel down. Tim limped over as fast as he could before practically throwing himself at her. "Belle!” he yelled as he hugged her tightly.
Belle chuckled and hugged him back, as tight as she knew his little fragile body could handle.
"Hey, Tim… You’ve grown so much since I last saw you!” Belle said as she pulled back to smile at the boy. “How about we go open Mr. Gold’s present, hmm? I know your going to love it.” She glanced over at Adam, smiling at him before Tim began to drag her over to a spot on front of the fire, telling her to bring the trunk too.
"Partner?” David repeated.

Gold’s heart swelled as he watched the scene transpire between Belle and Tim. He turned his attentions back to David when Belle took Tim inside. “Aye, partner,” he confirmed.

David couldn’t help but smile a little as he realized that the man in front of him was telling the truth. He held out his hand and nodded his head. ”Then so it shall be… Partner.”

He gestured inside for him after shaking his hand. ”Please, come inside.”

Gold nodded and walked in, happy to finally get out of the snow and even happier to have made David’s day. He took a quick glance around the little house…it looking exactly like it had looked on his journey the night before. That sent another shiver up his spine-knowing that he had really been visited by ghosts that evening-knowing that ghosts were real.
Mary Margaret had heard everything as well and she was in total shock. Was this really happening? She looped her arm through David’s as she came to stand next to her husband. “Mr. Gold…I don’t think we can thank you enough…” She stuttered out, unable to believe the words that were coming out of her own mouth.
Mr. Gold offered her a small smile. “There’s really no need.” He paused and remembered the food,” Ah and I almost forgot.” He held out the bagged turkey along with the other food he a brought from his home for Mary Margaret. “For your family on Christmas.”

Mary-Margaret’s eyes widened as she saw all the food and looked between Adam and the food for a few moments. When she finally came to the conclusion that it wasn’t a mirage, she smiled warmly. “OUR family,” she corrected him in a friendly manner as she took the bags from him, excited that she would finally be able to make her family the meal they deserved.”Please, make yourself comfortable.” The woman said, motioning over towards the area where there was a couch in front of a fireplace, the place where Belle, Tim, and Neal sat.

Belle sat on the carpet with Neal in her lap, who had woken up from a nap while his parents were talking with Gold, and Tim standing in front of the open trunk with a bright smile on his face. He took out a teddy bear and gave it to his brother before he took a car out for himself. Sitting down, Tim began to play with it enthusiastically, loving the present dearly.

Mr. Gold strolled leisurely over to Belle and the children while David and Mary Margaret took all the food into the kitchen to prepare it. He observed little Tim for a few moments, seeing that it was clear the boy was really enjoying the toys he brought.

He flashed Belle a smile before looking back to Tim. “Well now, we have yet to be properly introduced,” Adam said to the boy, eager to meet him.

Tim looked up from his toy and smiled. “You’re Mr. Gold,” the boy said matter-of-factly.

"Aye,” Adam replied as he carefully took a seat on the floor between Tim and Belle, making sure to be weary of his ankle. "But you may call me Adam."

Tim watched him a curiously. "You have a cane, just like me!"

Adam nodded and offered him another smile. “Yes I do.”

"Are you sick too?"

"I'm afraid not.” He motioned toward his bad ankle. "I broke my ankle many years ago and it never healed properly."

Belle couldn’t help but smile as she watched and listened to Adam and Tim talk, getting to know one another. A small chuckle fell from her lips as Tim tried walking with Adam’s cane before going back to the toys and bringing over a few so that he and Mr. Gold could play with them together. Her heart fluttered and her cheeks flushed a little at the thought of having a child with Adam. She wondered if the child would turn out to be as wonderful as Baelfire.

Belle moved a little closer to Adam and hugged Neal a little tighter as Belle hesitantly rested her head on Adam’s shoulder, waiting to be accepted or denied.

Gold glanced over at Belle from the side and sighed happily as he put his arm around her so that he could pull her closer.

He turned his attentions to the baby in her arms. Just like in the visions, Belle seemed so natural with the babe and with Tim. He briefly wondered if she would want children. She was so much younger than him…it was possible.

"So this is little Neal? How old is he?" he wondered.

Belle smiled softly and moved closer to him as he wrapped his arm around her, moving until their hips touched. When she heard his question, she lifted her head momentarily to turn Neal in her lap so he was facing her and Adam.

"I believe that he is about… Nine months... Maybe ten? I’m not exactly sure but he is as adventurous as his older brother and sister. Started crawling at four months." She smiled down at the child before allowing him to turn back so he could go back to watching his brother. "I’ve known Tim since he was a few weeks after his first birthday. I use to babysit for the Nolans to make extra cash."
"You seem to be very good with them," Gold noted. He chuckled as little Neal reached out and tugged on his jacket sleeve, babbling something that was indistinguishable. "I'm afraid my jacket is not as interesting as you might think," he said to the baby. Gold reached down and picked up the little teddy bear. "But you might find this more amusing."

Neal giggled and took the bear from Adam with small hands, bringing the bear's face up to his so he could suck on the nose. Belle chuckled softly and kissed his forehead before cradling him in her arms. "That means two things. One, he is never going to let go of that bear, and two, he is hungry." With Gold's help, Belle got up and walked into the kitchen where Mary-Margaret was. "Hey. You got a minute? Two things. One, I'm pretty sure Neal is hungry, and also, I was wondering if my papa could join us for dinner. I really don't want him to be alone on Christmas again."

"I can make him a bottle," David said when he heard Belle mention Neal was hungry. Mary Margaret nodded at her husband in confirmation, before answering Belle's question about her father. "Oh, of course he can come, Belle. You know I don't mind," Mary Margaret replied. She was busy prepping the vegetables when it suddenly hit her what Belle had just said. She stopped what she was doing and turned to Belle. "Wait…I thought…Gold…is he allowing you to see your father again?" she asked, both confused and surprised.

David glanced over Mary Margaret's shoulder as he mixed the bottle, curious about Belle's answer.

Belle nodded her head understandingly and slipped Neal into his high chair for his dad before walking over to Mary-Margaret, a smile on Belle's lips. That was right, neither of the Nolan's knew about what had happened that morning.

"Well, Adam and I sort of came to an agreement about that. Well, we came to an agreement about many things this morning. One agreement that tied a whole bunch of things together." She purposely lifted the hand that had the ring on it to scratch her cheek, subtly letting Mary-Margaret in on what she was getting at.

"What agr…ee…ment…" Mary Margaret started to ask, but her words trailed off as the diamond glistened in the light catching her eye. Her mouth hung open in shock and she swiftly reached out to grab Belle’s hand and examine the ring. "Belle, is this real…are you telling me what I think you’re telling me?"

"Telling you what?" David asked as he stepped over to the pair while he was trying to screw the top on the bottle, but when he saw the ring too, the bottle slipped from his hand. It landed on the floor with a thump, causing Neal to squeal when he saw the milk spill out onto the floor. David quickly came out of his stupor and picked up the bottle, rushing to clean it up and make another before Neal could get very upset, all the while trying to listen to Belle.

Belle got a little worried by their reactions. They didn’t seem to be as happy as she had hoped. Blush flooded the girls face, smile faltering a little as she nodded. "Y-Yes… It is…" she said, moving to help David. "I thought you guys would be happy for me. But I suppose no one can be. Not when they still think Adam is a horrible person. Which he isn’t." She used a dish cloth to clean up the milk, trying to defend her decision on the engagement, feeling like the Nolans were going to lecture her on making the wrong choice.

"Oh no Belle," Mary Margaret quickly retorted, "I am…" She glanced over at David to see the look on his face, before altering her sentence. It was pleasant. "We are happy for you…just shocked…everything that’s happened today is shocking. I’m still in disbelief about Gold giving David a promotion. Now this…when just yesterday he…"
It was all such a surprising turn of events. Mary Margaret nor David could put it into words. "Tell me… how did this all come about?"

Belle finished wiping up the milk and rung out the cloth over the sink. "Well… Last night, I confessed my feelings to him but he turned me down. Then, this morning, he played me like he did you two. Got mad at me for not making him breakfast. I went downstairs and found that he had prepared us the most wonderful breakfast. That was when he confessed his love for me and proposed. After breakfast, he started planning on how he could make it up to you for being so cruel. And before you question his intentions, know that we have both already talked to my father and I know Adam’s heart is true.”

David, having stepped up next to his wife, after handing Neal his bottle, exchanged a glance with his wife, both of them clearly thinking the same thing. "You say he turned you down?" David confirmed. "But why the sudden change of heart?" Was the whole thing an act? It couldn’t have been… "I mean it’s no secret the way the man has treated you…me…everybody…for so long…”

Belle looked up from the ground to look between David and Mary-Margaret before she shrugged. "I don’t know… I didn’t believe it myself until I saw the way he looked at me… I recognized it as the way my father looked at my mother when I was little… He looked at me with love and warmth in his eyes… And he is openly smiling and from experience, I know that it is a genuine smile.” Belle couldn’t help but smile a little herself as she thought about Adam. "I don’t know what happened last night that made him change for the better, but I am so glad that he is finally able to be happy again.”

David and Mary Margaret both smiled at one another when Belle spoke of love. And once Belle was done cleaning, they both brought her in for a hug. "We are so happy for you Belle,” Mary said. "I know you’ve been wanting this for a long time," David added. "I hope he can be the man you want him to be."

Belle smiled and hugged them back. "He already is and so much more.” Pulling back, she smiled up at them before remembering Adam was still in the little living room with Tim. "I should probably get back to him before Tim talks Adam’s ear off,” Belle said with a chuckle. "If you two need any help, just call for me,” she said before walking to go back to Adam. She smiled a little as she saw the back of his head. "Neal is being fed. How are you and Tim getting along?"

"Very well," Gold replied as he briefly turned back to address Belle. He turned his attentions back to Tim. "Tim here was just teaching me how to build a castle." Tim looked up at Belle and beamed. “Look Belle! Look at our castle!” he said pointing to the little cluster of blocks in between him and Gold. They were stacked almost as tall as the boy, and looked like they would topple any moment now.

Belle smiled to herself at how well Tim and Adam were getting along. She always worried about Tim getting hurt because of how trusting and loving he was, but she knew he had a good sense of character. The girl sat on the couch that Adam was sitting in front of and leaning against, sitting right next to him so her leg was against his arm. "Wow! That’s amazing!” She smiled brightly at the boy. "I wish I could live in a castle as amazing as that one,” she said with a slight chuckle in her voice. The ‘Castle’ was a complete disaster but Tim looked so proud of it.

Tim giggled and reached out to place another block on top. The little bit of movement caused the structure to come crashing down, most of it falling over into Mr. Gold’s lap. Mr. Gold laughed and began collecting the blocks into a pile. "Awww…” Tim said, disapponted.
Belle slid off the couch and sat next to Gold on the ground to help him pick up the blocks. "Don’t fret over it, Tim. We will make another one!" She smiled over at him and mussed his hair before leaning over Adam to help Tim build a stronger base.

"You’ll help me?" The boy exclaimed eagerly as he helped her pick up. "And Mr. Gold too?"
"Of course we’ll help you," Mr. Gold replied with a smile, knowing Belle would say yes.

Belle smiled at Tim and nodded her head when she heard Adam. Belle glanced over at him and got her gaze caught on his handsome face. She tried to pull her eyes away but she found that she couldn’t just like every other time.

Adam continued helping Tim, when out of the corner of his eye he caught Belle staring at him. Turning his head, he let his eyes meet hers and didn’t have to ask what she was thinking. The look in her eyes said it all. She was happy. She was in love. And it was with him. How could he be so lucky?
Belle was so gorgeous and he found he couldn’t break away from her gaze either.

Belle felt like the luckiest girl in the world as Adam returned her gaze, reflecting the warmth and happiness that she knew was filling her own. What had she done to deserve such a wonderful man?
Her heart fluttered in her chest and she began to unconsciously smile over at him, wearing her feelings for him on her sleeve. She couldn’t break the gaze she held with him even if she wanted to, at least not until she heard a sound coming from beside them that sounded like a child’s laugh. Belle tore her eyes away from Adam’s to look at Tim who was snickering.
"You two look like my mother and father right now!" he said with a smile, referring to the way they were looking at each other.
"Yes I suppose we do," Adam said in all seriousness, not letting the smile leave his face. He reached over and gently squeezed Belle’s hand. "We love each other very much—we’re family—just like your parents." Gold reached over and nuzzled the boy’s cheek with his knuckle. He recalled the vision where Tim had been so insistent with Belle that they were family. It was easy to see it was something the boy felt was important and it was. "We’re all family."
Tim smiled big focusing on Gold’s comparison to his parents. "So does that mean you’re Uncle Bae’s mother?" he asked Belle.

Belle smiled over at Adam, squeezing his hand back as she rubbed her thumb over his knuckles. Her heart fluttered as he said they were all one big family and she knew it was true. Now that Adam and Belle were to be married, she would truly be part of their family.
But Tim’s question about Belle being Bae’s mom made the girl laugh almost uncontrollably. Belle and Bae were about the same age. He was a year or two older, but that was because she knew Adam had him at a young age. She glanced over at Adam before looking back at Tim. "Sort of."
she answered with a chuckle.
A few hours later, there was a knock on the door and a wonderful smell of food in the air. Bae and Emma had arrived as Belle and Adam continued to play with Tim.
Gold had moved to sit on the couch, only able to sit on the floor for so long. When he heard Bae walk in, who didn’t notice him immediately, he looked to Belle for support, unsure of how Bae was going to react when he found his father there.

When Belle saw the desperate look in Adam’s eye, she slipped her hand into his, squeezing it comfortably and she placed her other hand on his knee, rubbing circles on it in a soothing manner, letting him know she was right there. She would always be there for him. "Just breath… It will be okay. I KNOW he will forgive you." Belle brought his hand up to her lips and kissed it before placing it back down between them.
Tim jumped up and hobbled over to Emma and Bae as fast as he could. "Emma! Uncle Bae!"

Adam nodded at Belle and took a deep breath before standing and turning around to face Bae, who was giving Tim a big hug.

"Hey little guy, how you doin?" Bae asked Tim, ruffling his hair.

"Awesome!" Tim exclaimed and his face lit up as he began to tell him all that happened. "Uncle Bae your father’s here and Belle and they brought all these wonderful toys! And he said they were yours when you were little! Come see, come see!" Tim grabbed Bae’s hand and tried to drag him over toward the fireplace where all the toys were.

Belle felt Adam squeeze her hand as Bae walked over to them, being dragged by Tim. Belle got up and smiled over at Bae to hug him like she always did. As she did, she whispered in his ear. "Be easy on your father.”

When she had called her father to let him know he could come, she had also called Bae to warn him about his father’s change so that it wouldn’t be a huge shock for him. But she didn’t say too much, knowing that Adam and Bae needed to do the talking.

Belle moved away so Adam could greet his son now.

A weak smile spread across Adam’s face when he locked eyes with his son. “Bae…hi,” were the only words he could manage. He didn’t know Belle had spoken with him already. Any moment, he assumed Bae would yell at him or get defensive.

But Bae didn’t. Instead he returned the greeting with a small smile of his own. “Hello, Papa.”

There was a moment of awkward silence, until Tim spoke up, still eager about showing Bae the toys. He tugged on Bae’s sleeve. “Look at this plane!”

Belle went and sat back down next to Gold, recapturing his hand for a moment to give him the strength she knew he needed as she gave him an encouraging smile. Belle knew the smile Bae gave his father was to silently let him know that things were okay between them; that he wasn’t mad.

As Tim showed Bae all the toys that Adam had given him, Bae felt happiness and warmth spread inside his chest. His father had really done that? Perhaps what Belle had said about him changing was true.

"And look at the castle we built!" Tim continued, very proud of the creation. "Belle and Mr. Gold helped make it!"

"Did he now?" Bae said a little surprised as he examined the block structure.

He glanced around at all the toys, taking them all in, seeing that they were in fact his. So many emotions began surfacing as memories of everything flooded his mind. He bent down and picked up the toy train and he twirled it in his hands. “This is the one you gave me the Christmas mom left…” Bae said softly to his father, looking at the train sadly. “You kept these, all these years?” he asked. He was shocked Gold had not tried to sell them just to add to his fortune.

Gold nodded. “Despite what you might think, they mean a lot to me…you mean a lot to me. I know I’ve made a lot of mistakes with you son, but I want the chance to make it right. I want to be a part of your life. And I want to get to know Emma.”

Belle smiled as she listened to Bae and Mr. Gold converse. She could hear the desperate tone in Adam’s voice and see the pleading look on his face as he tried to show his son that he was sorry for everything and was ready to make a change. Everyone knew that what Mr. Gold had done over the years was bad, but now he did too.

Bae fought back tears as he listened to his dad and saw the heartfelt emotions on his face too. Both Emma, who was standing there quietly with Belle, and Belle knew that this was all Bae ever wanted. He wanted his dad to be a part of his family again. He wanted his dad to be his dad again. And now, Adam was making the effort instead of just Bae.

Bae stepped forward and walked closer to his dad. "And this isn’t just some act to help with a little
ploy you came up with?” It was hard to believe that his father would do something like that, but he had done it before a long time ago.

"I swear to you son, this is not what this is. I’ve recently come to realize the errors in my ways and that everyone I care about—you, the Nolans, Belle, are miserable," Gold explained. He was miserable too, but that wasn’t important to mention. "I don’t want to be that man anymore. I have the power to help others in need and I want to use that power. I almost lost Belle," he glanced over at her briefly and took hold of her hand, "but luckily I came to my senses and now I’m gaining a wife." He didn’t think Belle had told Bae yet about the engagement, nor did he know that Nolans already knew, but he honestly didn’t care.

His gaze went back to Bae and there were a few tears in the corners of his eyes. “And now I’m so desperately close to losing you, my only son. I don’t want that to happen. I love you son. I want to be a part of your life. And I know you’ve never asked me for money, but anything you need it’s yours—a wedding present for you and Emma.”

When Belle had talked to Bae, she had left out the fact that her and Adam were engaged, wanting his father to be the one to tell him.

Bae looked at his father with the same shocked expression both Belle and The Nolan’s had looked at Adam when he had let them know that he was ready to change his ways. After a few moments, Bae stepped forward and pulled his dad into a tight hug, letting a few tears of his own leak out of his eyes. "I missed you, Papa. I missed you so much,” he told him as he hugged him tightly. This was the father he remembered from when he was growing up. The one who loved everyone and wanted everyone around him to be happy.

Gold froze for a second, not realizing Bae would accept him back into his life so easily. Slowly, he wrapped his arms around his boy and held him close. “I missed you too son…I love you so much.” The few tears that were in his eyes escaped and he closed his eyes for a moment so he could just hold his son and take everything in.

Bae sniffled and let a tear fall as he hugged his father for a little longer. He knew his father was telling the truth and truly meant what he said because he had started to get emotional and cry a little. His father! After he became so cold refused to shed a tear in public! This meant his old father was back. "I love you too, Papa.”

After holding his son for a bit longer, he finally pulled back and sighed happily.

“Uncle Bae! Play with me!” Tim exclaimed.

Gold glanced over at the little boy and smiled. His gaze rested on the toys in Tim’s hands. “I hope you don’t mind I gave your toys to Tim,” he said to Bae, worried he might have wanted some for himself.

Bae smiled up at his father and waved a hand dismissively. "Don’t worry about it. There is no one in this world I would want to have these toys more than Tim and Neal. They deserve them more than any other child.” Giving his father one more smile, he let Tim drag him over to the toys to play with him, Emma leaving the room to go see her parents.

Gold turned his attentions back to Belle, taking her hand and leading her over to sit with Bae and Tim while they played and waited for dinner to be ready. They sat on the little couch and he moved to sit close to Belle with his arm draped around her and placed a small kiss to her lips. Bae hadn’t said anything about their engagement, but he was certain Bae approved.

Belle cuddled into Adam and smiled, kissing him back. "I love you, Adam… Merry Christmas,” she whispered to him before turning her attention back to Tim, watching him and Bae play with the toys.

Soon enough, Belle’s father had arrived and food was being put out on the table for dinner to begin soon. This was turning out to be an amazing Christmas.
Mary Margaret had set the poinsettias that Gold brought out on the table and she was bringing out the last of the food while Tim helped Belle and Emma set out all the dinnerware. David greeted Maurice and engaged in light conversation with him before he went and said hello to Gold once more. Maurice was still stunned about everything that had happened and it would take time to warm up to the man, but he was able to be civil. Gold returned the greeting, but was unsure what to talk about. Luckily, he didn’t have to think long on it as Mary Margaret called for everyone to gather around the table. Dinner was ready.

Belle got up with Adam and walked over to the table where all the food was set out, sitting down between her father and her fiance, across from Mary-Margaret and David. With everyone sitting in their appropriate spots, Belle couldn’t help but notice that she was surrounded by all the people she loved most and it made her smile.

"Let us say our thanks! I want to thank Mr. Gold for all this food and for all the toys!” Tim said enthusiastically, a bright smile on his little face.

Gold smiled big when he heard the boy’s words. It warmed his heart to hear Tim speak so nicely of him. Yet, even though he had given the family those things, he still didn’t think he was worthy of their thanks-not yet. No, it would take a lot more for him to make it up to them-to everyone-and that would only take time, but he was willing to do anything he could. He was never going to revert back to the man he used to be. His journey had taught him a lesson and as everyone finished saying thanks, began to eat, and converse happily, he knew this was only the beginning of making a better life for both him and all of those he cared about.
Epilogue

Christmas a year later…

Belle stood in the kitchen in front of the stove, stirring multiple pots and placing things that were done into serving platters and bowls to be set on the table for when their guests arrived. Things were a little hectic for Belle, but that was just how she liked it. She hated doing nothing. Especially after Adam and her had found out the news and he practically refused to let her do ANYTHING around the house. Taking a moment to smile down at the swell of her stomach, she let her happiness radiate around her. Her life was beyond perfect. She had a family to love and love her back, a roof over her head, food to eat, and a wonderful husband. There was nothing more that she would ever want.

Dressed impeccably and ready for the day, Mr. Gold made his way down the stairs and in the kitchen where he found his wife.
"Merry Christmas, Mrs. Gold," he greeted, wrapping an arm around her from behind and planting a kiss to her cheek. His hand wandered down to her stomach and rubbed it gently. "How are my girls?" They had yet to find out the sex of the baby, but Adam insisted he knew it was a girl.

There were no words to describe how happy that simple little gesture made Belle. Leaning back into her husband a little, she abandoned her steaming vegetables for a moment. "Merry Christmas, my love…” She replied softly, her hand moving down to meet his on her stomach. "We are doing much better now that you’re down her..” She turned her head to look up at him, batting her lashes a little as she puckered her lips, silently asking for a real kiss.

Wanting to indulge her, Adam leaned down and kissed her letting their lips linger for only a few seconds. “You’re cooking and I’m distracting you,” he said as he pulled away-not really wanting to.

Belle pouted a little when he pulled back. "You could help, you know. That way I can cook while you distract me,” she said with a chuckle. Giving him the job of tending to the pots on the stove, she took all the food that was done and put it on the dining room table. When she finished, it was her turn to hug Adam from behind and trail kisses from behind his ear, down his neck and across his jaw. "So what time is everyone arriving?"

Adam hummed contently when he felt her little kisses on his neck. “Now it is you who is distracting me….” He said as he was trying to finish up with the potatoes. He came to a stopping point and turned around to face her, placing his hands on her hips. “David said everyone would be here around one-so we have another hour to ourselves.”

Belle smiled up at him as she let her arms move from around his waist to around his neck, her eyes sparkling in the light. She smiled softly as she leaned up and pecked his lips. "Mm… Perhaps we should open a few presents?” she asked, obviously eager to do so. She had gotten him some things even though he had told her he didn’t want anything. She only hoped that he liked her gifts. "Or do you have something else in mind?”

"Presents?” He eyed her suspiciously. "I thought I told you not to get me anything?” Or maybe she didn’t. Maybe she was just excited to open her presents. Yes, of course. "I do have a few surprises for you, however.” He took her hand and led her into the living room-a room that looked entirely different than it had the year before. The whole house looked transformed. For one, Adam had stopped being stingy when it came to heating it, so he had allowed Belle to open up all those closed rooms, including turning one into a playroom for when the Nolan children came over.
For Christmas, every room had been very over the top decorated, but no room was as elegant as
the living room.
The fireplace was covered in lights, candles, and garland, with two stockings that hung from either
end. In the middle of the mantle sat the snow globe Belle’s mother had gifted her, the same one he
had shattered. Except it was no longer in pieces. True to his word he had had the globe repaired
and no one would ever know what had happened to it-no one except Belle and him. Every time
he glanced at it, he would always remember that fateful night, the night that changed his life
forever. The night he had almost lost Belle and every other loved one in his life.
By the large bay windows sat the biggest, fullest, Christmas tree, lit with what one would guess
was a thousand lights. It was covered in the most gorgeous ornaments and atop the tree sat a bright
sparkling star. Underneath was a mountain of presents-not just for them, but for everyone in their
newfound family. Gold had also opted to give a VERY large sum of money to the local charity to
help the poor, and he had promised Belle he would do so every Christmas in the future.

Belle smiled as she walked into the beautiful room. She remembered when she was able to only
put up a few candles and decorative pinecones. But now, now it looked like a winter wonderland.
It made her happier than it probably should, but it was only because it reminded her how much her
husband had changed; how he went from a cold, heartless, shell of a man to a man that had a heart
as big as the moon and whom everyone loved. She still had no idea what had made him change
his ways, but she didn’t care. He was happier than ever and that was all that mattered to her.
Walking over to the loveseat that was by the tree and across from Adam’s wingback chair that
always sat in front of the fireplace, Belle sat down and curled her legs up under her. “Since when
did you start thinking I was the type of person who did what they were told?” she asked with a
chuckle in her voice, shoulders shaking with mirth. “Besides, it is our first REAL Christmas
together. I couldn’t not get you anything. All of the ones wrapped in the blue snowflake paper are
for you.”

Adam chuckled and shook his head. One thing he loved about Belle was her stubbornness. He
wouldn’t change it for anything. “Very well, but I’ll open mine only after you’ve opened yours,”
he insisted.
There were several for Belle, including a beautiful diamond necklace and earring set that matched
her wedding ring, which he fastened around her neck himself. However, there were two gifts he
was more excited to give her than the rest. “Here,” he said handing her one of the smaller boxes,
which was quite heavy, “be careful it’s fragile.”

Belle wasn’t one for excessive, gaudy and extravagant jewelry, but the necklace and earring he
had gotten her were beautiful and perfect. Plus, she couldn’t help but love that they matched her
wedding ring she wore. When he handed her the box, she was shocked by how heavy the little
package was. Listening his warnings, she very carefully unwrapped it and opened the box. As she
saw what was inside it, tears stung her eyes and one of her dainty hands came up to her mouth. It
was a snow globe.

Belle’s reaction to his gift brought the biggest smile to Adam’s face. It had taken him a long time
to find the right snow globe. The little figurine inside was a man and woman dressed in wedding
attire standing next to a Christmas tree. There was an engraving on the front of the base in gold
letters that read ‘Our First Christmas’ along with the year. On the bottom was a handwritten note
that read, ‘Merry Christmas my beautiful Belle-the first of many. I love you more than words can
say. -Adam.’

As Belle pulled it out of the box to further inspect it, she felt tears slide down her cheek. This
moment reminded her so much of her last Christmas with her mother. Much like the snow globe
her mother had given her, this new one meant so much to her already.
As she read the little message on the bottom, Belle sniffled and smiled, turning her watery gaze to
Adam, happiness all over her face. ”It’s perfect. I love it, Adam… So, so much…” She didn’t
even need to say that she LOVED him because her eyes said it all for her. Moving the box from her lap, she carefully stood with the snow globe and placed it beside her mother’s on the mantle.

The love shining in Belle’s eyes warmed Gold’s heart. He never thought he’d find someone who loved him the way she did, yet here she was right in front of him. Not only that, but she was also pregnant with his child. That had been another shock. At his age, he had never thought he would have another child, but when Belle told him the news he became the happiest man on earth. He couldn’t ask for more. “I have one more gift,” he told her once she set the globe down. He pulled out another box wrapped in beautiful red paper with a big white bow and held it out for her. This present was much smaller than the last, able to fit in the palm of his hand.

Turning back to Adam, Belle wiped away her tears and forced herself to calm down. But she didn’t stay like that for long. Taking the present, she sat back down and smiled over at her husband. ”I told you not to get me more than two gifts,” she playfully scolded him as she blindly unwrapped the gift. When she saw what it was, she smiled brightly and did her best to force her tears away. “How do you always choose the most perfect things?” She felt like her gifts would pale in comparison to his.

"And I told you not to get me anything,” he teasingly scolded back. He could not stop smiling as he watched and listened to her. The gift she held in her hand now was a small ornament of a pregnant woman in a rocking chair. She had one hand on her large belly and a book in the other. With it’s brown hair and blue eyes it closely resembled Belle. "I only buy what I know will make you happy," he replied to her question.

Belle rolled her eyes affectionately, putting the ornament onto the tree before getting up and gently sitting down in his lap, making sure not to put all of her weight on him. ”And by that, you mean buy me the world.” He often brought her home little trinkets and gifts, wanting to show his love for her as often as possible. Pressing a soft kiss to his lips, she let them linger for a little. ”If that is all, I have a few for you to open too.”

His arms wrapped around her as soon as she sat down and he whimpered a little when she didn’t deepen the kiss. “Well if I must…” He would much rather have her stay just like she was, in his lap and easily accessible, so he didn’t release her. Instead he began to kiss her, first lightly on the lips, then along her jaw line and down the side of her neck.

Belle began to get up but soon found herself stuck in Adam’s lap. As she felt his lips, she tried to suppress a shudder of pleasure, but failed miserably. Gods, the feelings he could spark up in her from simple kisses. ”Adam… You insatiable man,” she murmured to him, bottom lip soon finding itself between her teeth. ”Please, at least let me give you ONE of the gifts. I know you are going to LOVE it.” She couldn’t stop the breathless moan that fell from her lips.

"I love YOU," he replied between kisses, still not letting up. His kisses moved further down, him moving the top of her dress aside so he could shower her shoulder with them. One of his hands rested on her back while the other ventured up and softly ran through her curls.

Belle couldn’t bear to pull away or stop what he was doing. Not when this had been her dream a year ago. Gripping the fabric of her dress like it was her sanity, she took a few deep breaths before forcing out her next sentence, eyes squeezed shut. ”B-But it will make me VERY happy…” Her throat was tight, her body trying to prevent her from stopping him and his wonderful kisses. Belle couldn’t help but lean into his hand that stroked her chestnut curls.

Her words finally made him give in, despite how much he did not want to. All he wanted to do was make her happy, but ever since they had confessed their feelings for one another, he couldn’t keep his hands off of her.
It was agonizing to pull away from her and after planting a lasting kiss to her lips he said, “As you wish.”

Belle kissed him back, letting out a small sigh of relief against his lips. Just from those kisses, she had felt the muscles in her abdomen quiver and her loins begin to tighten. Getting up off his lap, she took a deep breath to calm her raging hormones down before grabbing the one gift she REALLY wanted to give him. Sitting back down in his lap, she looked up at him with slight lust-filled eyes and flushed cheeks, handing him the present.

Gold never took his eyes off her, his eyes full of lust, but mostly love. He inhaled a sharp breath when she sat back down in his lap, doing well to control himself. He took the present from her, but never stopped looking into her eyes. “You are making it very hard to resist,” he said leaning forward with the unopened present still in his hand, wanting to pick up where he left off.

Belle rolled her eyes affectionately and held her finger up to his lip to prevent him from kissing her again. ”This one gift and THEN you can continue. Please? For me?” She fluttered her thick lashes and pouted in an attractive way, giving him a pleading look that she knew he wouldn’t be able to resist. ”I promise, this one gift and we can do whatever you want.” She dropped her dainty finger from his lips and gently tapped the top of the box.

Adam gave her a half smile, showing her that she was getting her way. Leaving the devious smile on his lips, Adam finally broke eye contact with Belle and turned his attentions to the gift. Examining it, he could see it was small, but he had absolutely no idea what it could be. After untying the ribbon on it, he tore the paper off, revealing a plain white box. When he removed the lid, he found something delicately wrapped in tissue paper on the inside. Pulling it out of the box he unwrapped the small item and gasped when he saw what it was. He was frozen for a moment as he stared at it, taking it in, trying to register what it would really mean for him-for them. Tears welled up in his eyes and he couldn’t stop them from falling when his eyes met Belle’s again. ”A girl? It’s a girl?” He asked in confirmation as he held up the beautiful glass ornament colored pink with those three words etched across the middle.

Belle smiled at his reaction, heart racing as she nodded her head and reached her hand up to gently wipe at his tears, a few of her own falling down her reddened cheeks. ”You were right all along, my love. I went to the doctor last week while you were at work. He told me that she is healthy and will be due in about five months.” She smiled up at him, a hand coming to rest on her swollen belly. She knew that he always wanted a little girl; a little girl to spoil and call his own.

In an instant Gold had his arms around her in a tight hug, and his lips flush against hers in a deep and passionate kiss. He allowed their tongues to dance around in harmony for a couple minutes before he pulled back and let his hands cup her slightly bulging belly. ”A girl, a girl…I just can’t believe it….” He couldn’t believe he was going to be a father at all…but gods he was so happy. He rubbed her belly gently and placed a kiss to the top of it. ”I already love you so much,” he said to their baby. ”My little girl…”

Gold glanced back up at Belle, “And you…I thought we were going to wait to find out?” After all when they had went to the last ultrasound together, that was what they had agreed on.

Belle wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back, feeling her tears mix with his on their cheeks. She loved him, she loved their daughter, and she loved this moment they were sharing…

When he pulled back and began to speak to their unborn child, Belle couldn’t help but smile and stroke a hand through his hair and listen to him. But when he directed his words towards her, she bit her lip and dropped her gaze. ”Well. My curiosity got the best of me and I crossed my fingers behind my back. I was planning on keeping it a secret from you so that you would be surprised but then you became so insistent that it was a girl and I wanted us to be able to think of names and
buy things for the nursery. I thought it would be the perfect Christmas present for the man that
didn’t want anything…” She said, eyes still cast downwards.

Using his thumb and index finger, he gently lifted her chin upwards so she could look at him and
he rested his forehead against hers. He was beaming at her and a few tears of joy were still leaking
from his eyes. “It is perfect Belle…thank you.” He embraced her again. “Thank you so much for
everything…for loving me, for giving us a child, a daughter…for thinking I’m going to be a great
father even with my doubts.”
Every day he worried he would make the same mistakes with their child that he had with Bae.
Every day he worried that he would become that man he used to be.

Belle hugged him back, cherishing the feeling of being in his arms and being so close to him. She
loved him. All of his imperfections. All of his insecurities. She loved every single molecule that he
was made up of.
The girl smiled softly as she heard what he said to her, her heart fluttering in her chest. "No..
Thank YOU for giving me the change to do so. For taking a risk at love again just for me. You’ve
given me everything I have ever wanted. A big family to love and who loves me back… A child.
Irrevocable love… Besides, I know you will be a great father. I mean, look at how perfect Bae
turned out.” She closed her eyes for a few moments as she gently pressed her lips against his. "I
love you, Adam… I don’t think that I can ever stop doing so even if… Even if you stopped loving
me. I promise that if you somehow revert to your old ways, I won’t stop fighting for you,” she told
him, knowing that was one of his fears.

It was a mystery to Adam how Bae had turned out to be so wonderful; he had never felt like the
best father, even though he had tried really hard. But after reflecting back on his past, he had tried
in all the wrong ways-focusing more on getting money than spending time with his boy. Yet,
somehow Bae’s life had never gone wrong. It was a miracle.
"Belle, I will never stop loving you," Gold promised as he reached up and stroked her cheek.
"And I vowed to myself-to you-to everybody- that I would never be that man again. As long as I
have you, that won’t happen. I love you so much my dearest Belle.” His lips met hers once again
in a soft and sweet kiss.

Belle closed her eyes for a moment as she leaned into his touch, nuzzling her head into it slightly.
His words made her heart grow wings and a smile bloom on her lips. Her love for this man could
not be measured by words. When she felt his lips on hers, her heart took flight and she couldn’t
stop herself from kissing him back even if she tried to. She even attempted to deepen it a little,
keeping her end of the bargain for making him open the present.

Adam had no objections deepening the kiss. He was even willing to take it a little bit further. That
was…until the doorbell rang. Breaking the kiss with a sigh, he looked at Belle with a defeated
smile. “I do believe our guests have arrived.”

Belle sighed and shook her head before she leaned forward and pressed one more soft kiss to his
lips. "You take care of that while I freshen up.” If Belle went and answered the door right now, it
would be obvious to see on her face what they had been doing. Plus, she had yet to change into
the dress she was going to wear for dinner. Getting off his lap, she held her stomach as she
scurried out of the room and into their room.

As Belle left the room, Gold was unable to take his eyes off of her. Gods she was so beautiful…
and even more so now that she was carrying his child. Belle. His wife.
Their wedding had been a small one, taking place in his large backyard one bright and beautiful
afternoon. Only the Nolans, Bae, and Belle’s father had attended. However, the news of the
marriage had been large. It was the talk of the town. At the time very few people had known
about his change, so the townsfolk thought he had somehow tricked or forced Belle into marrying
him. They all pitied her. But as the days went on, he learned the concept of generosity, giving to
the poor, lowering the excessively high rent for everyone, and repairing the dark and drafted
houses he rented for that fortune. And slowly people came to see that Belle really did love him.
The doorbell rang again, causing him to come out of his daydream. “One moment,” he called,
standing, grabbing his cane, and making his way to the front door to open it.

On the other side of the door stood the Nolan’s including a very healthy Tim who no longer
needed a cane to walk. Tim became impatient to see the man he referenced to as his Grandpa and
of course Belle. When Gold opened the door, Tim smiled up at him and ran to hug him, being
careful of his bad leg. "Grandpa!"

Everyone smiled up at the man who opened the door and took turns hugging him or shaking his
hand in David’s case. But because of David’s joyful and loving nature, he almost immediately
pulled the other man into a hug.

Belle changed into a red dress that matched Adam’s tie, came to just above her knee, and had a
sweetheart neckline that looked perfect with the necklace Adam had given her. She also put on the
earrings. The best thing about her dress -in Belle’s opinion- was the way it layed over her stomach.
It hid her swollen belly perfectly. Gods, she couldn’t wait to tell everyone. When she finished
changing, she did a few makeup touch-ups and put her hair into an elegant half up, half down
hairstyle before going downstairs to join her family.

Gold eagerly hugged little Tim in return, happy to see him, even though they saw a lot of each
other now. Ever since David had become partner, Gold spent more time with the Nolans and
sometimes Tim would even come up to the shop to ‘work’ with his Papa and newfound Grandpa.
Neal wanted a hug too, in which Gold obliged. He was almost two now and wanted to do
everything his brother did.

After greeting everyone, Gold ushered them into the living room. “Belle should be down any
moment,” he said.

"And Bae said he’s on his way as well,” David added.

Making her way towards the voices she heard, Belle found herself standing in the doorway of the
living room. Gods how she loved the sight of the beautiful room filled with so many people whom
she loved dearly. "Merry Christmas!” she said as a subtle way of telling them that she was there.

She smiled brightly at everyone as they turned to look at her before she ran over and scooped Tim
up in her arms, leaving a big red kiss mark on his cheek from her lipstick. "Someone looks
handsome,” she told Tim with a smirk, adoring his little suit that he wore. "Perhaps even more
handsome than your Papa AND Grandpa.” Belle said, knowing that both David and Adam were
wearing suits. It was exactly the reason why Tim had one on instead of a sweater like his brother.
He wanted to be just like his Papa and Grandpa.

Tim giggled loudly and threw his arms around Belle’s neck. “Really? More than both of them?”
he asked through his giggles.

Little Neal ran over to Belle’s legs, clinging at them, babbling something indistinguishable, but it
was clear he wanted hugs too.

Belle smiled up at him and nodded her head. "More handsome than any man in town. And more
of a cutie too.” She chuckled and lightly tapped her nose before carefully setting him down to pick
up Neal. She tried to ignore the slight ache in her back as she did so, giving little Neal a hug and a
kiss too. "But I think this little one is in the running of being most cute.” Belle tickled his tummy a
little before turning her attention to the others in the room.

She could see Mary-Margaret giving her a knowing look as she glanced down at her stomach with
a smile but just received a playful glare in return from the brunette.

Gold was watching Belle carefully, loving the way she was interacting with the boys. However,
he wasn’t loving how she was lifting the heavy children with her condition. He strolled across the room to greet her, giving her a swift kiss on the cheek. He whispered to her softly, so no one else could hear, “Are you sure you should be picking the boys up?” His tone was soft and not angry, but it was easy to hear and see how worried he was.

Belle gave Adam a warm smile and gently placed Neal down. "Don’t worry. It was only to greet them. I will sit down next time, okay?" she told him softly, unable to keep her heart from fluttering as he showed his concern for her and their unborn daughter.

Gold nodded and let out a small sigh. This pregnancy made him worry more than ever. Every little thing Belle did he worried would hurt the baby. He tried to ignore those feelings, but it wasn’t easy, especially when Belle did things like lifting—which he knew for sure she wasn’t supposed to do. "Why don’t you go sit and rest," he suggested, "while I go finish up in the kitchen?" Almost all the food was done, except the turkey, which was ready to come out of the oven.

Belle sighed softly and was about to be her usual stubborn self and tell him that it was fine and go to the kitchen to finish, but the look on his face made her do otherwise. "Alright, my love. Just call me if you need anything, okay?" She pressed a soft kiss to his lips before moving to go and sit back down on the love seat.

Gold smiled to himself, glad that for once she was being reasonable and retreated to the kitchen to finish up with dinner.

Mary Margaret looked over at Belle and asked, “So Belle, how are you? Everything going okay?” She was referring to more than Belle’s general health—she knew about the baby—but she was trying to be subtle since David had yet to find out. Mary Margaret knew Gold and Belle wanted to announce it that day, so she didn’t want to spoil it.

Belle smiled softly at her and nodded her head. "Yeah.. I’m doing pretty great.” Belle leaned forward towards her, giving her a hug as she whispered in her ear. ”And so is SH..” She pulled back with a bright smile on her lips, not having told Mary-Margaret what the gender of the child was yet.

Unable to contain herself, Mary Margaret let out a little squeal of joy, but quickly tried to come back from it when David and the children all looked up at her questionably. Mary Margaret looked at her husband embarrassed, and swiftly tried to come up with a reason for her outburst. “Belle was just…” She caught a glimpse of her necklace. “Showing me what Adam got her for Christmas…” It looked a little suspicious, but she smiled softly hoping it wouldn’t cause David to ask questions.

Belle smiled up at her before smiling over at David, nodding her head. ”Yeah. Adam got me a necklace and earring set that matched my wedding ring,” she told him calmly before getting up to casually pull Mary-Margaret out of the room.

"She is supposed to be here in about four months," Belles told her once they were out of hearing range, a hand over her stomach. "Before I found out, Adam was so insistent that it was a girl, so one of his Christmas presents was an ornament that says ‘It’s a girl.’"

"Oh Belle, I’m just so happy for you—both of you," Mary Margaret replied ecstatically as she embraced her friend. Pulling back, she glanced down at Belle’s belly. "Four months left? It will be here before you know it! And you still haven’t told everyone…”

Belle smiled and shook her head, rubbing a hand over her swollen belly. "No one except you knows. Adam and I wanted to tell everyone at the same time so we figured Christmas dinner would be perfect. Although we are still a little worried how SOMEBODY will react to it.” Belle nervously brushed a curl behind her ear as she referred to her father.
Mary Margaret looked at Belle concerned. “Who are you referring to?” She has an idea that it might be Belle’s father, but she didn’t want to make any assumptions.

Belle smiled and chuckled softly. ”My father of course. I mean, I know after a while he will be overjoyed, but his initial reaction is worrying both of us. I know my father always wanted grandchildren. Especially a little girl whom he can spoil to his hearts content.”

"Then why are you worried?” she asked, placing a reassuring hand on Belle’s arm. "Is it because she’s Adams? I thought he and your father were getting along?"

Belle nodded her head and looked up at her with a bit of a happier smile. "They are. They really are. But that doesn’t change the fact I’m still his little girl and the thought of me… Consummating is not very appealing to him.” She said with a chuckle. It was true. When Adam and her had gone off on their honeymoon and were saying goodbye to everyone, her father couldn’t even look Adam in the eyes.

Mary Margaret couldn’t help but giggle just a little. “Belle, I think every parent feels that way… but you’re a married woman now. I’m sure all he will care about is his soon to be granddaughter. He will see how happy this makes you and not think anything about it.”

Belle nodded her head and smiled up at the woman before she lead her back into the room where everyone else was. Just as they walked in, Belle heard a knock on the front door. “That must be Bae and Emma. I’ll go get them. Go sit back down.” With a smile, she went to the front door and opened it.

Bae and Emma both grinned at Belle when the door opened. After saying their hellos and wishing her Merry Christmas, they joined the rest of the family in the living room, placing their presents under the tree. A few minutes later, Maurice also arrived and he looked better than he had in a long time. Not only were his clothes in nice condition, but he also looked healthier, well fed and happy. He had Belle back in his life, a decent place to live, and was even bringing in some money of his own from selling his inventions—something Gold had helped him get a head start on. "Belle, sweetheart,” he said as he embraced his daughter tightly after walking in the door.

Belle welcomed her father warmly, hugging him back but trying to subtly be cautious of her stomach as well. "Oh Papa. I’ve missed you so much.” It had been barely a week since she last saw him, but now that she got to see him more often, she grew used to his company. “And you’re looking very handsome,” she said as she pulled back and took in his semi-formal attire. She loved how well taken care of her father was. Adam had done all that he had promised her father and more.

"Thank you, Belle,” Maurice replied giving his daughter the biggest smile. It had been a year since they reconnected, but it still seemed like it was all a dream.

Glancing around the house, he tried not to let its sheer size intimidate him like it had in the past. He always knew Gold was very wealthy, but he had never really embraced how wealthy he truly was until the first time he visited his and Belle’s home. He rarely came to the house because of how uncomfortable it made him, meeting Belle in town or at the shop instead.

He looked back at Belle and held up the few presents in his arms. “Where would you like these?”

Belle smiled brightly up at him and lit up a little more as she saw the presents. It wasn’t the fact that he had presents that made her happy, but it was the fact that he was making an effort for his new extended family. "Under the Christmas tree will do fine. I’m going to check on Adam. David, Mary-Margaret, their kids, Bae, and Emma are here already. Go make yourself comfortable.” She pecked his cheek before going to the kitchen. Despite what she had promised Adam, she hadn’t sat down for all that long.
Maurice nodded and joined the others in the living room.
Gold was in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches on the turkey that had just come out of the oven. All the other food was in the dining room, warm and waiting to be eaten.

Belle came up behind him and wrapped her arms around his middle, resting her chin on his shoulder. "Everyone is here and waiting in the living room," she told him softly.

"Good, because I just finished up." He set the utensils down and turned around to face her, giving her a gentle, loving smile. "Do you want to call everyone in to eat," he asked and then his hand fell to softly rub her stomach, "Or would you like to go ahead and tell everyone the news?"

Belle thought for a moment before she shrugged her shoulders and smiled up at him. "I don’t know. Do you want to go tell everyone now?" She gave him a smile and quieted a brow. "I’m up for it if you are."

Gold gave a weak nod. He was very nervous. It wasn’t that he wasn’t excited about the baby, but he was extremely worried about their reactions. The Nolans wouldn’t be a problem, and even Belle’s father-well he knew he could handle him. And despite Maurice’s feelings toward him, Gold knew the man would love his grandchild. No-Bae’s reaction was the only one that was really making him nervous. How would his son feel about having a sibling? Would he be upset and think Gold was trying to replace him? He had not been a very good father to Bae growing up and even though he was doing all he could to make up for it, would that spark any jealousy if he was a great father to this child? He couldn’t help but feel guilty.

Belle leaned up at kissed Adam softly, gently cupping his cheek and stroking his jaw with her thumb. "Alright, my love." She carefully unwrapped her arms from around him to slip her hand into his and lead him to the living room.
Getting everybody seated, her and Adam stood in front of the Christmas Tree. "Alright, everyone. Adam and I have an announcement to make."

Everyone looked to them eagerly, having no idea what they were about to say-except Mary Margaret who was trying really hard to keep a straight face.
Gold gave Belle a fleeting glance and smile, before he addressed the others. "Belle and I…” He placed and arm around Belle and his hand on her stomach. He took a deep breath and forced the words out of his mouth, letting a smile bloom on his lips. "…are expecting a baby girl."

Belle smiled brightly at everyone, eagerly awaiting their reactions. Both David and Mary-Margaret smiled brightly and jumped up to hug and congratulate them, Emma following soon after. But Bae And Maurice sat there for a few moments, just taking in what they had announced. Soon enough, Bae was up there, congratulating his father too. "I’m gonna have a little sister?" he asked rather excitedly.

Belle’s father was still having a hard time taking in how fast his little girl grew up.
The look on Bae’s face calmed Rumple slightly. He didn’t look angry or sad-but happy. Adam nodded his head. "Yes, son. A little sister," he confirmed. "In four months time."

Bae smiled brightly at his father and hugged him tightly. "I’m so happy for you, Papa. I’ll be the best big brother anyone could ever be," he promised Adam.

Maurice came up to Belle with a sad yet sweet smile. "My Belle… You’re growing up so fast… My little girl is having… Well, a little girl," he said with a slight chuckle. "Congratulations you two. I can’t wait to see my little granddaughter."

Adam mouthed a thank you to Belle’s father, glad Maurice wasn’t taking it as bad as Belle had thought he would. He seemed accepting and happy.
Adam returned his son’s hug. “I only hope I can be the best father…the type of father I should have been with you.” He spoke sadly and in an apologetic manner.

Bae placed a hand on his father’s shoulder and rubbed it comfortingly. "Don’t worry, Papa. You were going through a rough time and I understand that now. Just let me be the one to talk some sense into you if you do become like that again. I will probably be one of the only people who won’t smack you,” he said with a chuckle to brighten his father’s mood.

A chuckle erupted from Adam and he hugged his son again. “Oh Bae. I’m so glad you’re happy about this. I was so worried you’d be upset…” It wasn’t like him and Belle had planned it…it had happened so fast…but he wouldn’t change anything. Belle would make a wonderful mother and he couldn’t imagine a life without raising at least one child with her. Bae was still his son too, and no child could replace him, but he knew he had room in his heart for more. He would be able to love Bae and his new daughter just the same. Hopefully, Bae was right though. Hopefully, he wouldn’t make the same mistakes.

Belle smiled up at her Papa and thanked him once more before she turned to everyone else, letting Bae and his father have a few more moments together. “Why don’t we all get settled in the dining room and figure out where we are all going to sit,” she said and lead everyone to the other room where all the food was on the tables and was set with plates and cutlery. Both her and Adam had done a good job with dinner and everything was cooked to perfection.

"Come on son, let’s join the others,” Adam said to Bae after embracing him one more time. The two followed the family into the dining room. Everyone took their seats around the table, commenting here or there about how the food looked so delicious.

Adam joined Belle at her side, taking the head of the table right next to her. Not sitting immediately, he reached across the table, grabbed her hand, and smiled at her. “We should all thank Belle for preparing such a wonderful meal,” he announced.

Belle raised a curious brow when Adam didn’t sit down but instead grabbed her hand and said something to everybody at the table. She rolled her eyes affectionately in an attempt to hide the blush that grew on her cheeks. ”I didn’t do everything.” Belle put emphasis on ‘Everything’ and looked up at Adam for a second before looking back to the family. ”I just hope that everyone likes it.”

"Yes, but she did do most of the work, despite my objections…” he added in good humor. "It all looks wonderful, Belle," Mary Margaret told her.
"Yes! Such a big meal we should all be thankful for," little Tim added.

Belle gave Adam’s hand a small squeeze and rubbed her thumb over his knuckles for a few moments. As she heard Tim, her heart fluttered a little. He was the kindest, most humble boy anyone could ever meet. ”Would you like to say thanks then, Tim?” Belle asked softly. He always seemed eager to do it each year.

Tim nodded eagerly and looked around the table at everybody, whom were all smiling brightly at him. Then, he began listing everything he was thankful for and why, not failing to mention again how Mr. Gold was the one responsible for the feast and bringing them all together.

In a way, the boy was right. Gold knew that if he was still the man he used to be that they would not all be together and none of them would be happy. Tim wouldn’t even be alive if he had never come to his senses and paid David the money he deserved. Belle would probably be betrothed to that brute Gaston who he knew would abuse her.

But none of that had happened. No. Adam had his family, all of his family, alive, well, and happy, together for the first time in his life. He had a new wife who loved him very much—and who he loved dearly—and was carrying their child-their daughter. His family was only growing
and he couldn’t wait to be a father again. This was how it was meant to be. Thinking about it brought a tear to Gold’s eye, and it slipped down his cheek as Tim said his last words before they started to eat: “And god bless us! Everyone!”

Fin

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