Summary

He starts forgetting things. Just small, inconsequential things at first - where he left his keys, what he needed to pick up from the store, how many sugars she takes in her coffee - Emma doesn't really take much notice of it. They're getting old, and she can't honestly count the number of times she's had something similar happen.

Notes

Why the fuck did I write this? I HAVE NO IDEA. Because I hate you all, I guess? This is what happens when you encourage me. Seriously, though, I cried writing this. This is angst, folks, pure angst.

The silver swan, who, living had no note, When death approached unlocked her silent throat. - Orlando Gibbons

Her Silent Throat

He starts forgetting things. Just small, inconsequential things at first - where he left his keys, what he needed to pick up from the store, how many sugars she takes in her coffee - Emma doesn't really take much notice of it. They're getting old, and she can't honestly count the number of times she's had something similar happen.

But then he forgets David's birthday, and when she reminds him, he becomes irritated, ornery,
speaking to her in short, parsed sentences that terrify her in their lack of affection.

Two days later everything is back to normal, and she forgets about it, throws it off as him having had a bad day, slides her fingers through his salt and pepper hair as she curls up next to him on the couch and they settle into each other.

Mal calls her a month later in tears, tells her about how she'd called to say hello and he'd told her he didn't have a daughter, hanging up the phone before Mal could even get a word in - mom, did I do something wrong? she asks, and Emma tells her no, that she's not sure what's going on, but she'll figure it out, you didn't do anything wrong, honey, your father loves you very much.

It takes her another week to find the courage to bring it up. She's scared, is the thing, because they are getting old, and she's not quite sure how she'll handle it if something is wrong. They've dealt with plenty in their time, but this feels different, this feels...worse.

[[MORE]]

He's agitated by her questions, lashing out at her for no particular reason, and Emma leaves the house in an angry rush, knocking on her parents door with teary eyes as she explains everything that's been going on. Mary Margaret gets this look in her eye, this look that means she's putting the pieces together, and Emma has been trying very hard to avoid thinking about it, but it seems she comes to the same conclusion as Emma has. Something is very wrong.

When she returns home the next morning he's passed out on the couch, looking like hell, and he wakes almost immediately, sending a glance her way that is terrifying in its enormity. "Emma..." he says, glancing down at the coffee table, his hand trembling as he lets out a slow sigh. She takes her time rounding the couch to sit across from him, close enough to reach out for him but not quite touching, and in a rush he leans forward, wrapping his arms around her, quick, pulsing breaths turning to sobs before she's even managed to wrap him completely into her.

They visit ten different doctors, but every one tells them the same thing.

The word echoes in her ears, curling distastefully against her tongue, and he holds her close while she cries, whispering sweet nothings into her ear. She rails for days when Regina tells her there is nothing to be done - it's natural, it happens, sometimes, even to magical beings, there's no delaying it, there's no stopping it. It will happen. This thing will curl into his mind and tear out bits and pieces until there is nothing left, it will destroy every memory, happy or sad, that has ever been a part of him.

"I've lived for nigh on four hundred years, my love," he tells her, wrinkles around those blue blue eyes as he smiles at her, curving his fingers along her jaw. "Something was bound to give."

But this. Not this. This is the man who could remember every kiss or touch or word they'd ever exchanged, who knew four languages and thousands of songs he could sing every word of, who told stories to their children 'round the fire and weaved beautiful tales about every world he'd ever traveled to. This is the man who loves her more than words can explain, and she is going to lose him.

----

Henry flies in from London when he gets the news, and when he slips into the car next to her he smiles, that bright and carefree smile of his childhood. It disappears in the span of a moment, the ends curving downward even though he tries to keep up the ruse, and her own face droops.

His hand darts across to grasp hers, and she squeezes back tightly, tears clouding her eyes as she looks across at her son, this grown up man with a family of his own, her beautiful boy.
"Everything's gonna be okay, mom," he says in that deep timbre of his - he has the barest hint of an accent, too much time spent overseas not to pick up something, and Emma's terrified laughter bubbles to the surface, because he's used that phrase a million times, a million different ways, something he picked up from the days when they were battling new monsters every month, and she'd tousle his hair and tell him the same thing. And they'd always been right, hadn't they? Every battle they fought had been won, every evil creature defeated, they'd always gotten their happy ending.

This is not a battle the Savior can win.

-----

He seems to get better with Henry around. The diagnosis had been that it would be years before things would begin to be noticeable, but Killian has always had the swiftest mind of them all, and it is noticeable already.

But with Henry around (Amy and the boys fly out a week after him, and the house is crowded and full of laughter and chaos, and Emma revels in it) Killian makes a triumphant return to form, the two of them bickering and laughing at each other, recounting old stories she's heard a thousand times to the boys absolute delight, cutting across each other and making the tales far more epic than she remembers them being at the time.

They all grow quiet when he tells the story of the Wicked Witch. It's always been one of Amy's favorites (it had taken her almost no time at all to cotton on to the fact that Storybrooke wasn't really your normal, everyday small town, and she'd come to accept the crazy truth more quickly than any of them had expected - a true fairytale romance for Henry), because she likes hearing about Henry's life in the real world, likes the epic tale of Killian Jones and Emma Swan.

When he gets near the end, he turns to look at Emma, reaching across the table to tangle their fingers together as he recounts the curse he'd been put under, tells them all the details he'd gleaned after - of Emma defeating the witch in one angry blast of magic, of her race to get to him, of the kiss that had woken him from his spell, and the town from theirs.

"And then your dear, beautiful grandmother smacked me right across the face for not following her silly rules," he says, bending forward over their clasped hands to press a soft kiss against her fingers.

Emma laughs, bright and happy, while Amy stares at them with tears in her eyes, but the boys have heard this story before, as well, and they quickly grow tired of romance, demanding stories of epic adventures in mystical lands.

That night they make love and it's just like the first time, wild and passionate and terrifying, clinging to each other like the world around them has ceased to exist. After, his fingers curl into her hair, twisting into the greying strands on a contented sigh, and they talk for hours, laying together in their too-large bed until the sun crests over the edge of their windows. Emma keeps watch as he finally tilts his eyes closed, his breath evening out as he falls into slumber, and it remains one of her finest memories of their lives together.

-----

He starts writing things down whenever a thought strikes him, and she spends the first few weeks bemusedly picking up post-it notes, and scraps of paper, edges of napkins that say nonsensical things like Cocoa Puffs, and cinnamon, and Jane Austen, and MALORY, written all in caps with the name underlined three separate times.
After a while she grows annoyed with it, and comes home one day with a leather bound journal, presents it to him while he's pouring over an old, dog eared Harry Potter book.

"What's this, love?"

"Just figured you might want to write everything down in one place," she tells him, glancing at his ever growing stack of notes, and he smiles at her as he drags her down into a kiss.

"What are you writing all this stuff down for, anyway?" she finally asks when they come up for air, his forehead pressed into hers as he stares at her.

"Sometimes I remember things that I want to tell you about, or things that I want you to know I've thought about, and I'm afraid..."

It isn't fair. None of this is fair. This man has fought tooth and nail for every good memory he has, every good memory they've made together.

"I'm afraid it'll be the last time," he finally tells her, voice barely above a whisper, fingers trembling against her cheek. She bends her neck to press a kiss into his palm, trying to ignore the pit in her chest, the ache in her very bones.

"I love you," she tells him, and it's almost angry, the way it comes out, fierce and devoted and so so scared.

His head dips forward, forehead pressing into her shoulder before he turns his own head to press his lips into her neck. "And I you."

----

They break the news to Liam and Mal when Liam returns from school for the summer. There are a lot of tears, a lot of promises made, a lot of love shared between them all in the two weeks Mal has before her internship starts, and Killian parades his children around town to the amusement of everyone, reminding the patrons of Granny's (Ruby had never been able to part with the name, and it's once again fitting- her first grandchild born just two years ago now) of all the high honors Liam had received during the course of the school year, telling anyone who would listen that his littler girl was going to own her own news company one day soon.

It helps. Emma is starting to let it all sink in, not letting herself deny it any longer, and to see him with their family and friends, still the wonderful father, still the obnoxiously charming friend, still the loving, devoted husband - it helps.

Malory leaves on a promise to call every day (You will not, my darling, you'll be far too busy conquering worlds) and Killan and Liam spend a large chunk of the summer holed up in the upstairs office, consulting over the book they refuse to let her read, one she knows they've been working on together for a very long time.

----

He keeps the notebook from her, and she respects that, although it's hard, really, when she knows she'll lose him, one day. She watches him writing in it and wonders what he's trying to capture, what he's telling those scraps of paper.

They spend more time together than they have in years, taking walks along the beach, spending hours sitting together, reminiscing, remembering, taking their time with each other.

One night they sneak into one of the ships docked at the port, a museum of sorts, similar in style to
the Jolly Roger, and they curl up together beneath the stars. Cygnus is out, and he eventually admits he’d taken them out specifically for that reason.

"We didn't have a swan, in our realm, but this one. Full of bright stars, brighter than any in the night sky, the story of a man so distraught with loss he spent lifetimes collecting the bones of his brother and was thrust into the stars. It's a wonderful story."

"You miss him."

"Every day. But I like the thought of him watching out for us amongst the stars. Perhaps he's chosen his own swan to spend his eternity."

"You're such a romantic," she tells him, like it's a new thing, like until this very moment she'd never realized, and he smiles at her, her bright and wonderful man.

The look on his face is not a new one, and as she leans over him she can feel it all, every breath, every sigh, every touch and smile and kiss they've ever shared, tucked behind his brilliant blue eyes as he gazes adoringly at her.

Despite all that she knows is to come, this moment will be her eternity, and this night will always be hers to keep.

Liam leaves for his last year at school with a large stack of papers from the office, whispering something in his father's ear before he drives away, and Killian shoots her a small, secret smile, as he swings an arm over her shoulder, tugging her in close to kiss her temple.

----

Killian walks Mal down the aisle two years later, eyebrow raised in some sort of unspoken warning even as he hands her off to Daniel with a proud smile on his face.

His toast at the reception makes Malory cry so much she sneaks away to fix her makeup, but the flawless waltz they perform ruins it all over again, and when Emma heads over to wipe it all off Mal waves her hands away, swinging her onto the dance floor despite her protests, laughing bright and loud as Henry and Liam join them.

She finds the speech written out on a piece of parchment paper two weeks later, carefully lays it out and reads it in the silent house while Killian spends the day with David.

My little flower, my darling girl. You have been the light of my life, the sails to my ship, propelling me to be a man far better than I ever hoped I could be. You have made me laugh, and cry, and curse the heavens. You'll always be my little girl, the one who demanded I read her stories about fierce princesses who slayed their own dragons, the one who refused to go to school until the horrible Tommy Hewer apologized for calling your brother stupid, the one who tried my patience with every unworthy date and made me so proud with every milestone. There will never be a better woman than the one you raised yourself to be.

Emma doesn't read the rest. She couldn't, could remember the cadence of his voice and each and every word that had made the whole room pull out a tissue, and when Killian returns he finds her like that, clutching the parchment to her chest.

"Swan," he says, all bravado and swagger, this ridiculous man, he still looks like sex on a stick at sixty, "If you wanted pretty words, you should have asked me for them. I've enough words for you to fill several books."

She smiles at him, folds the parchment carefully and tucks it away in her pocket. "I'm well aware,
my eloquent pirate."

His grin is devilish, and she lets out a shriek of laughter as he tosses her over his shoulder, knocking a fist against his back as he carries her up the stairs.

"What are you doing?"

"I've come to pillage and plunder, Swan, now kindly shut your gob and let me pirate."

----

Things slowly fall away - he forgets which month comes after March, forgets Regina's name, forgets which street they live on and has to call her for it in order to give Liam's new girlfriend directions.

It tears her apart to watch it happen, but the things that remain - they are the very things she was so worried would leave him first.

He still remembers to put cinnamon on her hot chocolate, still remembers to respond to her sillier requests with an "as you wish", still remembers her favorite song and his favorite beer.

Liam, Henry and Mal surprise them one day, all of them flying in together to spend the week, just the three of them, and on the first night Liam presents them with a gift, wrapped up in blue paper with a gaudy bow on top.

She rips the thing open only to find four eager faces staring back at her, and lets her fingers drift across it reverently. "Once Upon A Time" it says, and it looks and feels and smells just like Henry's book, exactly like it, but when she flips through the pages there are new stories there - stories of Oz, and Robin and Regina, of herself and Killian, and Liam smiles as he tells her that this is the project they've kept hidden from her, something they can share with their kids and grandkids long after the stories have passed from this world.

"It's beautiful," she tells them, eyes lingering on a picture of herself and Killian, back to back on a battlefield, swords raised to defend against the horde.

----

Eventually he forgets the bigger things, too. Some days she wakes up and he is everything he always was, the clever, witty man full to the brim with innuendo and love. But most days, most days he seems a bit lost.

On those days she closes herself up in his office, digging through stacks of his notes, hoping to find him in the words he'd been so careful to record.

His loopy script is small and careful, purposeful in every word, and she spends a moment staring at the pages without seeing the words, the whole thing a beautiful mess.

_Cinnamon on her hot chocolate_ reads a bright red piece of construction paper.

_Henry Mills, Liam David Jones, Malory Evelyn Jones_ - on a piece of stationary Robin and Regina had gifted him with one Christmas.

_Neverland, Oz, Wonderland, The Enchanted Forest, New York_ (She laughs at the last one, New York really had always been another realm to him) - this one is torn from a yellowed notebook

1. Neverland
2. New York
3. Storybrooke
4. Storybrooke (TLK) (There are more, so many more, a list that goes on for ages, every kiss he could remember them ever sharing. She leans against the closed door and sobs, wishing for his warm arms around her, his lilting voice, the tender way his fingers would drift across her back.)

_Not a day will go by I won't think of you._

----

She stops reading his notes. It's too much - when he's right down the hall and he has no clue why scribbles on a napkin make her upset, when he wants to comfort her but doesn't know how.

She reads to him. The storybook becomes her lifeline, her way of communicating, and on the days when he forgets her name she pays particular attention to the tales of Emma Swan and Killian Jones, and sometimes, if she's very, very lucky, he'll whisper her name _Emma_ in that dark, desperate way he sometimes used to; or press a kiss to her temple when her voice broke.

Most days he tells her what a wonderful story it is.

----

She wakes up one morning to find Killian's side of the bed empty, and has a bit of a panic attack, thinking of all the doctor had said about patients wandering out of their houses and losing their way (its a small town, someone would find him, but if he's having an off day it won't be pretty for anyone).

She rushes down the stairs, throwing on a jacket, only to find him in the kitchen, dancing along to the radio while he cooks something on the stove. There are two mugs sitting on the countertop and a can of whipped cream beside them, and when he turns to look at her it is _Killian_, smiling with a raised brow as he moves around the table to grasp at her, swinging her around the kitchen in a ridiculous dance while he sings to the music. They'd done this before, breakfast in bed and silly days doing nothing at all, singing and dancing and laughing and fucking.

"Emma, I don't want to forget you any longer," he tells her when they've slowed, still circling slowly around their kitchen.

"I don't want you to either."

"I just want to stay here in this kitchen for the rest of our days."

"I don't think it works like that."

----

It doesn't.

His better days are usually followed by a string of horrible ones, and Emma nearly breaks down and takes her mothers advice to get him more professional care, but she can't imagine not waking up next to him - they've spent thirty years together, she's lived more than half her life with Killian at her side.

One particularly bad one sends her into hysterics. She'd been reading to him, thumbing through the storybook, and he'd been agitated, annoyed with her attempts to remind him of things. (She's not supposed to push, she knows it makes things worse, knows it upsets him not to be able to remember what they both want him so desperately to remember.) When she'd gotten to their own
story he'd shot her an annoyed look. "I've grown tired of this story. I don't want to hear it any longer."

Henry and Amy make the executive decision to move back to Storybrooke. It's been twelve years since the first diagnosis, and Emma, never particularly kind to her body, had fallen down the stairs a month before, fractured her hip, and while Malory and Daniel were able to help her out, they had a baby of their own to deal with.

The boys are teenagers now, and spend a lot of time avoiding their parents at all costs already, so Henry and Amy buy a house two blocks away, and one of them is almost constantly under foot.

Emma just wishes she were young again, annoyed to have to rely so heavily on her own son.

Killian doesn't respond well to having new people around all the time, grows quieter, more distant, and Henry and Amy spend a lot of their own time trying to get Emma to let him go, but she can't. He has been her one constant, her true north, the only one who stuck around even when they didn't have to, and she can't just abandon him. How would that be fair?

She finds him staring into the mirror, the leather greatcoat stretched tight across his shoulders. When he sees her standing over his shoulder he shoots her a guilty look, shrugs the thing off and moves to hang it back up.

"It's hardly my style," he tells her, and she grins as she leans against the frame of the door.

"Oh, it still looks pretty good."

"I'm not that man. Whoever he was."

"He was a thief, and a pirate, and a stubborn ass. King of eyebrows and innuendo, out for revenge and bloody murder."

He seems annoyed by this, and she half expects a rant about bad form, but none comes.

"You were never that man. Even when you worked your hardest at it, you were never truly the brigand or the villain. Too much honor left over in you. Too much love."

This seems to satisfy him, and he nods carefully, reaching for her without thought, smiling against her as she tilts her head to return his kiss.

She finds the notebook some time after year fifteen, tucked into the back of a desk drawer, and when she opens it she immediately feels tears prick at her eyes. They are letters. Letters to her. All of them, every word, every pages, every line of writing is for her, and the pages are filled front to back all the way through til the end.

The last entry is only three years old.

My dearest Swan,

I don't wish to wake you. You only seem peaceful when you sleep, any longer, and I know in some ways I am to blame for this. There are days when I feel trapped in this body, days when the things
I want to tell you slip from my tongue before I can open my mouth to speak, days I know I forget your name. I am so very sorry for all I have put you through.

But I have loved you for a lifetime, and I always will. And know that every time you remind me of our shared past, every time you smile at me or laugh at me or read to me again the beautiful stories of the life we have shared, know that I hear them, that I feel them, that I understand, finally, how deeply you have loved me in return.

I love you, my Cygnus, and no matter who I am tomorrow, we will always have the stars to guide us to our eternity.

----

The stars are bright, and the late summer breeze is warm. Today has been a good day. They'd slipped past Henry and Amy and snuck back on to the old ship, tossed a thin blanket over themselves as they turned their face to the stars. Emma's head is carefully tucked against Killian's shoulder, and his voice is soft and sure as his fingers dip across her shoulder, tracing intricate patterns.

"You know, there's another story about Cygnus. I didn't tell you before."

She hums against him.

"It's said that the swan is truly Orpheus, laid to rest beside his lyre. The orphan swan, thrust into the heavens to watch over his fellow lost children, where he would lament day in and day out, singing his swan song every night for the stars and the orphans to hear, to remind them they were never alone."

She smiles through the tears. "You made that up," she tells him, and he smiles as he shakes his head.

"Only a little."

"My captain with his tall tales."

They fall into silence for a time, content to just be there together, and Emma can feel it in the air, can feel it in her bones and in his soft sighs. This will be their swan song, this night, this summer, whatever is left of him is almost gone, and she will be alone.

He senses it as well, his grip growing tighter through the course of the night, his kisses longer and fiercer than they've been in years.

"You will never be alone, Emma," he tells her finally, and she swallows painfully. "Even if I am gone from you in this realm, I will always be there for you among the stars. Every breath I have breathed has been for you, and our dear Orpheus has saved every memory beneath his wings, just for you."

"I love you," is all she tells him in reply, too much and not enough, he has always been the one with words and romance, but he has always been the one who knows everything she doesn't say. "And I don't want you to go."

"As you wish," he tells her, and as she curls into him she can almost imagine the promise will hold.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!