Redefining Home

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Summary

Gremma 3B AU: The undoing of the Dark Curse may have given new memories to Emma and Henry Swan, but it also brought someone else to New York. After a kiss breaks a spell, a year can bring an infinite amount of changes, and a Lost Girl can find a different sort of home.

Notes

I do not own OUAT or its characters.

A tumblr-prompted set of one-shots in the same universe, in which Graham came back with the undoing of the Dark Curse. Explores the family dynamics in New York and the changes brought when they are called back to Storybrooke.
Outside Looking In

It had taken some doing.

Killian had spent the better part of the year clawing back to this land, to this world. It had taken a curse and some clever magic gifted to him in order to get in front of this door. Now, he shifted his weight back and forth on his feet, anxiously, rubbing the place where his hook was missing. Finally, he gathered his courage and rapped twice on the entrance.

A couple moments of heavy anticipation later, the dark door swung open. He froze, his face lighting up at the sight of her. She looked as lovely as ever with her glowing skin, sleep-tousled hair, and bright eyes. The scent of cinnamon and maple wafted out from the warm apartment, scents he had long ago associated with her. He grinned. "Swan."

Her face fell, eyes narrowing.

He shook his head. He needed to explain himself quickly, or this could go bad. "You don't remember me—"
"What do you want, Killian?" she replied flatly.

His eyes widened, mouth falling open in shock. "You remember me?" he asked in bewilderment. He thought that was the whole point: Swan and the kid would have a whole new set of memories, a lifetime of normalcy in striking contrast to their real lives.

"Yeah, I do. Why are you here?" she pressed, leaning against the doorframe heavily. He now noticed how on her left hand, above that twisted bracelet that never left her arm, a simple platinum band blinked in the low light.

His chest tightened, but he chose not to comment. "There's a new threat to your parents. I came to protect you, as it were," he mumbled. That wasn't everything, of course, but it was all she needed at this moment.

She sighed, pulling her fingers through her hair. The action pulled the man's soft shirt around her torso, framing the small distention of her stomach.

"You're with child," he commented, stunned. He had accounted for many things on this trip, but her being both married and pregnant were not among them.

She rolled her eyes. "Thanks for pointing out the obvious. If we're going to continue talking about curses, at least let's not do it in public," she said, widening the door to allow him entrance.

He stepped inside, blowing out a low breath. The apartment was light and uncluttered but lived-in. The boy was seated at the kitchen table, a plate of half-finished pancakes in front of him. He brightened with a smile as he saw him. "Hook! Does this mean everyone's okay?"

His brow furrowed, because this was all too strange. He was supposed to be struggling to explain magic and curses and other lives, not constantly being confused at how they know everything and were moving on in their lives. "How do you know?" he finally asked.

Emma hid a small smile, pressing a hand to her belly. "Curses are strange, I guess," she said with a shrug.

"Mom kissed Dad and it broke our curse," Henry piped in proudly, sticking another bite of pancake in his mouth.

He gaped at them both for a moment. "How in the hell did Neal get over here?" he asked incredulously. Granted, he hadn't seen the man in a long time, he knew that Baelfire crossed over into their land and had not stayed behind with Emma and Henry.

Emma snorted, grabbing up her dish and bringing it to the sink. "Neal's not here. Henry has another Dad: my husband. He's known him long enough."

He grimaced, bringing a hand to rub his temple. "So, you found your true love, eh?" he asked, and tried to ignore the pang in his heart. He knew somewhere in him that this woman was not his true love; he had lost that centuries ago. But he had hoped for a bright spot of happiness in his bleak existence, and thought she would have been the one to bring that.

Henry nodded enthusiastically, obviously not in tune with his distress. "Yep! 'Cause not even death could stop true love!" he said brightly.

Emma chuckled over the sound of the running water. "If you want to call it that, sure. I guess technically it's true, but I don't like to think of it that way," she replied.
"What do you mean by that?" he asked, feeling his face twitch in distress at her admittance.

She shut off the sink and turned, pressing her lips together. "He died in Storybrooke. There was some mix up with the new curse, some idea that things couldn't change with the original curse or something. He came back, and he ended up with us."

He felt the wash of disappointment come over him again, the resounding thud of his hopes dashed. "Glad you found something to make you happy, Swan."

She smiled faintly. "Yeah, Humbert, now, though," she said, lifting her ring to his view, and she twisted it fondly. "It was better in order for him to legally adopt Henry," she explained, but the look on her face said that she enjoyed the title of "wife" as well.

Killian sunk against the table, opposite both of them. "So, new curse in Storybrooke. Your parents are in danger, so I figured the Savior would be the right choice in fixing it," he said hollowly.

She nodded, grabbing up Henry's empty plate. "I guess I've been away from the job long enough, right?" she said, her lips tightening.

He hesitated. He glanced back down at the barely visible swell of her belly, the tension sweeping back into her form in a way that made him realize just how relaxed she'd been before. "It isn't your job," he finally said.

She gave him an impatient, condescending look. "I was written into a curse. I have true love magic. It's who I am, and I'm not running from that."

He opened his mouth to reply, when a key jangled in the door. He turned, swallowing hard as he prepared to meet the new man.

He was different than he expected, he supposed, but then again just the person he'd expect Emma Swan to fall for.

He was tall, dressed in a long trench coat, vest and tie underneath and a shining detective shield on his waist. A platinum band that was just a little thicker than his wife's encircled his ring finger, but otherwise he was unadorned. He had curly dark hair, dark blue eyes, and a tired smile split across his features even as confusion lit them at his presence. "Em?" he asked, and the accent struck him slightly, so similar and yet so different.

He watched as Emma's face, her body, her entire being unfurled from the tension, the brightness he caught in her eye when she first opened the door increasing exponentially. Everything before seemed a shadow to this beauty. And it was all in response to him.

Emma crossed the floor, reaching his side and pressing a light kiss to his lips. They indeed looked like a couple that just fit together, perfection of pieces. Hook felt the last inkling of hope in his soul flicker out.

"New curse," he heard Emma murmur. The man's eyes fluttered shut, pulling her protectively closer.

"Safe?" he responded, his voice even quieter, eyes seeking out Henry cautiously.

"Dad, this is Captain Hook," Henry announced with a bright grin, hopping down from the table and running up to the couple. "He said Storybrooke's back, so we'll get to see grandma and grandpa and my other dad and everyone again."

The man's smile is cautious as he turns to him. "Graham Humbert, formerly the Huntsman."
Pleased to meet you," he said.

He swallowed back his pride and took the offered hand. "Killian Jones. It seems there's a lot to catch up with."
Emma liked the bar on 84th.

It was a couple blocks from the 20th precinct, and just close enough to her apartment that it wouldn’t be terrible if she had more than a couple drinks. It was frequented by the cops that worked the Upper West Side, so it wasn’t terribly upscale as well.

Emma felt comfortable in the bar. Always had.

She had just dropped off the latest stack of paperwork for the bail jumper she had turned in, so she felt deserving of a drink or two. A case finished meant some time to relax, enjoy a paycheck, and do something fun with her son for a few days. Just in time for the weekend. Henry, however, was at Avery's with Matt and Michael doing a school project and then a sleepover, so she didn't have any more responsibilities for the night.

She sighed as she eased up to the bar. She rubbed the back of her neck and let her coat fall. She smiled up at Andie, and then switched her phone to silent. She could drink in peace. She turned a coaster over in her hands absently as she considered if it was simply a beer night, or full-on whiskey night.

Suddenly, a frothy pink drink was pushed in front of her. She looked up, catching Andie's twinkling eye. "I did not order this," she said bluntly to the bartender.

Andie grinned and flicked back her bobbed black hair, cleaning off a glass. "I'm aware of that. It was purchased by an admirer of yours," she replied, gesturing with her chin to the back tables.

Emma groaned. She peeked over her shoulder discreetly to see who might have sent the drink. She scanned an unfamiliar row of detectives before landing on one that stood out in the crowd. Her heart picked up pace, just a little.

Dammit, she had been trying to avoid that one. She wasn't sure which division he worked, but she had seen him a few times at the precinct. He was handsome; tall and strong but not bulky, dark curly hair and soft blue eyes. She had noticed him, all right. She noticed and cursed every time her stomach fluttered like a teenager with a crush.

She sighed and rose reluctantly, picking up the frilly drink with a grimace. She needed to shut him down now. He was … he was too dangerous. She thought about him too much, even from just little glances.
He was looking down at his glass of amber-colored liquor when she approached. She slid the drink onto the table, and he looked up. His eyes flashed with something, a flare of recognition mixed with surprise and delight. Her features set.

"Nice gesture. But I don't take drinks from strange men and I wouldn't be drinking this, even if I did. So thank you, but no thank you," she said, trying to keep her voice firm even as something in the pit of her stomach warmed and quivered as their eyes caught and held.

He looked down at the drink and then back to her. "I didn't send it," he said. His accent should have been surprising; it wasn't often to catch a cop in the 20th with an accent of any kind, let alone one that rich and lilting. Confusingly, she found that she had excepted that tone from his words, had anticipated the way his voice would sound even before he had opened his mouth.

She reasoned that she must've heard him around the station.

Finally, she shook her head to clear it, focusing on his words. She raised a brow. "You didn't," she asked skeptically.

He smiled, slowly. "No. I don't usually send drinks to women that don't know me. As for the fruity thing here? Nah, I'd take you more for a Jameson girl, myself." Even as he joked, there was something serious behind his features, like she could see his brain trying to discern something.

"I sent it," a voice came, two tables down. A sheepish grin set across the face of the beat cop she'd been avoiding all season long.

"No, Pickett," she grumbled, bringing the glass to his table. "You drink it."

She turned on her heel, feeling herself redden. She felt more than a little stupid, and frustrated as well. She bit down on her lip, looking away. She crossed her arms in front of her and approached his table again. "Well, this is embarrassing then."

He shook his head, his face splitting into a dimpled grin. "No, it's fine." He hesitated before leaning forward. "I've been meaning – well, rather, I've seen you at the precinct. And you just …" he looked off, his brow furrowing for a moment. "Have we met before? Somewhere not in New York?"

She was about to drop something about cheesy lines, before the pull inside her seized up. She swallowed. "I don't … think so? I think I'd remember but maybe … you are familiar," she said, stumbling over her words a bit.

He gestured to the seat opposite him and she took it. She studied him a moment, over the curves and lines of his face, startling over the familiarity again. It was even more prominent close up. "I've traveled a bit," she admitted slowly. "I don't know where I'd start."

He frowned. "I transferred from Maine. That's the only place I've really been, other than here. Up near Bangor. I grew up near the coast, though. All through that area."

She looked away sharply. "I was … found … born in Maine. Lived there until I was sixteen." It had been foster care, all over that area, where she had bounced from home to home until a particularly bad one. She had gained a couple scars, and then she ran.

He was looking at her with a strange sort of knowledge. He nodded. "Maybe there, then. I didn't stay in a home more than a couple months at a time, though. That could be why we don't remember."

Her eyes widened. That's where the knowledge came from. "Oh," she said simply. She looked
down at his drink. "I think I need one of those," she said numbly.

He nodded, gesturing to Andie. He turned back with a small smile. "I'm Graham, by the way."

She reached over and took his glass. She took a long sip from it. "Emma. Nice to see you again."
Coincidences

Chapter Summary

Emma finds her parents again.

The door looked just the same.

Same chipped green paint that creaked and indented, with scrapes of white showing the original color. Same black, blocked out "3," fashioned to be not quite straight and attesting to the shoddy craftsmanship. The gold-lined and fogged peephole, peeking at her like a rheumy eye.

It had been a year since she'd seen it, since she'd been inside the apartment building that led to the little loft. Just looking at it stirred her soul in a way she couldn't quite describe, an ache that started in her heart and spread out through her fingers.

Things were good in New York. No, not just good – excellent. She had her husband, who she thought she had lost forever and couldn't believe how much she loved. She had her son, who was getting brighter and more amazing with each day, thriving in the city. And she had her new little one, nestled inside her and shifting lazily, that she was so very anxious to meet.

But … she had missed them. She had missed Mary Margaret's annoying optimism and much-too-early morning clatter and gentle speeches with a glowing smile. She missed David's horrible attempts at subtlety and infuriating secret keeping and the way he'd cradle her head as he hugged her.

She missed her parents.

She bit down on her lip, reminding herself that she was almost thirty years old. She had been an orphan for twenty-eight of those. It's not like she had lost people who she'd known her entire life. But still … she missed them.

Carefully, she adjusted the shirt she was wearing. It was strategically cut, skimming her figure in a way that didn't let on that she was pregnant. She hadn't wanted to spring that on them, not when she had to convince them who she was. Graham had already grudgingly conceded in letting her come alone, while he and Henry set up a room at Granny's and no doubt would be playing darts all evening long.

Finally, she gathered her courage and knocked three times in quick succession.

It was quickly opened. David. He looked just the same. A smile tugged at her lips, as a wistful hope bloomed within her. "Hi."

Then, she watched as he staggered back and his face transformed.

Her face fell and her hands came up. "Don't close the door, I- … I'm, uh- … my name is—"

"Emma," he breathed, shock still coloring his words.

"David?" Tears built their way up into her throat but her lips quirked up. "You remember?" A
relief she didn't know she needed built within her.

He tugged her forward, collecting her gently into an embrace. Emma's eyes fluttered shut, a warmth of familiarity flaring inside her. Still so cautious, David was. His hold was firm, but he kept a fair amount of distance, not closing her in any further. Part of her wanted to sink into the embrace, but another reminded her that it was for the best. Now was not the time to bring up her pregnancy.

"You remember?" David replied.

She nodded, blinking back tears. "Yeah. But Hook said you were cursed?"

He grabbed her hands, pulling her inside. He shut the door and bobbed his head. "We were. We're back … or we never left. We don't know. We're trapped again," he replied. His eyes danced across her face with a certain wonder.

"But you know who you are?" Emma clarified. It somehow made it better. She wasn't dealing with cursed personalities anymore; they were her parents, not her best friend and her best friend's lover.

"Yes, but we don't know anything about the curse: who cast it, nothing. We don't remember anything from the past year. It's like it's been … wiped away," he explained. A dark shade of worry and fear marked his face, but was overshadowed by the delight still inside it.

"Wiped away?" Emma repeated. Her brow furrowed in confusion. Why just a year? That made no sense. There were reasons that entire lives were wiped from memory last time. She had discussed it enough times with her husband to understand that. With most of their memories, the people of Storybrooke would seek out magic or family … happy endings didn't end. Her parents were even still together!

"Saying goodbye to you," he said, interrupting her thoughts. He came closer. His face was crumpled, eyes misting with tears. "It feels like it was yesterday."

Her breath caught in her throat. She looked away, tangling her fingers in the shoelace on her wrist. She felt every minute of their absence. It felt disproportionately painful that they didn't. She swallowed back the self-pity, turning slightly so she wouldn't have to look at him straight on. She thought for a moment, going over what she had been told. No clue who cast it, no clue why they'd been cursed … but they knew how long they'd been cursed. "Yesterday," she murmured. She looked up. "But how do you know that it's been a year?"

"Emma?"

Emma's head turned toward the stairs but she was caught in a blur of dark hair as her mother flung herself on her. She caught her with a huff, then was shot with a burst of realization as their stomachs touched. She looked down, her eyes widening at the distention that overtook Mary Margaret's small frame.

"As you can see," David said gently. He's looking at Mary Margaret with soft eyes, but when they turn to her she can see an apology in them. "A lot's happened."

Emma felt the tears she'd been keeping at bay bolt forward. She sobbed out once and she turned to cover her mouth, angry that she'd let it out.

"Emma." Mary Margaret's voice. Concerned, frightened, remorseful.

"No, no!" she said, trying to get her bearings. She sobbed again. "No, I'm so happy! I'm so happy
for you." She swiped her cheeks, feeling the frustration of having them spill over bite through her. Her emotions were all out of control. She'd blame Graham later.

"Please. I know this is hard. You don't have to pretend," Mary Margaret voiced gently.

She shook her head, turning. Her face split with a smile, but she could still feel the damn tears on her face. "No, you don't understand. Dammit, it's the stupid hormones."

Her parents shared a look. "What are you trying to say, Emma?" David asked.

She laughed through the tears, feeling the irony build. "You say a lot's happened," she began, then pulled her hand down the front of her blouse to smooth against her belly. "Well, I might be able to call."

Mary Margaret's hands went to her mouth with a gasp. "Emma!" She rushed forward again, pressing her hands against her belly. "Sweetheart, congratulations!"

David is smiling cautiously from behind her mother's shoulder. "Coincidences, huh?" he said, his eyes twinkling.

She shook out another laugh. "Yeah, but a bit more complicated. I haven't even gotten to the married part. Or even the resurrection part and how I got my memories."

"Henry?" David asked.

She smiled. "Excellent. So's Graham."

Mary Margaret's jaw dropped. "Wait, Graham?"
Almost Like Déjà vu

Chapter Summary

Emma could use a little help.

It's late.

Graham sighs as he pulls up the collar on his coat, blowing out a foggy breath. The cold was biting, the wind casting an icy chill from the darkened skies. He spent three hours of overtime this evening, only to end up at another dead end. He should be used to such things by now. He's been working Cold Cases for ... well, for a long time, now. He rubs his forehead as he tries to remember just how long he'd been working that department. No matter; it is still just as frustrating as the first time.

He hesitates at the corner, looking down the well-lit street toward the on-coming path of the unoccupied taxi. He begins to raise his hand but then rocks backward, whistling lowly through his teeth before deciding to walk.

He needs the time to decompress. Maybe he'll even stop by the bar on 84th.

His heart speeds up, thinking about running into Emma. They've been meeting up only by chance; any hesitant request to see her at a scheduled time has been rebuked. They enjoy their talks when they do see each other, that is sure. But anytime he mentions coffee or an art exhibit opening, or even the dingy little break room at the precinct, she freezes up. He's given up on asking outright.

But that doesn't mean that he doesn't think about her. Honestly, it's embarrassing how often he thinks about her. Sometimes, it's things that relate directly to her: finding something on his case that relates to one of hers, hearing someone mention her bringing someone in, Simmons mentioning his kid's play at the same school her son goes to. Sometimes, it's far less specific: a bearclaw in the pink box at his desk, a dartboard in the corner of the old diner, a strange ache in his chest at the sight of his first aid kit.

It's all strange. She had crept into his mind when he first saw her, that nagging feeling of familiarity, but now it was like she was ingrained into his skin. Sometimes, when they talk, he thinks he sees how he feels reflected back at him in her eyes. Mostly, he thinks it's his wishful thinking.

He turns down the block, passing an alleyway when he hears the unmistakable sound of fists. He sighs, turning down the alleyway, only to have a mass of blonde hair hurled at him, knocking them both to the ground.

"Emma?" he asks, looking down at the woman. She's snarling in the other direction, towards the skinny man running down the alley. "Dammit," he mutters under his breath, and jumps to his feet to help in the pursuit.

He rounds the corner, finding the guy attempting to scale the fence blocking his exit. Hastily, he grabs him by the back of his shirt, yanking him to the ground. The guy struggles, kicking out and throwing another swing that barely skims his chin. Graham growls and wrenches his arm back, twisting him around to pull both wrists together.
"I had a handle on it," he hears Emma say from over his shoulder, panting as she came down from the adrenalin rush.

"Nothing wrong with a partnership," he fires back, flashing up a quick grin. At the sight of her, he frowns, seeing the thin trail of blood drip down from her eye. He pushes his knee harder into the perp’s back, feeling a wash of protectiveness and fury at seeing her injured.

"As long as you don't want to share the paycheck," she counters dryly, fumbling through her pockets before producing an industrial zip tie.

Quickly, he lashes the man's hands together and hauls him to his feet. "Nah, I get my reward from the high-paying glamour of a government job," he replies wryly.

She looks away, holding back a smile, and it pools relief in his belly. She seems no worse for the wear. "Well, then … thanks."

He nods. "I'll help you get him back. You need something for your eye, anyway."

She opens her mouth to protest, but then snaps it shut. Finally, she shrugs, tugging the man by the connection. "Fine."

"Yo, you gonna keep flirting or let me go, already," the man pipes in, a scowl embedded on his face.

"I wouldn't be provoking that one. I could easily add on 'assaulting an officer' to the list of your no doubt laundry-list of charges," Graham threatens.

Emma hides a smirk, stepping forward. "Buddy, you're on thin ice," she hisses, dragging him down to trail just slightly behind her as she stomped her way toward the station.

Graham laughs and follows after a moment, his eyes sparkling with the certainty that his life is a lot more interesting with her in it.

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"I don't need it," Emma whines as he leads her into the office. The division is dark, everyone long since gone home. He flicks on the light once they reach the small room at the corner.

He smirks, finding the first aid kit and snapping it open. "It's a bad cut. You don't need a hospital, but you might want to be a little fixed up before you get back to your place and freak out your kid."

"Henry's at Michael's tonight. I wouldn't freak him out," she grumbles, but sits back on the top of the desk. She glances around. "Nice office, you have."

He grins and opens up a swab. "Thanks for thinking I'm useful enough to warrant my own. This is the Assistant Chief's. We all take turns using it while she's on leave."

Emma rolls her eyes. "Forgot. Glamorous desk job, right?" she says, her eyes widening as he came closer.

"You're just jealous," he teases.

He studies her for a moment, her blue-green eyes so carefully focused on him. Cautiously, he brushes her hair from her face before pressing the pad gently to her head. She hisses and he pulls back. Gently, he uses the thumb he didn't realize was on her opposite cheek roll soothing circles.
Her breathing is picked up as he dabs it against her, as something swirls inside him. "Why is this familiar?" she breathes.

He takes a second to look back into her eyes before shaking his head. "I don't know," he admits. "Like … déjà vu or something."

"I don't believe in déjà vu," she says bluntly, but in a breathy tone that says she is doubting herself.

He finishes cleaning the blood, but keeps dabbing at the wound, his other hand cupping her face more fully. He can still feel her eyes on him. "Maybe something we did in foster care?" he asks. They can't remember being in foster care together, no matter how many times they've talked about it. But it must be the way they know each other, why his soul seems to sing in awareness at the mere thought of her.

"Maybe," she says uncertainly.

Finally he pulls back, letting his fingers fall down her cheek and down her exposed shoulder before coming off completely. He wants to continue touching her, never wants to stop. He forces himself back. "All better."

She nods, her eyes still wide, searching. "Yeah."

He turns to close up the kit, and when he turns back, she is still watching. "What?"

She rises, and his stomach bottoms out. He feels like he is falling, like his chest is tightening into a vise around his heart. She is pausing, mere inches from him. He can feel what will happen, like a phrase at the tip of his tongue that he can't quite reach. It's there. It's all there.

Finally, she reaches out, placing a flat palm over his heart. He knows it is pounding like a jackhammer, but he is surprised to see tears forming in her eyes. "It won't stop," she murmurs, before turning and pressing their lips together gently.

He slants his mouth onto hers, pulling her close because yes, here, this is right. He is just getting used to it, about to pull her deeper, when he feels the dam burst.

A wolf, a forest, a girl, a Queen, a vault, a slave, a town, a woman, a kiss, a fall …

"Graham?"

He looks up, seeing Emma's stunned features. "Emma?"

She sobs, pulling him hard against her, wrapping her arms around him tightly. "Oh God, oh God, oh God," she breathes over and over.

His arms find the small of her back and tighten until there is no space to be found between them. "Emma, I thought … I thought I'd never see you," he says, huffing in a half-laugh, half-sob.

He can feel tears soak into his shirt as she presses her face tighter against him. "How? You're here, Graham, but you were dead and I never got to ….."

He finds her hair and tangles his fingers into it, smoothing the strands as he presses a loving kiss to her brow. "I don't know. But I'm here. Emma, you broke the curse."

She staggers back, slowly smiling. She pulls her hands through the scruff of his beard and his
lashes flutter shut at the feeling. "Graham … I think … I think we broke the curse."

His eyes snap open, seeing the fear read in her eyes. He carefully brings her closer to kiss her lips again. "Wouldn't be the first time."

Her brow creases in question.

"My memories," he reminds, staring down at her in awe. He still can't believe it, any more than the first time. He never thought he'd be granted someone to love, certainly not someone that would care for him back. True love. He cups her face, wiping away a stray tear. "You brought them back that first time."

She kisses him soundly, and half of him wonders if it isn't to keep him from talking about it more.

He can't say that he minds.

"You're not leaving me again," she says stubbornly, but the pain in her words says it is also her deepest fear.

He leans his forehead against hers. "Never. You or Henry. You're stuck with me," he vows. He wants to keep this promise, wants to live up to it. Whatever happens, he will never be the reason that they separate. He is hers. Forever.

"Manhattan," she murmurs across his lips. She glances up. "This could be home."

He chuckles, kissing her again. "Wherever you are."
Falling into Place

Chapter Summary

Immediately follows Almost Like Déjà vu. Emma and Graham weren't the only ones affected.

Wherever you are.

Hearing those words, in the gentle caress of his accent, pools warmth into the pit of her belly. She grabs him firmly by the collar, tugging him to her lips again, and he meets her eagerly.

Emma can't get enough of the feel of him: his hands circling her waist, the taste of his tongue against hers, the press of his body fitted into hers. Her head is spinning delightfully, drinking in every sensation and every moment of this reunion. She's not even fully processing the swell of memories resurfacing, as the whole of his presence sucks her in, immersing her in his strong arms.

He pulls back, just a fraction, his lips swollen and hair mussed in a way that makes her want to tug on the strands under her fingers to bring him right back. "Your phone," he murmurs, backing up. His breath is short, matching hers.

She can't quite focus on his words with the dark blue of his eyes staring into hers, so she leans forward to pull him in again. He chuckles, catching her hands in his and leans his forehead against hers. "Could be Henry."

Henry. That breaks the fog.

She quickly fumbles for her cell, buried within her purse. She yanks it out just as it goes to voicemail, "missed call from kid" flashing on the screen. She groans aloud, rubbing her temples. "His memories. If we have them back ….."

"He must, too," he finishes, nodding in agreement.

It still feels strange, she thinks as she glances up at him. Magic in general is such a bizarre thing to come to terms with. She had experienced a True Love's Kiss without question before, with her son. Now, knowing that apparently a romantic true love lay between her and Graham …. She has never dared to believe that such a thing was possible.

Her mind traces the memories of his death all over again, the stunning look that overtook his face as he leaned in that final time. She had trusted in a happy ending that night, right before she lost him. Now, he is here, flesh and blood and alive. "Three weeks to break a curse. New record," she murmurs as she smooths a hand over his chest again. It's comforting in a way she can't explain to feel the steady beats under her palm.

He covers her hand, smiling sweetly. "Believe me; I'm surprised it took so long considering just how much I thought about you."

She chuckles. "Yeah, well I'm surprised it was so quick considering how much it scared me."

He looks at her thoughtfully for a moment, tucking a stray tendril of hair behind her ear. "You're
not still scared, are you?"

Yes. The answer is immediate, snapping her into stiff awareness. "Not in the way you think," she admits finally.

He nods, tracing a line across her jaw reverently. "I'm not going anywhere. Not if I can help it."

She frowns, looking away sharply. "You couldn't help it the first time. That's the problem."

"Emma—"

"Let's get Henry," she cuts off, grabbing her purse to swing over her shoulder. Behind her eyes, she feels the beginning of tears she doesn't want to start releasing again. She's already shown enough emotion, and she doesn't want any more.

He doesn't say anything, not this time. He pulls on his coat, and takes her hand gently. "You want me to come?" he asks uncertainly.

She pauses, realizing that she did include him in that. She doesn't want him to leave her side, not when she still fears what can happen. Even more, she automatically thinks of him when she realizes she wants her family together. She entwines their fingers, looking at him with that new realization. "I told you: you're not leaving again."

"Just try and drag me from your side, princess," he jokes.

She scowls. "Does that mean I should start calling you Huntsman?"

He stops suddenly, and she turns back to him in surprise. His expression is serious, almost haunted. Tight lines ran across his forehead as his lips press together. "Please … don't."

She gapes at him a moment, feeling his words weighing down on them. She nods, finally. "I won't."

He offers a wavering smile. "I'll explain it to you, I promise. Just … with you, I need to be Graham." He gestures to her phone. "You might want to tell Michael's parents that we're on our way."

She looks up at him a long moment, then leans up to press her lips to the corner of his mouth. "Good idea."

As she speaks to Emilia and explains that she needs to pick up Henry early, she feels a short burst of happy surprise. He's kind of a loner. Regina's words echoed back in her head, and she feels a sort of pride that her Henry, the one that is well-adjusted and grows up in a place where he's allowed to be free, has Michael and Avery and Matt and Damon and the yearbook team and a crush on Selena that he actually talks about with his mother … Henry is happy here.

She presses up against Graham's side as they walk, the comfort level rising within her as the phone is transferred to Henry. There is the sound of a lock clicking shut before a worried, "Mom?"

"Henry. You remember?" she asks anxiously.

"Yes! I thought it was just me, but I don't know how it happened!"

She peers up at Graham again, seeing the smile that tugs on his lips as he watches her. "Yeah, I know how it happened. I'm on my way now. He's coming with me."
"He?" he asks, then there is a beat. "Oh, Graham! Mom, he's alive! How is he here?"

Emma's eyes flutter shut and she inhales deeply. Clean, woodsy, no longer leather but something so familiar …. "We don't know yet. But we're coming."

"'Kay. Mom? I love you."

She feels the part of her that was still worried that he preferred Regina slip away, locked into a deeper part of her. "I love you, too." The phone clicks off, but she continues smiling down at it. There is still an ache that reminds her that her parents are gone forever, in another universe, but she has her son. And now, she even has Graham.

"I keep seeing him, that last time. I remember thinking that he looked so familiar …," Graham murmurs, trailing his fingers up and down her arm.

She sighs. They had bumped into Graham two weeks ago, when Henry came by the precinct to meet up with her after school. What Graham doesn't know is how Henry teased her for the whole of the two weeks after. "I think he recognized you, too."

He twists her hand in his, hiding a shy smile. "Did he freak out? It's almost one."

She shakes her head. "No, he's just excited. Confused, just like us."

The silence that builds next is amicable, comfortable even. She listens to the sounds of his breath, watching the patterns the fog makes as he exhales. It is cold, to be certain, but she finds as she leans against him this is negated. She feels safe, despite the lingering fears that he will disappear again.

They reach the building three blocks down easily. The lobby is warm, but she doesn't let go of her grip on him. He tightens the arm wrapped around her as he presses the elevator button. It is startling how exactly they fit into each other. This is something she had barely known before, things she would have missed. The doors slide shut, and she turns, pulling his lips to hers once more.

He breathes against them hotly once he releases them. "Do you know?" he asks, nudging her nose lovingly.

She lets the words swirl in her head before she nods. She knows exactly what he's asking, because she can practically feel the affection and love seeping off him. Yet, he is still cautious; he doesn't want to scare her by actually saying it.

The doors slide open, and he pulls away first, exiting to the hall. She stops him before he can go further, feeling a knot in her stomach that she still knows she needs to express. "I do, too."

He takes a moment to study her features, a slow smile crossing his face. "Wouldn't have worked if you didn't." He cards his hand through her curls slowly. "Let's get Henry."

She nods. Suddenly, she is eager to see them all together. She bounces to the door, knocking softly. She expects Emilia, but it is Henry that pops out, hugging her tight across the waist.

"Hey, kid," she says softly, brushing through his hair. "How you holding up?"

He nods with tightly shut eyes. "It's a lot," he mutters before pulling back. He pivots, and grabs a surprised Graham next. "Missed you."

Graham embraces him cautiously, awe crossing his face. "Missed you, too."
"Don't go too far, 'kay?" he asks.

It tugs something sharp in Emma's heart to see them, to remember the devastated look on Henry's face after his death in contrast to the relief now.

Graham chuckles, and pulls him back. He brushes back his hair fondly. "I'd prefer to stick around, if you don't mind."

Henry's answering grin is almost blinding. "How'd you break the curse, anyway?" he asks her.

She feels heat bloom over her cheeks suddenly. It shouldn't embarrass her, but she's still processing the idea of this True Love thing and it's doing strange things to the part of her that never believed it existed in the first place.

It's Graham that answers, though. "Sorry, kid. I might have kissed your mom again."

Henry's eyebrow rises. "Then what took you so long?"

"Okay, that's enough," Emma says, feeling the blush overtake her once more.

Henry pulls his overnight bag over his shoulder. "What? We could have been having this conversation two weeks ago, if you had just listened to me. Graham could have helped me with that stupid PE assignment."

Emma rolls her eyes. "Sorry if we didn't kiss soon enough for you, kid. Guess you'll just have to ask him to help on the make-up assignment."

Henry's face transforms, looking between the two. "This is real, isn't it? We get to stick together."

Emma shares a look with Graham, her face softening. "Yeah. This is home."
"Well, I'll be off then," the pirate murmured lowly, tracing his gaze over the apartment building before rocking back.

Graham watched him a moment. "Thank you. For your help."

His eyes snapped up. "Wasn't for you, mate."

Graham nodded. "I know. I'm not thanking you for me."

The man's eyebrows quirked up as he looked downwards, twisting his hook. "Yes, well." He was silent a beat. "I'll be ... around. If more help is needed."

Henry popped up from the passenger door. "Thanks, Hook!"

Killian chuckled, backing up. "You're welcome, young sir."

Graham followed the man with his eyes as he walked into the distance, contemplative. It was clear the other man had feelings for Emma. In all honesty, it didn't bother him to know. He was fully aware of all that she and the pirate had gone through together. Too alike but not alike enough, Emma had explained one night. Graham knew better than most how easy it was to fall for Emma Swan. He couldn't exactly begrudge the pirate of that, especially since Hook was not attempting to undermine their relationship.

He sighed, stepping back into the car. If anything, the pirate's feelings may prove helpful as time went on. Just as long as boundaries were set and abided.

"I don't get why we don't get to go," Henry grumbled, breaking him from his thoughts.

Graham shot a smirk back at him from the driver's seat, turning the ignition on again. "Your mom's right, Henry. It'll be confusing enough with her trying to explain things when they have no memories. We'd only add to that."

Graham watched Henry's nose wrinkle from the rearview mirror. "I just want to see them again."

Graham bobbed his head in agreement. "I know. We will, eventually. Who knows? Maybe your mom'll have them convinced in just one visit," Graham teased.
Henry's lips quirked up. "I'm not even that optimistic, Dad."

Just as it had the last few months, the title still bloomed love and pride all through him. It wasn't as simple as it that, though, now that they were back in the place they thought they'd never see again. He swallowed, pulling over in front of the bed and breakfast before turning to him. "You know now that we're back, your father's here. You'll be able to see him again."

A smile shot over his face, surprise lighting his eyes. "Yeah. I forgot about that," he said softly.

Graham pressed his lips together, looking down a moment. "We need to figure out what to do about the adoption," he said lowly.

Henry's head cocked to the side. "No, we don't. You're my dad. Besides, he wouldn't remember me until we break the curse, anyway." Graham watches him a long moment, looking for the hurt underneath his words. Henry's silent a beat, and then leans forward. "You're both my dad. I'm glad you adopted me. Honestly."

Graham closed his eyes briefly. He wasn't sure how things would be once Neal remembered, if he would be able to keep the adoption legal. For now, it probably wasn't the time to worry about it. He knew how much Henry cared about their little family, how much they all did. There were more pressing things to be concerned about; he just needed to focus on keeping them all safe and happy.

The little bubble they had in New York was so perfect, though, that trying to accommodate for how it would change was daunting.

"Let's get a room and get ready for your mom, shall we?" Graham finally said, sighing.

They climbed out of the bug, and Graham wrapped his arm around Henry's shoulder with one arm, dragging a suitcase with the other. Having the kid close was both reassuring and comforting in the midst of all the change.

The familiar scent from the trellis of flowers covering the entrance greeted them as they approached, and he inhaled deeply.

It was almost unnerving being back in Storybrooke. He wasn't exactly looking forward to staying in one of the rooms that held such bad imprints of the past. Granny's though, the diner … it was comforting to see. There were a lot of good memories associated with that diner, and the street on which he was standing was the same one he first kissed Emma on. The dart board was visible from his place on the street, and he chuckled as the memory sifted through his head.

He bypassed the restaurant completely, though, and headed for the check in toward the rear.

The bell rang as the door opened, and he found Granny and Red in a familiar position: bickering. It seemed amicable for once, but even so it still brought a smile to his face. Some things never changed. He looked down at Henry, who shrugged. "Excuse me. We were looking to book a room."

The pair snapped to them, eyes widening. Granny was all-out gaping at him, and Red's hand covered her mouth. "Graham?" Red squeaked out, voice cracking.

His eyes narrowed in confusion. "Wait, you know me?"

Both women nodded in unison, but it was Granny that stepped around the corner. "Is this some trick?" the older woman said, eyeing the weapon on the wall.
Graham huffed out a laugh. "No. How do you remember?"

Henry dropped the handle of his suitcase and rushed to Red, hugging her around the waist. "You remember! How do you remember?"

Red shook her head. "Better question: how do you?"

Henry snorted. "We've already had to explain that. Dad kissed Mom. Our memories came back."

Red looked up again, catching Graham's eye. "You and Emma?"

Graham felt a flush creep up his neck as he nodded, twisting his ring around his finger nervously. It was complicated seeing her again with all their memories. He remembered a time where she edged around saying she had feelings for him, at a time where he couldn't have feelings for anyone. Until he found Emma, feeling without a heart was quite impossible. The only other person who came close was Henry. "All sorts of loopholes in curses, I guess."

He was shocked to feel himself pulled into Granny's arms with a strong hold. "Good. It was too serious without you around," Granny said with a sharp nod. "Nice to see that things aren't as bleak as I thought, too."

He offered a wavering smile back. "Thanks." He glanced to Henry, and then back to the older woman. "How did you guys get your memories? We heard you were cursed?"

Granny sniffed, pivoting to get back to her desk. "Who knows! It feels like yesterday that we were escaping a curse, now we're back in one and Snow's preg—" She cut herself off, before huffing out a low breath. "Didn't mean to spring it on ya. Your mother-in-law's in her ninth month."

Graham's eyebrows shot up, and inwardly he winced. He wondered just how Emma was taking that news. "It's fine. We'll be needing to settle in, though, before we can help out."

Red ducked her head, turning to the reservation book. "It's Storybrooke, so basically every room is available."

"Not 12," Graham said. He winced, holding back a wave of revulsion at the idea of that particular room. He gestured to Henry. "A double would be nice, maybe with a bigger bed. Emma's … well," he hesitated, wondering if he should mention the pregnancy. "She needs the space."

Granny looked at him pointedly before searching through the books. "5 has a queen and then a pull-out twin. Good enough?"

He nodded, and she pulled down the key. "Thank you." He turned and placed a hand on Henry's head, ready to climb the stairs.

"Graham." He turned back, catching Red's soft smile. "Glad you're back."

He gave a final smile, glad to be free of the awkwardness. "Thanks."

They climbed the stairs quickly, and found their room easily.

"So, everyone knows, I guess?" Henry said as he flopped onto the bed.

Graham shrugged and sat down next to him. "Seems like it. It's a good thing; we should be able to defeat this Big Bad and then figure out what to do."

Henry's quiet a long moment, twisting his hands together. "When it's all done … what if I want to
go back? To New York?"

Graham stared at him seriously. "We'll figure it out as we get to it, Henry. But do you really want to leave everyone behind? Your family?"

Henry shrugged a shoulder, looking away. "It's safe in New York."

Graham nudged him. "Not really. I think I have a whole group of people down at the station that'd say otherwise."

The detectives down at the precinct all adored Henry. Simmons in particular had taken him under his wing since their kids shared a school; he liked to show off to him whenever Henry came around after last class, and Henry ate up every bit of the attention. Henry even managed to get Lazo to slip him treats from the vending machine out of her own pocket. It was definitely safe to say he was spoiled there.

His words don't bring a smile to the kid's face, though, as he hoped it would. "I know Garcia and Simmons and Lazo and all them would say that New York's a lot scarier than some small town in Maine. But we know better."

Graham sighed and tossed his arm over his shoulder, pulling him close. "We know how bad it can get. New York is reality, and it's a lot more unpredictable. Here, we usually know when something's coming."

"You didn't," he mumbled.

Graham grimaced. "That was before I had my memories. And I still knew something was wrong," he explained slowly. It was still hard going over how he died with both Henry and Emma. He had tried to be vague at first, but Emma had coaxed it out of him. Henry had just known Regina's part in it, and he hated having to confirm his suspicions. Later, they had speculated all they could about reasons he had returned, but nothing was solid evidence. He knew a lot of the time Emma was worried that he'd disappear from her life again, even after they got pregnant.

"Dad," Henry began, then hesitated. He twisted his fingers together. "What happens when we see her?"

He didn't have to ask who he means. He could see it in every line, every flinch, every flame of regret and sadness. Graham swallowed, considering it. "Whatever you want to happen. If she knows, she'll want to see you. But it's not her terms anymore. It's yours."

Henry looked up. "Mine?" he asked hoarsely.

Graham's lips quirked up. "What did we tell you when your mom and I got married?"

Henry smiled cautiously. "That even though you wanted to adopt me, that it was my decision, both morally and legally," he rattled off.

Graham chuckled, pulling him closer. "Exactly. It's your choice how often you want to see her, listen to her, and if you want to accept her. No one else gets a say in it: not me, not your mom, and not her. Got it?"

Henry nodded, looking infinitely more relieved. "Got it."

"Good, 'cause I need help getting that pull out bed before your mom comes in and hogs the real bed to herself."
Henry was half-passed out, his video game making considerably less constant noise as he nodded off, by the time Emma came home. Immediately, she rolled onto the bed and into his arms, pressing tight up against his side. She pressed a long, lingering kiss to his lips. "They remember," she murmured.

He pulled his arms around her lower back, tugging her as close as he could manage. "I know. She's pregnant?"

She nodded against him. "Seriously pregnant. About to pop, pregnant." She was quiet a long moment before she sighed. "She thinks it's great that we're pregnant together."

"And you?" Graham asked into her hair. He pressed light kisses into the golden strands, and his hand rubbed circles against the tense muscles of her back. He couldn't image the surprise of seeing your mother, who was the same age as you, pregnant with a child she will raise from birth.

She shrugged. "I don't know yet. It's strange. I knew they wanted another kid and all—" her breath hitched here, knotting on the idea before it abruptly evens. "It's not like they don't have a lot to catch up to with us."

A snort came from Henry's side of the room. "Yeah, 'cause we're the ones with the complicated life."

"Hey, kid," Emma said in a falsely-stern voice. "Just because they're Snow White and Prince Charming, it doesn't change the fact that your dad popped up from the afterlife and then married me and gave me your new sibling."

Graham laughed outright at the boiled-down explanation of their situation. Henry sniggered from his bed as well. "How'd you stop them from rushing over?" he asked. He was a little surprised David and Snow hadn't arrived back with her, what with Henry so nearby.

She sighed heavily. "They're in the diner. I told them I was going to check to see if you both were awake."

"I'm awake," Henry said, popping up. All traces of fatigue had indeed been wiped from his features in anticipation.

"You sure you're up for it?" he asked Emma, reaching to rest his hand over her stomach. The baby twisted beneath her skin, a ripple against his hand. He smiled fondly, caressing the area.

She nodded. "Worst part's over. They want to see you, anyway."

"Great," he said dryly, rising to a sitting position. He held out his hands, and she took them to help her rise.

"It's a good thing. They like you, Graham," she said, wrapping her arms around him again.

He rocked them back and forth a minute before Henry clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Quit stalling. The grandparents aren't going to maim you, Dad."

He chuckled, and let a little tension out of his body with a deep breath. Emma smiled up at him gently, squeezing his hand in support. "Ready?" she asked softly.

He nodded, turning to follow Henry, who was already hopping down the last half of the stairs.
The diner was dim, lit by the low light of florescent bulbs. It was hard to make out the patrons at first, but then he caught sight of Henry wrapped firmly between both of his grandparents. Graham smiled gently, feeling his heart stir at the sight. Henry deserved every ounce of happiness he could get, and those two were ones to lavish such things. Emma sighed happily beside him, pressing into the length of his side lovingly.

He was content to watch the reunion, and thought it would last a lot longer. That was, until the dark haired woman hurled herself into his arms. He let out a hard breath as the wind was knocked out of him. She was shaking, tears immediately soaking into his shirt and the press of her swollen belly impeded her attempts to hold him tighter.

"Graham … oh, I'm so sorry," she cried.

He awkwardly patted her back, catching Emma's eye in bewilderment over her shoulder. "Snow … it's fine," he said lamely. He was unsure where this sudden outburst stemmed from.

David appeared next, carefully extracting his wife from his embrace. "She's still trying to process," David explained, pulling her in. "I'm glad you're back, Huntsman."

_Huntsman._ The name still froze something in his stomach, a hard ball of ice that chilled him to his core. It had been his only name in their world, but also a harsh reminder of the way he'd been outcast by human society. He nodded stiffly. "You can call me Graham, still. Thank you. And congratulations."

Snow sniffed, brushing underneath her eyes. "And to you! When Emma told us … I'm so happy for you both!"

Emma was hiding her face from them, a small smile crossing over her face as she rested a hand over her stomach. "This is strange," she voiced softly.

He nodded his agreement, finding it echoed by David even as Snow only shook her head. "No, no, this is amazing! You have your memories! You're back, and in love, and having a baby, and I'm just so—" She cut off, sniffing hard as more tears trickled down her face. "This is _perfect_," she gushed.

"Hormones," David mouthed with a fond grin down on his wife.

Graham chuckled under his breath, curling his hand into Emma's. He knew something about that. "I think we have to talk about—"

Just as he was getting to it, the bell chimed behind the Charmings. He froze, feeling Emma tense beside him. The woman stopped short, eyes widening at the sight of all of them. Her eyes bounced from face to face, lingering on his before resting firmly on Henry.

Graham shot over to Henry immediately to catch his reaction. The boy's face had drained of color, as he edged closer to Emma.

"Henry," Regina breathed.

Henry backed up and stepped behind the block of both his and Emma's bodies, subconsciously seeking the protection of the parental barrier.

Snow and David had both pivoted to face Regina. Snow's face was pitying, but accepting of the other woman's entrance. David looked a little more resigned.

"Do you want to go upstairs, Henry?" Emma asked firmly. It was a true question, leaving their
son able to make the decision for himself. But it was also a clear warning to Regina: there was no way she was just stepping into his life again as if nothing had happened.

Henry looked over to the woman that raised him, and then back to Emma. "Yes, please."

Regina's face fell, absolutely shattering in distress. She watched Henry climb up the stairs without a backwards glance. "He doesn't have his memories," she said certainly.

Emma shook her head. "No. He just knows too much."

Her eyes darkened, flashing over the two. "You. You've poisoned him against me."

Graham stiffened, but it was Emma that glowered at her, exceeding the look Regina was trying to pull. "No. You did that."

"Emma … she's helping us," Snow piped in softly.

Her eyes flashed and her grip on his hand increased. He could feel her start to almost imperceptibly shake, and he brushed his thumb over her skin to try to silently offer his support. "That's great. That still doesn't make up for what she's done to my family."

Regina straightened, leveling her gaze. "Excuse me?"

She stepped toe-to-toe with the former Queen, intimidating even in her flowy blue shirt and barely noticeable bump. "He came back. But you still tried to take him away forever in cold blood. Our son," she said pointedly, gesturing back at him so as to make explicit who she was including in that "our." "had to live with that knowledge, feared you in those months before I could break the curse. How you treated him during those years before I came? Unacceptable. You don't understand how hard it was to get him to handle both sets of memories. He gets a good education, now. He has friends. He has all sorts of people who love him. He has a full life. He is happy now. You will not ruin that."

Regina's lips were still curled in distaste, her face showing no sign that Emma's words were sinking in. "He is my son. You can't prevent him from seeing me."

"I'm not. You don't understand: I am letting this be his decision. And you damn well better heed his wish, or so help me I will tear you apart."

Graham found himself staring at his wife with a new sort of awe. His heart swelled to see her defending Henry so deftly. He caught David's eye and he grinned back, the same sort of pride in his eye.

"Emma," Snow pressed, touching her shoulder gently to pull her slightly back from Regina. "Maybe you're being a little harsh."

She shrugged off the touch, ignoring her mother completely. "If you can help, great. But we're not here for some trumped up reunion in your honor, Regina. We're here to help everyone escape another curse."

Regina crossed her arms in front of her, glaring at Emma behind a sheen of tears. "Here I thought we'd buried this hatchet, Savior," she spat acerbically.

Emma laughed humorlessly. "What you did to me? Whatever; it's buried. But I can't say the same for what you did to them."

He knew Emma was a little more on edge, a little quicker to action with the changes the baby was
making in her, but he also knew that whether or not that was true Emma would still defend Henry to the end. He didn't find it necessary for her to defend him just as vehemently, but they had had that sort of discussion before and he knew there was no stopping it.

He cautiously stepped forward, grabbing her hand. Their rings clinked together as she let herself be led back into his side. "Lines are drawn. Let's call it a night, huh?" he murmured into her ear.

She nodded sharply. "We're done for tonight. We'll ask about your help if you can accept those terms," she shot out, whipping her hair back and then tugged him to the back.

"Emma," Snow called, but Emma ignored her plea, tightening her grip on him once more. He knew she just wasn't prepared for the white-washing her mother was sure to do at the moment. Things might be easier with Regina's help, but if the woman wouldn't stop pestering Henry against his wishes … they could do without it.

He stopped them just in front of the door to their room, twisting her to meet his face. He pressed his lips against hers, suddenly eager to show how proud he was of her. "You're amazing," he breathed before kissing her deeply.

She was smiling as they parted, her eyes made bluer by a swell of emotion. "It had to be said."

He nodded. "It did. And we'll let Henry decide."

"Not just Henry," she clarified, bumping her nose with his.

He carded a hand through her hair. "I know. But Henry takes precedence."

The door swung open, revealing a red-eyed Henry. "Mom. Dad. … Thanks," he said.

He smiled brightly, pulling him into the embrace of their family. "Team, right?"

Henry nodded, burying his face into his side. "Always."
"Graham."

He looks up from his paperwork, sprawled over half the dining table. He looks tired. She knows the case he's working on has been less than fruitful lately. Still, she admires him for the work. Even after they got their memories back, he hasn't faltered as he includes Emma and Henry into a snug routine of work, family, and friends.

Henry is at Avery's, as was becoming more frequent as school picked up steam after the holidays. They have a big project due in a week's time, and Henry had her cell once he was ready to come home in the morning.

Home. Such a foreign concept. The false memories had done a lot in establishing the possibility of a home with Henry. But breaking it? Once she remembered her old life, with Henry and Graham by her side, it became a bigger milestone. Home is with them. She actually feels happy.

Graham rests his hand on his face, managing a small smile. "Yeah?" he asks, rubbing his temples as he stifles a yawn.

She shifts her weight on her feet, wondering if she should put off telling him. It's late: well past one after a long Friday that began at nearly five in the morning. But she's just come home after a long walk, after finding out exactly why she's been so lethargic lately. She has half a spine now, and she doesn't know how long before she'd tell him if she doesn't now.

Carefully, she yanks her gloves off and shrugs out her coat. Finally, she pulls her purse onto the tabletop with a clatter, and then scraps a chair back to sit in. She worries her lip between her teeth, before sliding her hands over to his. He catches them effortlessly, interlacing their fingers even as
the fatigue settles on his features.

After a beat, she looks up. "I went to the doctor's today."

Immediately, his face flashes over with concern, instantly alert. "You just had a checkup two months ago. You hate going. Why … what's wrong?" he asks.

She looks down, playing with his fingers nervously. "I haven't been feeling like myself," she explains slowly.

He nods. "Yeah." She must have a bewildered look on her face, because his smile widens tentatively. "Em, I knew when you weren't feeling like yourself in Storybrooke. I think I've gotten better at it while living with you."

She forces a laugh and pulls her hand through her hair. Then, she steels herself and decides to just let it out. "So, I'm pregnant."

It's not often that she gets the chance to render him speechless; often, it requires a physical action and, even then, it doesn't usually last long. Now, though, the look on his face is priceless. Mouth parted, eyes wide … emotions flicker across his face at such a rapid pace that she can barely catch them all.

"Graham? This is usually where you say something," she cajoles, finding a smile tug at her lips. She's been worried all day about telling him, but something that keeps passing through his eyes has her heart swelling.

He's happy.

She'd been shocked. She can only imagine how shocked he is. There's been no other signs but the tiredness: no nausea, still some spotting, no changes in appetite or mood. The knowledge still hasn't settled in her head, though the first inklings of excitement are starting to bubble through.

Finally, he shudders out a breath and stands, pulling her out of her chair. His hand finds her stomach, making its way past her sweater and tee, cold palm caressing her skin. He chuckles as it finally slides into place between her hipbones. "Pregnant," he whispers, incredulously.

She nods. "I blame your fetish for open spaces," she jokes with a teary grin.

He grins in awe, finding her lips in a sweet kiss. "You think it was there?" he asks seriously.

She rolls her eyes. "We weren't exactly five thousand percent careful." It had been a case up in Hewitt, near the woods, and they may have been a little more reckless than usual. Not that she was complaining, then or now.

"Figures our kid'd get conceived in the forest," he says with a laugh. His eyes are bright, twinkling in delight.

She wraps her arms around his neck, pulling him down for another lingering kiss. "Good thing, right?" she asks, feeling an old scar flash its way to the surface.

He smiles broadly and it goes back under. "Great thing."

She believes in it, in them. All four of them.
"Hey guys! Bad day or celebration?" the petite bartender asked, perked up from behind the counter. She was already pouring shots for two rowdy guys at the end of the bar. She grinned, pushing back the new red streak that weaved through her black hair.

"Just unwinding. Beer?" Emma said, sliding onto a stool. Graham stood behind her, waiting for another to open up and rested his hands along her waist in the meantime.

Andie nodded, sliding over two bottles. "Happy hour," she said glibly. The woman always liked to claim happy hour for the two, even though the slightly divey bar didn't exactly have a happy hour.

Emma smirked, handing over one of the bottles to Graham. He took it with a shake of his head, before reaching over to entwine their fingers. She had never been one too big on public affection, but Graham's unobtrusive gestures were worth every moment of brief minor discomfort. Besides, at this point in time, Emma was feeling too good to care about how their proximity was viewed by others.

Suddenly, there was a slap as someone's hand came down on Graham's shoulder. He turned, and his face brightened. "Simmons! Off already?"

The older man half-grunted, leaning his weight against the bar. "What's another three hours of overtime, right, Humbert?"

"Whiskey, old man?" Andie called, sliding two more drinks to two more patrons.

"None of that well stuff this time, young'un," he said sternly, to which the brunette snorted. She rattled something off in Vietnamese then disappeared behind the double doors.

Graham chuckled, tightening his hold around her waist. She sighed, leaning against his chest comfortingly.

Simmons nodded to the couple. "You two. The more often I see you, the more you look attached at the hip."

"That's because they have that FFL, Pops," Andie cut in bluntly, pushing over his shot.
Emma's eyes widened, and Graham choked into his drink. "Andie!" she admonished.

"What? Don't try to deny it. I can always tell by your hair." Emma's hand raked through her tresses before noting just how unkempt his were. The bartender began stacking glasses nonchalantly before gesturing to Emma's outfit. "Besides: top button done up in this heat? You're fooling no one, Bounty Hunter."

"And you just came from work. Animals," Simmons said sternly, but smiled into his drink.

Graham swallowed, and turned his head as he took a pull from the longneck. A blush was creeping up his neck as he blatantly avoided eye contact.

"You're no help," she muttered, elbowing him in the side. Andie winked at her as she did so. Emma huffed. It wasn't like she was going to confirm that they had had sex in the breakroom before heading over.

"You act like it's a bad thing! The early stages are the best. Sex all the time, everywhere …," Andie's eyes shined over for a second before she reached out to swat at Simmons. "Why don't we do that, anymore?"

Simmons knocked his head on the counter with a groan. "You two are bad for my health. Couldn't you just settle down and get married already? Take some pressure off me?"

Emma felt Graham's hand tighten around hers. She felt the breath stolen from her lungs at even the suggestion. "It's only been three months," Graham said weakly. But almost unconsciously, his thumb brushed over her left ring finger delicately. A tremor coursed through her body as she tried to stamp down the sudden fear that had nothing to do with Graham himself and everything to do with her issues from previous relationships.

"Three months and you're still this nauseating? Must be in for the long haul," Simmons joked, finishing off his whiskey.

Andie leaned across to swipe a hand over the ring on his finger. "Don't be pressuring other couples to get married, too, just because you're sick of hanging around my parents. Idiot," she said affectionately, then whisked back her hair to get back to work.

"You'd think after two years she'd understand that I'm none too bright with this sort of stuff," Simmons said, but his dark eyes were soft as they trained on his wife. He shook off. "You two do realize we have security tapes, right?"

Emma felt her face flush, and Graham pulled her closer. "Taken care of," he said smugly.

He rolled his eyes and stood with his drink. "Just don't let it happen again. Chief'd have your head." He paused, thinking a moment. "Lucky there's no policy on detectives intermingling with bail bonds people, Humbert."

"Don't I know it," Graham replied simply.

Later, when they got back to the apartment, Emma felt like she should bring the marriage thing up. Because as flushed as it made her, she isn't entirely put off to the idea. She thinks they should have a real conversation about it, exactly what her concerns were, exactly what he thought about it.

But as soon as the door shuts, his lips were back on her neck, his nimble fingers unbuttoning her blouse, and all thoughts of talking flew out of her head.

XX
The next time is barely a next time.

They were walking down the street, all three of them. It was their day off, and they were enjoying the sunshine. Hot dogs were in hand as they made their way to the park. Graham was teasing Henry, pretending to grab up his food, and Henry was protesting with equal amounts of jest. Graham was smiling down at Henry, and the kid was grinning back up at him, adoration plain on both their faces.

And her heart twisted because she could imagine them as a family. All of them, together. Always.

Her finger burned with the want of an extra weight.

But then she realized after a beat that they were already a family. There's no need for legalities.

XX

It doesn't come up again for almost another month.

She had woken up in the pre-dawn hours, Graham's lips against her forehead lovingly. He had roused her only briefly, with the promise to be back early from work to celebrate. She had kissed him a little more fully, a happy birthday spilling from his mouth before he left the room.

Henry had been smiling widely all day long. He made pancakes that morning, packed her a lunch, and even bought a bouquet of bright, sunny-colored buttercups in a hand-painted vase.

It was a great beginning to a fabulous birthday, if she ever had one.

She went into work only briefly, sorting through piles of new cases and doing some research minimally. She was slightly distracted by the anticipation. She had never had a real birthday. The only thing that came close was her last one, when she had had a small cupcake and a tiny boy knock at her door.

What a difference a year made.

She left earlier than she had planned, but she knew she had some extra time before Henry left yearbook and before Graham came home. She browsed windows, surprised each time she caught her smiling reflection. She couldn't remember a time she felt so light and happy on her birthday. She stopped in one of the little boutiques, picking up a dress she had passed enough times in the window to actually envy. She even stopped to get a pedicure, something she rarely indulged in.

She came back to the apartment feeling relaxed and comfortable, eager to see her son and live-in boyfriend. She twisted the knob to open to a dark apartment, and had a burst of realization.

It was too cliché. It had to have been Graham's idea.

She sighed, dropping her purse and bags to the side. "Okay, where are all of you?" she asked with an eyeroll, hands on her hips.

At that, the lights did indeed click on, a verifiable crowd in the room exclaiming a loud, "surprise!"

She laughed out loud, finding Graham's twinkling eyes amidst the crowd. Henry reached her first, hugging her around the waist. "Were you surprised, Mom?"

"Very. Thank you, Henry," she replied, brushing her hands through his hair.
Graham reached her next, pressing a lingering kiss to her lips. "Too much?" he asked softly.

She shook her head. "No. Thank you, really. I've never—" she cut herself off, feeling a build of tears form behind her eyes that was so sudden it even caught her off guard. "Thank you."

"Don't let him get all the credit!" Gia declared, popping up to hold her face. "And besides, he still has to outdo my party last year."

She smiled tightly. Of course, she did remember Gia giving her a twenty-eighth birthday party, with a fancy dinner and lots of wine and great friends. But at the same time, she remembers a cold and lonely Boston apartment, and a single blue candle. Graham seemed to recognize the turn of her thoughts as he squeezed her upper arms.

"Well, it's not going to top anything without some champagne for the birthday girl," he professed, tugging her along to the table. It was filled with bottles of wine and champagne, canapés, and the biggest cake she's ever seen for an adult. "More food, don't worry," he murmured with a grin. He handed her a glass, then turned her toward the group.

She stood awkwardly, looking over at all the friends she had made in New York. Andie and Leo, cuddling in a corner and pretending not to. Gia, Emilia, and Ritu with their partners, their kids with Henry on the other side. Garcia, Lazo, Richards, and even Assistant Chief Miller grinning in plainclothes that looked alien on the detectives.

She raised her glass and took a sip over the rapidly forming lump in her throat. It didn't often strike her, the differences between her first life and the one she made in New York. But this was almost too much. It wasn't real, but it was. These people weren't just made up lives that were built to care about her; she could still talk to them about real things and they will listen and pay attention, but will also have their own problems and screw up and be nice and funny and rude and short and just ... real.

Graham's hand found hers and she looked up at his grinning face fondly. He's her touchstone; him and Henry. They were reminders that both lives were real, no matter what.

"I love you," she whispered below the din of everyone talking.

He looked down at her, his gaze softening. "I love you so much, Emma."

"Birthday girl kiss!" a new voice cut in, weaving through the crowd to plant a loud kiss on Emma's cheek. She pulled back, and Emma's eyes widened.

"Maggie, what are you doing here?" she asked. Maggie had been a friend from her Boston memories, before she moved to New York two years ago.

"I couldn't miss out on meeting this one," she said fondly, pointing to Graham. She grabbed her elbow. "Excuse me, boyfriend, need to catch up with my girl, here!"

"I thought the point was meeting the boyfriend?" Emma pointed out.

She waved her hand. "What do you think I've been doing the past hour waiting for your lazy ass?" She pulled on her harder.

"Have fun," Graham said with a bemused smile, turning back to the table with a shake of his head.

"Maggie," Emma started, than couldn't help the giggle that escaped her. Her memories of the girl were full of laughter and good times.
"God, girl, now I know why you haven't been back to Boston! I can't believe you thought you could keep a man like that to yourself," she admonished with a bright grin that split her ebony face. "He is gorgeous, hon."

Emma sneaked a look back at Graham, who was currently showing Henry and Michael how to properly swirl their grape juice in the wine goblets. "That's me. Keeping attractive men I'm dating away from your bad influence."

"I'm an excellent influence. Just ask Henry," she sniffed, picking up her glass delicately. "Now, tell me: it looks serious. Is it serious?"

Emma looked away, pulling on the ties of her bracelet. "Yeah. Yeah, it's serious."

Maggie nodded. "Thought as much just talking with him. So, when do I have to buy my plane ticket for the wedding? Those things get expensive last minute."

"Mags!" she exclaimed, feeling the heat pool in her belly. The thought didn't seize her up, though, she found. Not like last month. "I—you know me," she finished lamely.

Maggie tossed back her hair. "Yeah, I know you. That's why I'm asking. I've never seen you like this with a guy. And the way he's into you and Henry? Keeper written all through him, babe."

She didn't get a chance to respond as Andie pulled her in for a hug. "No hogging the birthday girl," she exclaimed, her voice tinged with just the barest hint of drunkenness. "We're supposed to be talking super pretentious things and then once the kids get bored and go next door, play Cards Against Humanity and get you plenty drunk."

"I like her," Maggie said, eyes shining.

"Straight and married," Emma pointed out.

She twisted to look at her. "And? I can still like her."

"She sure can!" Andie cried back, not noticing how her husband's eyes widened as she threw her arms around the taller girl.

"Well, that settles that. Are we eating?" Emma asked.

"We were talking about Graham and Emma's wedding plans," Maggie said, ignoring her completely.

Andie squealed while Leo only smirked. "Real or figurative? Because I've started down the figurative with them."

"We'll see. But I want to hear about these plans," Maggie said, wrapping an arm around Andie and directing her to the drink table.

Leo knocked her shoulder. "I'm not sure if you two are going to walk down the aisle or be dragged attached to those two," he teased.

"Emma doesn't get dragged by anyone," Graham cut in, tucking his chin onto her shoulder.

"I believe that. And no one will have to drag you to marry this one," he replied and then walked off toward the liquor.

"Sorry," he murmured into the skin of her shoulder.
She shook her head, nudging his head with hers. "No, it's okay. It's kinda nice to have, you know, friends speculating on this sort of thing."

Slowly, a smile crossed his face. "Yeah, it really is."

She took a moment to consider the fact that he, too, never had friends before. This curse … it had its downsides, to be sure. But there were a lot of good things to even it out. "Would you … would you ever consider—"

"Your glass is empty!" Emilia broke in, using a bottle to pour another glassful. "Sweetheart, I know you like him, but you should not be in the corner with your boyfriend all night. Come, join the party!"

She let herself be dragged into the crowd, and didn't let the notion enter her head any longer.

It was only the morning after, when she laid half on top of his chest, her head pounding from a hangover, that she realized that she would be perfectly content waking up like this every morning if it meant being in his arms.

She doesn't bring it up again.

XX

She thought about it briefly on a trip up to Hewitt.

They had found the jumper quickly, dropped him off with local police, and then decided to stay an extra day. He had spent time explaining how it used to be, in the other world. They had gone exploring in the forest under her suggestion, wanting a visual of what he was expressing. Something about being out there, though, ignited their blood and they didn't talk for long.

Later, she was lying on top of him in the middle of the woods, breathing him in. His hands were threaded in her hair, brushing them down in long sweeps. She felt safe in his arms.

It felt perfect.

Of course, feeling perfect sent warning signs all through Emma. She didn't believe in perfect, or at least didn't believe in perfect lasting. But he kissed her brow and held her tighter and she could forget her worries for a second.

She briefly wondered about asking him to marry her right then and there, so that feeling would last longer.

She let the moment pass by.

XX

It's a long time before the subject is broached again.

It was the day after they told Henry and two days after she told Graham about the baby. It was a lazy Sunday, intimate and calm. Dishes were stacked high in the sink to be tended to at a later date, the smell of chocolate and bacon still lingering in the air. Graham laid behind her with his arm draped protectively over her stomach, swirling soothing circles over where their child lay.

Henry's flicking channels absently, but she could tell his heart was not really into it. "So, the baby's due in August?"
She nodded, leaning up to see his face a little more clearly. "Doctor says August 20th. We've definitely got some time to prepare."

Henry dropped the remote, looking thoughtful. "At least you have memories of raising me, so you're not going in blind."

Her heart plummets. "Henry—"

"No, it's okay. I didn't mean it like that. I just … this is good. It feels right," Henry clarified. "It's real, too, right?"

Emma swallowed at hearing their mantra. "Right," she agreed tentatively. There were some things she definitely thought was real in this life, but somehow claiming Henry didn't feel as real. Not when she knew another side to it. She thought it was mostly her concern about how Henry thought of it all.

"You and me, kid, we're going to have to learn. You'll help me out, right?" Graham asked, his palm flattening against her belly comforting.

He grinned, and it mollified some of Emma's worries. "Right. Glad I won't be the only amateur."

"I'm not exactly a professional," Emma grumbled, shifting against Graham.

Henry sniggered. "Yeah, I guess it has been twelve years now."

"Or half a year, depending on your understanding of the space-time continuum," Graham replied dryly.

Henry groaned, tossing a hand over his eyes. "Yeah, whatever." He looked up. "Y'know, I know I've said it before, but … it's really cool getting to know you this way, Graham. I mean, I've always known you. But this is cool."

Graham's eyes softened. "Likewise, Henry. It wasn't quite the same back then, was it?"

Emma worried her lip a little. They had both told her before how it was growing up in Storybrooke. How Graham had been the closest thing Henry had to a father figure until his therapy sessions, but even then he had to keep his distance. A few discreet school projects together, a few talks after tracking him down when he would run away … it wasn't the same with Regina isolating him. Now, her two men were actually able to interact on a level that tugged on her heart each time she saw them.

"No, it wasn't. I wish it could've been different," Henry murmured.

When they settled into bed that night, Graham looked more pensive than usual. He lowered his head onto her stomach, making hieroglyphics on her skin. She pulled her fingers through the strands of his curly hair, watching them bounce into place, relaxing in others. His breath alternated between hot and cool against her belly, stirring her hormones even as she attempted to tamp them down. They really had things to talk about.

"Do you ever think about the legal side, Graham?" she asked tentatively.

"I want to adopt Henry," he replied in a whoosh.

She stilled. He took a shaky breath, turning to meet her eye. "You want to adopt him?" she asked curiously.
He nodded seriously, his eyes shading. "I mean … I know he has his father. But not here. Everyone we knew from before is in a place we'll never see again. And … and I really want to be his father," he admitted.

Her eyes filled with tears, her palm cupping his jaw lovingly. "I would love that, Graham. But it's not just up to me."

"Of course not. I'd want his permission. But … but you wouldn't mind?" he asked timidly.

She shook her head, leaning up to pull him close. "Not at all. We're a family already. You, me, Henry, the baby … we're all a family. And if you want to officially make Henry your son as well, then there is no argument from me."

He shuddered into her skin, arms surrounding her. "Thank you," he said, kissing her shoulder. Then, he leaned forward, grabbing something from a drawer.

"I know it might be too soon," he began, opening a small box. She couldn't help a sharp inhale as she saw a small velvet box fall out into his hand. "But know I have these when you're ready."

She watched, hypnotized, as he opened it. Inside lied two rings, nestled next to one another. Each were platinum and simple, one delicate to the other's thick. He grabbed her hand and she let him have it. He kissed her wrist lovingly before pulling the thinner one out.

"It's nothing flashy. I know you wouldn't want that." He picked it up and angled it for her to see the engraving around the inside, a simple heart in its center. He slipped it onto her finger, where it fit snugly. "But it's yours, whenever you're ready."

She felt the sob build within her chest as she looked at the band. In her first life, she had never thought about this. She never imagined that after a little over six months in a relationship that she'd even be considering it. Now, she couldn't wait for that band to find permanent residence on her finger, and the same with the matching band on his. "Well, it'll be easier for you to adopt him," she said hoarsely.

He frowned. "That didn't sound like a real yes. We don't have to be married for me to adopt him."

She smiled. "Yeah, I actually think we do. But it's not because of that, Graham. And it's not because of the new kid," she swore, pulling her arms around his shoulders. "It's because I love you. Legally or not, I love you. So let's just make it official."

"Officially?"

She huffed a dramatic sigh. "I guess I really, really want to marry you, Graham Humbert."

He grinned, leaning his head against hers. "Good. Because I really, really want to marry you, Emma Swan."
On Tuesday, Emma stomped into the bar on 84th.

She zeroed in on Andie, who was leaning against the back of the bar, her attention on her phone. It was only three in the afternoon, after all, so there weren’t many patrons. Emma scrapped out a stool noisily.

Andie looked up, smirking slightly before tucking the cell into her back pocket. "Well, good
afternoon. You missed the drama this weekend."

"Drama?" Emma asked, shrugging out of her coat.

Andie's tongue clicked. "You know the normal. Someone made some snarky comment about mail-order brides in front of my short-tempered husband. He spent the rest of the weekend making sure to cite him for any little thing he could. Littering. Jay Walking. Breathing too hard near a playground, I don't know."

Emma shook her head. Andie Simmons née Nguyen was a full sixteen years younger than her husband, and born to liberal Vietnamese parents to Leo's English/Italian-Catholic. They certainly had an unconventional relationship despite these facts, but they deeply cared for one another, fitting like two people married and in love should. "People are idiots," Emma said succinctly. "You okay?"

"Me?" Andie asked incredulously. "Please. First of all, people talking out of their ass is nothing new. And second of all, there are other things that should bug me more. Like the fact that I fell for a cop and now am stuck with him for life. Didn't even get money out of the deal," she joked.

Emma grimaced. "Yeah, well, still."

Andie shrugged. "It was still fun, in a machismo sort of way, to see Leo defending us like that. Not something I'd like all the time, but could be worse."

Emma gave a half smile. "Some perks to being with a detective, right?"

"Don't you know it!" the brunette declared with a quick grin.

Emma chewed absently on her lip, readying herself for the change in topic. "What are you doing Friday?"

"Leo and I were talking about seeing Cap. Why, you want in?" she asked, automatically grabbing a glass from the clean stack.

"I have something else in mind and was wondering if you and Simmons want in," Emma replied, picking up a coaster to fiddle with nervously.

"I don't know. I really wanna see Cap. It's supposed to really good," Andie said teasingly, filling the mug with the beer on tap. She put it in front of Emma before tapping her finger to her chin in mock consideration.

Emma pushed away the mug. "Thanks, but not drinking," she said.

Andie blinked. She studied her critically, her eyes narrowed. Suddenly, she gasped. "You're pregnant!"

Emma pulled her hands through her hair with a laugh. She should have known Andie would realize right away. "Yeah, kinda am."

"You idiot! You have me rambling on about old news while holding onto this gem!" she admonished, walking around the bar to enfold her in an embrace.

Emma chuckled, pulling back. "It's not like there's suddenly going to be a baby tomorrow."

Andie scoffed and swatted at her. "No, you have to tell me immediately so I can get to teasing you and Humbert about it all the time. Don't make me miss those precious moments!"
Emma rolled her eyes. "So, Friday?"

Her nose wrinkled. "Friday, what's Friday? You gonna carry to term in four days?"

She shook her head. "Nah, I was thinking about adding a hyphen to my last name then."

Andie's jaw dropped. "Seriously?"

Emma swallowed and nodded. It was still big and scary, in some ways. Her stomach flew with anticipation at the thought, even though something else felt warmed and comforted by the notion. Being married was not a huge step, in the long run, since both she and Graham knew exactly what it was to be apart and wanted nothing of that again. Still, the title of "husband" and "wife" seemed weighty, even weightier than, say, "mom."

She shook out of her thoughts and smiled at her friend. "Yeah. Already called Maggie in. I'm going to tell the rest of the girls tonight, but I knew you were working. Graham's telling the office right about now."

Her dark eyes tightened as she considered her. "Emma, you're not doing this just because you're pregnant, right? I mean, I know you love him and all, but Leo loved Jess at one point and now they're at each other's throats all the time and --"

"No," Emma cut off, shaking her head. Her mind immediately flashed over Simmons and his ex-wife fitfully arguing in front of the principal's office one time she had picked up Henry. She thinks that would never be her, until she reminded herself that it may have been had Neal stuck around. "No, not just because of the kid. Admittedly, it'll be easier for him to adopt Henry, but ... but I really want this, Andie."

It surprised her how much she did. It was nothing more than a formality, but for the little girl that had spent a lifetime in foster care and an adult woman who'd wandered around in self-imposed loneliness ... the idea of a wedding and a certificate and a ring seemed normal and right.

Andie stared at her a few more moments before a smile stretched across her face. "Then consider me there. Are you doing religious? Wait ... park ceremony?"

Emma cut her off before any more guesses came forward. "No, no, we're just doing City Clerk's Office."

Andie wrinkled her nose. "But party after, right?"

Emma snorted. "Yeah, we'll figure something out."

She nodded. "You're right. Gia wouldn't stand for nothing happening. I'm sure she'll have the Plaza or something booked up just for you," she said with a playful roll of her eyes. "But bachelorette party here on Thursday."

Emma held back a laugh, putting her face in her hands. "I can't drink."

Andie smirked. "Doesn't mean we can't."

XX

"You guys are ridiculous," Emilia said, mouth parted. "You don't mess around!"

Ritu laughed, pouring her glass full of wine before passing off the bottle. "I knew it. I knew it as soon as I caught you guys in the hallway that day. You may move at the speed of light, but you
burn just as brightly.” Her hazel eyes were twinkling merrily as she sipped from her glass.

"Says the girl who got married five days after meeting her husband," Emilia cackled back, then nudged Gia. "Miss Three-Marriages, give her some advice."

"Me?" Gia asked, eyes widening innocently. "Why, I think marriage is fantastic, obviously," she said with a wicked grin.

Emma rolled back her head, sighing. "And are you trying to talk me out of this or saying I'm doing the right thing?" she asked.

"My vote's on right thing. New kid or no, you guys have been headed down this path since day one. I thought I was going to have to smack you in the head a few times to get it down, so kudos baby Humbert," Ritu teased.

"Amen, Amen!" Gia said. "Don't take my track record for it. Lots of people get it right on the first time, I just wasn't one of them."

Emilia raised her glass to her lips, her eyes twinkling. "Same. I might have been in on some planning details with our lovely Andie for the past three months, you know."

Emma couldn't help laughing as she pressed the glass of water to her head. "I really didn't expect it to go this fast. But it feels like the right time," she admitted.

"Good," Gia nodded, pulling out her phone. "Even though you're not making this easy on me, I will find you somewhere fabulous to celebrate after. Really, hon, you couldn't have given me more than four days to plan?" she asked in a huff.

"Did I say I need somewhere fabulous?" Emma asked, arching her brow. She had already known that protesting a reception in general would not be possible, not with all the friends they had accumulated that had been rooting them on since before they began. But she and Graham didn't need anything fancy, and she dreaded hearing something like Ballroom or Palatial or Michelin-starred at the end of whatever she was thinking.

"You don't ask Gia for these things, darling, they just happen," Ritu mock whispered to her.

"Wait, wait, wait, Lee just texted. Someone cancelled a venue and it is perfect," Gia spoke up, a smile pleasantly on her lips. She turned the phone pridefully.

Emma had to admit, as she swiped through pictures, that while more opulent than her tastes, it was a fantastic location. She nodded. "Gia … how much?"

She waved her hand. "Please, please! I married Georg for a reason, sweets."

Emma shook her head. "This is our wedding and we'll pay for it."

"And Graham works for the city and your pay is dependent on delivery. Please, call it my wedding gift. I promise I won't buy you anything else," she said, crossing her heart. Then she grinned. "Until the baby shower."

"Best to agree now or she'll just buy you something ridiculous later," Emilia said dryly. She pointed at the brunette. "Or don't you think I remember the crystal duck?"

Gia looked surprised. "You mean you don't have use for a crystal duck?"

"Fine! Just no other gifts," Emma grumbled. How much could the place be?
She made it home exhausted, her sides hurting from laughing much too hard and her stomach too full. She was grateful she wasn't yet at the stage of morning sickness, or she'd have paid for every morsel she consumed. She came through the door sluggishly, kicking off her heels immediately. She reached down to rub her feet before clicking on the foyer light.

The soft glow of the DVD menu cast upon her boys, passed out in front of the screen. Her face relaxed as she looked at them, heads on opposite arms but the same sofa, a bowl of half-eaten popcorn tipping precariously between them.

She picked up the remote and clicked off the TV, sighing as she grabbed the throw blanket to toss over the two. She nearly let out a yelp when she felt a hand on her wrist, before looking over to see Graham blinking owlishly at her.

"Fun?" he asked in a slur of sleep as he sat up.

She nodded, pressing her forehead against his. "Yeah. Gia's found a place to have the reception."

He chuckled warmly, the sound reverberating in her chest. "Unsurprised. Good place?"

She hesitated a moment and then shrugged. "It's a little much, but with Gia, it could have been worse."

Graham's eyes turned serious, and he pulled a hand through her hair. His eyes lightened suddenly, a smile tweaking his lips. "A little luxury is okay. I'm marrying a princess, after all."

She scoffed, rolling her head onto his shoulder. "Does that make you my prince consort?"

Graham cocked his head to the side. "Is that how it works?"

She shrugged, pressing her lips against his gently. "No exactly sure. I was never paid much attention in History, much less read up on monarchies."

His kiss lingered more than she had anticipated, and she leaned into it. "Maybe we should just stick with 'husband' and 'wife,' then?" he asked when they parted.

The butterflies perked up in her stomach again, and she smiled widely. "Yeah, that'll work."

"She'll be princess," he said with a teasing smile, his hand flattening over her tummy.

She rolled her eyes. "Or prince. Let's figure out what it is before we start giving it titles, okay?"

Thursday morning brought Maggie to JFK.

Emma and Henry waited in bag claim, watching the parole officer weave through the crowds before sweeping them both into a big hug.

"My loves!" she exclaimed, kissing Henry on the crown of his head before pulling back and scowling at him. "You, sir, are getting too tall. Emma, why aren't you stunting his growth?"

"I tried," she said sardonically. "He grew two more inches."

Maggie clicked her tongue. "Well, at least the littlest munchkin will take some time before getting
that big," she countered. She held her hands wide, hovering a couple inches over Emma's stomach. "So, this is going to expand, huh?"


"But you were supposed to give me more notice. You're lucky I got discount last-minute fares."

"You never plan anyway," Henry piped up.

Maggie narrowed her eyes and then broke out in a grin. "That's my boy," she said, hooking her arm around him.

"Are you going to come back more? Now that mom's pregnant?" he asked, bouncing on his toes.

She had to admit, for all the news that they'd dropped on Henry, he was taking it all in very well. His reaction to the proposal had been enthusiastic, and they'd had a long talk about it. Henry had only expressed his happiness that they get to be together, all in one, and that the wedding just seemed like a fun add-in.

They've only tentatively broached the subject of adoption, dancing around it to get an idea of Henry's feel for it. So far, he seemed favorable to the idea. Graham wanted to wait until after the wedding until he formally asked him, though.

Maggie's face fell almost imperceptibly. "Got a few parolee's that would take offense to it, I think. Sorry, hon. But I'll come out for the big stuff."

"Tell me you didn't actually plan out a wedding with Andie last time," Emma said, changing the subject quickly.

Maggie narrowed her eyes. "Who do you think I am?"

"A meddler," Emma replied.

She shrugged. "At least I own up to it. C'mon, I found a dress online and they're holding it at the store. You'll love it."

Emma groaned, and even Henry looked bemused.

But an hour later, Emma was wearing a short, flared off-white dress with a half-mesh back. A rack of dresses she herself had picked were on the bar, waiting to be tried on. But the dress she wore made her stand straighter, tilting her head to look at it from other angles.

"Dammit," Emma said as she exited the dressing room. She stood in front of the mirror, seeing how it skimmed across her figure, the lightweight material swaying as she moved. "Dammit, dammit."

Henry popped up behind her in the mirror. "It's really great, mom. It looks like you."

She nodded, huffing as she fingered the soft fabric. "I hate you for knowing me so well, Mags."

"You love it," she insisted, coming forward. She grabbed her hair and twisted it back. "Now, imagine a braided bun. No veil, light makeup, flat sandals. Casual, but formal enough for pictures and all that. Elegant but comfortable. Chic but … well, you get the idea."

Emma felt annoying tears prickle as she cursed either the hormones or how she had friends that actually knew her and her taste in this timeline. She didn't want a full wedding dress, with yards of
silks or satins and a long veil or tiara gracing the top of her head. She just couldn't picture standing next to Graham in something like that. This, though, with its understated elegance and nontraditional style with a little something extra ….

She sniffed, looking away. "Yeah, I guess that'll work," she murmured, turning back into the dressing room.

"Shut up with the tears, now! We have lots of work to do before tonight."

XX

"To Emma, on her last night as a free woman!"

A whoop went through the air, and Emma tipped forward, laughing as Emilia pinned a "bachelorette" badge on her blouse and donned a sparkly-pink lei over her head.

"C'mon, c'mon, we must embarrass you all night!" Andie cried, grabbing her arm as she bounced excitedly.

Emma groaned as the cake came into view. "Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously!" Gia said, lighting the last Pecker Candle on the obscenely shaped confection. She grinned wickedly. "Were we approximate, darling?"

Emma narrowed her eyes playfully. She leaned forward. "Am I just supposed to –"

"Blow!" came the reply from the group of women.

Emma giggled and did as instructed, to the raucous applause of the entire bar. Ritu came forward with a different batch of themed food, and Emma threw her head back. "I am too sober for this!" she bemoaned.

"Nonsense!" Maggie declared. "Besides, your own damn fault. You and that soon-to-be hubby of yours. Not that I can really blame you, but you had to go and fu—"

"Shh, tiny virgin ears!" Andie scolded, holding her hand in front of Emma's stomach protectively. "He can hear you!"

Emma swatted her away. "I don't think it even has ears at this point, but thanks for defending the kid's honor and not mine," she replied wryly.

"Anytime," she said with a grin.

"C'mon," Gia said, her eyes twinkling. She placed a flute of sparkling cider in her hand. "We got some party games for you."

"Why am I scared?" Emma said pointedly.

"Because you're a very smart girl," Emilia replied with a wink.

XX

Emma arrived home in the wee hours, feeling thoroughly tired. Late nights were now a little harder to manage with the new thing she was carrying around. She was covered in lipstick marks, leis, phallic-shaped candies, and was pretty sure her shirt was ruined by chocolate, fizzy virgin drinks, and confectioner's sugar.
She exited the elevator, finding Graham fumbling with his key in front of the apartment.

"Henry still at Avery's?" she asked, coming to wrap her arms around the back of him.

She can almost feel his answering smile, even though she can't see his face. The door opened and he turned, fully engulfing her in his arms. "Yeah, he's staying there until tomorrow. Aamer's watching them, however begrudgingly. Tomorrow, I'll go over there and get ready at Ritu and Sam's, since Maggie already said you guys are taking over the apartment."

She hummed her acknowledgement. "You don't smell like whiskey," she commented, pressing her face into his shirt. Instead, he smelled like barbeque, and she inhaled deeper. She had expected him to come home reeking of liquor after Simmons and the rest had taken him out. The guys liked to get rowdy in groups.

"Didn't want to drink if you couldn't," he replied simply, cupping her face to bring their lips together.

Silly man and his silly, honorable decisions. "You know I wouldn't have minded."

"It wouldn't be fair," he replied stubbornly. Then he grinned. "But does that mean I don't have to give up coffee?"

She sighed. "We'll see," she said mournfully. It was the one thing she'd really miss the next eight months.

He closed his eyes, nudging her nose. "If it makes it easier, I'll give it up, too," he vowed.

"I love you," she murmured against his lips.

"I love you, too," he said, sealing them once again.

"We're getting married today," she said as they parted.

He grinned. "Yeah. We really are. Fourteen hours."

"And a lot of that will be sleeping and getting ready. So, not much time to get in some taboo premarital relations," Emma said with a coy grin, unzipping her blouse as she stepped into the apartment.

His answering growl was not altogether surprising.

XX

"You look great, mom."

She looked up, catching Henry's eye in the mirror and smiled. Andie was behind her, her hands still working on the braided updo her hair was to be styled into. "Thank you, kid. You're still not dressed."

He shrugged, leaning against the doorway. "Not yet. I don't need much time."

"True," she acquiesced, hooking a hoop into her ear before she looked back up. "Sick of hanging out with the guys?" she asked.

"Not exactly. Just wanted to see you."

"Little twerp's just trying to get gossip to bring over to the guys," Maggie said, ruffling his hair
with a playful wrinkling of her nose. "He's a spy!"

"Oh, no," Andie said and then rattled something off in Vietnamese that she didn't bother to explain.

Emma looked up, her brow furrowing as she noticed that the display had barely lifted a chuckle out of her son. "Break time," she declared, stepping up.

"What? I'm not finished!" Andie said with a pout.

"Yeah, well, need a sec. Pregnant bride is always right," Emma said. She placed a hand on his shoulder, and guided him out onto the balcony. Once the door was shut, she turned to him. "What's really up, kid?"

Henry shuffled his feet a moment before leaning his hands against the railing. "Do you miss grandma and grandpa?"

It felt like a sucker punch. The wind knocked out of her in a whoosh, a cold grip deep inside her.

Henry looked up, noticing her pallor. "I'm sorry, shouldn't have brought it up," he muttered, kicking his toe against the stone.

"No," she said quickly, shaking her head. "No, don't feel like you have to censor yourself around me."

He offered a smile and a shrug. "Just … I dunno. Something I was thinking about when Damon and Matt were talking about their grandparents coming for when Gia married Georg. They were complaining about having them over … but –"

"But you miss Mary Margaret and David," Emma finished simply.

Henry nodded slowly. "Yeah."

"It's okay. I … I do, too. I really do. Especially now," Emma admitted, walking to the edge near him. It hurt to admit, the pang of missing them suddenly split wide into a searing wound, one she hadn't realized still stung so deeply.

Henry leaned his head on her shoulder. "But this is real, too, right? Us?"

She kissed his brow. "Always. You, me, Graham, this thing," she gestured to her middle, and Henry was quick to cover it with his hand. She grinned, before sobering. "We'll always miss them. But at least we've got each other."

He was silent a long moment, but comfortably. "Graham wants to adopt me, doesn't he?"

She huffed a chuckle. "Figured it out, huh? No one's going to make you agree. He won't do it if you don't want it." She wrung her hands a little and then rested them on his shoulders. "It is absolutely your decision. And he'll ask you formally next week, once things are settled down. You can think about it all you want; there's no rush."

Henry quirked a smile. "Thanks. I will think about it."

"That's all I can ask," she said, bumping his shoulder with hers. "Sorry our lives are so complicated, kid."

He looked up, bewildered. "Think this is complicated? You should hear Aamer and Avery talk."
She grinned.

XX

She leaned down to fix her heel, and then swallowed back a churn of nausea. "Damn," she murmured. It looked like her luck had run out in regards to her symptoms. She refused to acknowledge that it could be nervousness; it was just a formality.

She turned the corner, and knew the exact moment Graham found her. His jaw slackened, his eyes widened, and he rose slowly, taking her in.

"Approval?" she asked as she got closer.

He took her left hand and brought it up to his lips, a kiss along her palm. "Still the shoelace, huh?" he breathed, rolling his thumb just underneath it.

"It's important," she said stubbornly. "Consider it my 'something old.'"

He pulled her closer, swaying them slightly. "You are beautiful. Always. But something about today ….

She laughed. "Is this going to be a 'bride' comment or a 'glow' comment?"

He shrugged. "A 'happy' comment. I love you."

"Good," she said. "Cause we're about to say that for life, so ….

He grinned. "Can't wait."

She pressed a kiss to his jaw. "Me neither. You don't look too bad yourself, Humbert," she teased. He looked great, actually. She missed a little stubble on his jaw, but his eyes were shining brightly as he looked at her. She realized they both looked so happy.

"You ready for this?" he asked.

She opened her mouth, then frowned. "Wait, ditch the jacket. You're uncomfortable."

His eyes sparked with surprise before he shrugged out of it. She smiled serenely to see him in a waistcoat, a memory of his old outfits in Storybrooke resurfacing. "How'd you know?" he asked.

She narrowed her eyes. "I knew when you were uncomfortable in Storybrooke," she taunted, twisting his words back. "Gia made you, didn't she?"

"Simmons, actually."

He trailed a hand down her arm before taking it in his. "Said I looked too casual without it."

"Please. We're not exactly doing this traditionally," she snorted, holding her hand over her stomach.

"Maybe at the coronation ceremony," he teased back.

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, sure. You're lucky you're so cute, buddy."

"Cute?" he asked with a wince.

She pretended to study him. "Yeah, guess so. Wanna get married?"
He sighed, hiding a grin. "If you say so."

XX

The ceremony in itself was more of a blur. It's benign, to the point, and very succinct.

Emma didn't care about the words pouring from the officiant's mouth.

She cared about Graham's eyes, steady on hers. She cared about Henry grinning like a madman, proudly holding out the rings when it's time. She cared about her friends and coworkers, delighting in their pronouncement. She cared about the barest touch he gives her stomach before sealing their lips.

She cared about the meaning behind it all.

This, all these people, every last one: from Graham and Henry all the way down to sullen-looking Chief Miller … this was family.

This was home.
A Long Way From Before

Chapter Summary

Telling Henry he'll be a big brother.

Emma woke to the sound of her phone ringing.

She groaned, lifting a hand to cover her eyes before rolling to the side. She hadn't gotten a fantastic amount of sleep the night before, finally retreating into exhaustion curled in her boyfriend's embrace sometime in the wee hours of the morning. It was still far too early for a weekend morning to be conscious, though Emma suspected it was after eleven.

Graham mumbled something half in sleep before waking with a sigh beside her. She grabbed the phone off the nightstand and warmed considerably to see "Kid" on the screen.

"Morning. You ready to come home?" she asked, sleep slurring her words just a bit.

Graham slid from the bed, brushing his hand over her stomach briefly before gesturing to the kitchen. She smiled in response, resting her palm over where his had been before refocusing on the call.

"Yeah. We finished up all we can do for now. I'll be over once I'm done with breakfast."

"You can eat here. Graham's about to cook," she offered, rising finally from the warmth of the sheets.

"Nah, Ritu made crepes. Be home soon!"

The phone clicked off and Emma grimaced. Well, there goes the plan of telling him over breakfast. She leaned back against the pillows, trying hard not to let the stone in her throat well up. She was worrying hard over that particular detail, the thoughts of Henry's reaction creating dizzying scenarios in her head. But … Graham was happy. And she was happy. She hadn't planned for it, but the addition of another person into their neat little family was so exhilarating.

She combed through her curls with tired fingers and padded into the kitchen. Graham was already at the counter, whisking eggs. His pajama pants were low on his waist, hair in wild tangles on his head. She grinned at the sight before wrapping her arms around his back, pressing her lips on the warm skin of his back.

"Should I make pancakes, too?" he asked, not missing a beat as he turned to pull her to his side.

"No, Henry's eating at Ritu and Sam's. Just us two eating this morning," she replied.

She could see a grin peek around his lips. "Three, technically," he said.

She scoffed, pulling out of his embrace to grab plates from the cabinets. "The new kid doesn't have much of an appetite yet in his microscopic stomach."

He yanked her back, tucking his chin onto her neck before pressing a kiss there. "Have I mentioned how happy I am?" he murmured, his hands stretching across her abdomen.
She shivered, the contented caress of his words making her heart race a little in response. "Maybe a time or two," she said nonchalantly. Then she rested her forehead against his. "Me, too, you know."

"When are we going to let Henry know?" he asked. Something flicked behind his features, a wistfulness that seemed alien to the situation.

"Maybe a late lunch? We can all go out, or even just order a pizza or something and stay in. We can talk about it more privately here."

"How's your energy?" he asked, a tight pulling of his eyebrows showing he really was worried, not joking around for once.

She shook her head; the lethargy was still there, hazing behind her eyes, but it wasn't anything too major. By this time with Henry, she had been a lot worse off. "Not a big deal. I can push through this."

"Still, I think staying in will be better," he murmured.

She raised a brow. "You're not going to start treating me like glass, are you?" she asked pointedly.

He grinned, leaning down to touch her nose with his briefly. "Wouldn't think of it. But I don't want to push you too hard, either."

"I'll let you know when I'm pushed too hard. Promise: I won't try to fake feeling well," she swore.

He narrowed his eyes to consider her statement before he shrugged. "Fair enough. But I'll be watching you, princess."

She rolled her eyes. "Just make the frittata, buddy."

He grinned and moved to the refrigerator to rummage up a few more items, then flicked on the stereo as he passed back to the countertop. She huffed a scoff at the beginning strains of the peppy song playing, even more so when she saw him mouthing the words as he diced.

"Seriously, Graham? You didn't know Kashmir, but you know the entire first verse of Hey Ya?"

He chuckled. "Hey, this is a classic. They played it at my high school prom."

She set the plates down at the table. "You didn't go to high school."

"Ah," he contradicted, tapping his temple. "Doesn't mean I don't have memories of it."

"Class of '01?" she teased.

"Second set. '03. All the best music," he joked, tossing the vegetables in the egg.

"Not exactly the most romantic song. Your poor date," she said with a smirk, folding a couple napkins for the table.
He laughed, pushing the dish in the oven. "We weren't exactly looking for romantic. We all went as a big group, peck on the cheek at the end. And, let's face it, this one's still better than Crazy Town."

She groaned out loud, recalling a high school dance she'd been half-forced to go to and some sweaty guy trying to get her to dance to that ridiculous song. "Fair enough."

"I knew you'd come around." He took her hand, twisting her into his arms.

She hid a smile under a grimace. "What are you doing?"

He grinned, unperturbed by her outward judgment. He raised his brows guilelessly as he swayed them to the music. "Getting you to shake it like a polaroid picture?" he said.

She snorted with laughter, batting him away. It sounded even more ridiculous in that damn brogue. She suspects that accent is why she lets him get away with half of his cheesy one-liners. "Hey, if you're going to be the father of my kid, your taste in music has got to be upgraded."

"You guys wanna have kids?"

She turned sharply, finding her son's wide eyes. His keys were held limply in his hand, backpack dangling from the other limb.

She felt her stomach bottom out, fear paralyzing her in the moment. Her gaze traced Henry's features, for a second seeing the Swans in front of her, their hands crossed over the large bump of Lillian's stomach, of we just can't take care of two children we hope you understand.

"Henry," Graham breathed first, clicking off the stereo. He glanced at her worriedly before swallowing. "We were going to talk to you about this later."

He nodded slowly, looking over Emma with some amount of confusion. "Mom, you okay?"

"I—" she began, then heard the crack in her voice. She looked down sharply. She had wanted more preparation than this. She looked back up, trying to manage a smile. "I didn't want you to just walk into this without us discussing it first."

Henry shrugged, letting the backpack drop. "S'okay. I was wondering if you guys were going to think about it at some point."

Emma stepped closer, cautiously. "The thing is, Henry," she paused, taking a breath. "The thing is … we're not just thinking about it. I'm … we're … there's gonna be another kid."

He's silent a long moment. Emma's eyes are focused right on his, and she can feel Graham's warmth appear at her side. It can't negate the chill she has covering her at this moment, though, the hard lump of pain coiling within her. She can't read any of the emotion crossing her son's face and that, more than anything else, concerns her.

Graham crouched down to his eye level and twisted his hands together. "I want you to know that I will do my hardest to make sure it doesn't screw up our dynamics. We all work. We want to make sure it stays working," Graham states, his voice forcefully calling to its seriousness.

Henry let out a low breath. "Then mom's right. We really gotta school you in music."

Emma's mouth dropped open, noting only dimly the short burst of laughter from her boyfriend. "You're not mad?" she blurted out.
His face twisted in bewilderment. "Mad? Why would I be mad?"

She bit down on her lip, straightening her spine as she considered it. "Because it's always been just us. And we're just figuring out how to add in Graham."

He shook his head. "No, that's not how it is. In Boston, we had Maggie and Beth and Ryan and even Tom for a while. Here, we've had Ritu and Sam and Avery and even Aamer, Gia and Georg and Matt and Damon, and Emilia and Jason and Michael. At the station we have Simmons and Lazo and Garcia and Richards and Miller …. Mom, we've always had a ton of people with us." His gaze flickered to Graham and he grimaced. "Just not in the other life."

Graham's eyes flash with sympathy, a brief glimpse of sharp empathy. "Yeah, you definitely got more people looking after you this time around."

Henry nodded, a half-smile forming. "You were always around."

Graham grinned back. "Not as much as I wanted to be."

"True," he acquiesced. "Better now."

She blew out a low breath, smoothing her hands down her sides before cupping his face gently with one palm. "But we're not as close with all these people like we all are together. We never had to live with anyone else until Graham."

Henry rolled his eyes. "Please. Maggie took over the couch in our first place. She was practically paying rent," Henry said, a grin forming.

She finally managed a small smile, feeling some of the worry shift in her belly. "It'll be a lot to deal with, and not a lot of months to deal with it," she warned.

He shrugged. "It's okay. Seriously. I never would have gotten a sibling in the first life. I kinda like the idea of getting one now." His eyes were focused on her stomach now, and subconsciously she moved to cover it. "Actually, it's really cool. This is our family, and it's getting bigger even after curses and erased memories and everything else. It's like I can't remember when it was just … well, just two people."

Emma's heart twists at that, of the reminder of what her kid's life was growing up in that first life. Their new life hadn't been the easiest, but it definitely worked out for the teenage single mom and her kid. She chanced a look up at Graham, and he immediately pressed her against his side. It almost made her miss the flash of latent pain across his features. "Not two people for sure, now."

Henry smiled. "Yeah," he said, then pressed his hand over hers, where it lingered on her stomach. "Sibling. Kinda weird to think about."

She chuckled. "You got until August to figure it out."

"Good. Hopefully I won't have Summer School again."

She sighed, pulling him to her embrace firmly. He was still a moment before winding his arms around her. An arm snaked out, grabbing Graham from her side to tug into the hug, and he melted into it smoothly.

"See?" Henry said after a moment. "We all fit. Even the newbie."

Emma laughed through her tears.
The More Things Change

Chapter Summary

Following Changes, Graham and Emma settle into Storybrooke.

Chapter Notes

Prompted from Gremma Shoelace re: the dwarves and Marco finding out, and posted during the Gremma Appreciation Week.

Being back in Storybrooke was a strange thing.

The air was cool, a light mist casting a pale grey over the early dawn of morning. Everything looked just the same: same storefronts, newspaper bins, mailboxes, flower beds, everything. Nothing changes in Storybrooke, and it seemed as if even after the curse broke, reset, and recast that remained true.

Graham tugged a hand through his hair, stepping out from the lobby of Granny's. Hidden in the tucked away corner, Emma stood with her arms crossed in front of her, squinting into the sun. Henry was still asleep, not quite used to waking up before eight during the summer, but Emma had tossed and turned all night.

For once, he knew it had nothing to do with the baby.

He took another glance across the landscape, jaw clenching slightly. He knew it was going to be unsettling, going to this town where he'd spent twenty-eight years in a fog before being murdered. He had thought he'd prepared himself well for it despite this. However, being a newly-resurrected former Black Knight in the eyes of the townsfolk was quite a bit different than just being the husband of the blonde visiting with the Nolans, as he assumed he'd be seen as until the curse broke.

Seeing Granny and Red the night previous had been fine. Red at least knew about his will to keep the Charming family safe while he was in the cage of Regina's castle. The rest could only view him as he had had to portray himself; that was a scary premise.

He sighed, tucking his chin into Emma's neck and splaying his hands wide over her belly. She leaned her head against his.

"You okay?" she murmured gently.

"Yeah. Just … strange," he mumbled. They swayed together, watching the foot traffic from the shade. No one had noticed them quite yet, and he was loath to leave the protective embrace he was giving his wife and child. "Not going to be too many glad to see me back."

She turned her head, confusion written on her features. "You were damn well liked, Graham. I don't think you're going to get any more people upset about your existence than Regina."
He looked down, patterns tracing across her stomach. "Maybe as Sheriff I was liked, sometimes. Not as the man I was before," he explained.

She looked down thoughtfully, spreading her hands over his. "That wasn't your fault, what happened then." She brushed against his ring, straightening it. "Besides, you're married to their Savior," she said, with some amount of bitterness at the label.

"Worried about it?" he asked at her tone. She shrugged, and he carefully placed a kiss to her temple. "They don't just love you because of the moniker, princess," he replied warmly.

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, there's that title, too. Besides, you're father of the next little royal, so they'll have to get used to you eventually."

"Looks like I lost my job, though," he commented as David waved from across the street. The gleaming six-pointed star at his waist proved that as he jogged over the intersection.

"You get better benefits as a detective," Emma said dryly.

"Hey, even my deputy got dental in Storybrooke," Graham teased, to which Emma smirked. Carefully, he extracted himself from her, though her hand entwined with his.

David's face was openly nervous as he finally reached them. "Hey, guys! I wanted to meet up with you both before you went into town," David said.

"Make sure I don't give the citizens of Storybrooke a heart attack?" Graham asked, then grimaced and placed a hand over his heart. "Poor choice of words."

David frowned. "Yeah, well, it's still going to be a problem to get the word around. We need to make sure people don't assume you're some trick of the evil that sent us here or something."

Graham's brow furrowed, nodding. Honestly, that wasn't the thing he would be most worried about. Fear of him being something he's not was one thing; fear of being the person he was, he anticipated being more damaging. Emma seemed to sense the turn of his thought as she squeezed his hand.

"Ideas, then?" she asked, squaring her shoulders. Her eyes glinted with a flash of steel, the protectiveness he recognized from the night before.

David nodded. "We need to make an announcement of some sort. Tell people that you three are back, so they're not blindsided. We don't need panic."

"Emma?"

The three turned to the sudden bolt of a young red-headed child throwing himself at his wife. The boy held her across the waist, tears shining in his eyes. "You came to save us," he murmured gently.

Emma's eyes were wide, and she half turned to Graham with a bewildered look before returning to the child. "Au—"

"Son, why are you disturbing these people?" a heavily accented voice asked, merriment and exasperation apparent even before he turned the corner.

Something warmed within Graham, to remember the gentle prodding of the older man who would volunteer to do paperwork with him on lonely evenings before Emma came. He had been such a
calm presence, a balm in between Regina's requests. Someone to banter with, like an older relative that doesn't judge or act rudely; more than an acquaintance, but the curse preventing them from becoming friends.

"Marco," Graham breathed finally, a smile stretching across his face.

The older man glanced up from his son, his eyes widening. He looked over to the other adults before settling on him again. "Graham, my boy, you're alive?"

The endearment slid across him like a warm cloak, the lingering fear that the people he bonded with during the curse would hold him accountable for the things done in his past melting away. He barely managed a nod before Marco embraced him, patting his back fondly. He pulled away with a grin.

"I know enough not to ask how these things happen: just to be glad that they did," Marco stated, placing a hand atop the ginger boy's head. "My son, Pinocchio. Say 'hello' to the former Sheriff."

The boy ducked his head back shyly before peeking around. "Hi," he said in a small voice. Then, in a voice common to children thinking they're whispering, "I thought Mr. Nolan was the Sheriff."

"I am. But Emma was before me, and Graham before her," David supplied.

Graham grinned, only half noting the stunned look on Emma's face. "It's good to meet you," he replied. He didn't remember seeing the kid around town, but he felt it was best not to ask.

Marco's eyes flicked back between Emma and him, amusement apparent in the spark. "Ah, so you have brought your family, I see? Miss Swan no longer?" he pressed.

Emma's eyes rolled up before she finally gave in, resting the length of her side against him. "Swan-Humbert. Henry's the same," she explained, her lip quirking up slightly.

"And are we keeping the little one a secret for now?" he asked knowingly.

His mouth parted, and Emma sucked in a small breath before cupping her belly. "Dammit, you can tell?" she asked, turning toward the glass entrance of Granny's, stretching her shirt across her stomach in different angles.

Marco was chuckling to the side, hiding it beneath his palm. "I have been around a long time, my dear. Do not worry, me and my son keep to ourselves, anyway," he said. He tipped his hat and took the boy's hand, twisting them around. "Congratulations, though. May your return only bring you happiness."

"And to you," Graham returned quickly, an old habit of their goodbyes. He turned to Emma who was still grumbling to herself. "Well, one down."

She sighed and returned to his side. "Two, really. Damn, it's still weird to see August."

"Oh, that's August," Graham said, a frown tugging down the corner of his lips. He tried not to take the mistakes of the older version to heap upon this young boy, and finally shrugged off the notion.

"Well, we can use Marco's help. And Granny and Red's. Between all of us, I think we can—"

"Sheriff?"

All three turn to the voice, only to be met by the wide eyes of Leroy.
David held up his hands. "Now, Leroy, don't—"

"HUGE NEWS, EVERYONE!" Leroy shouted, running to the diner at break-neck speed.

Graham blinked, the whole thing going too fast to even truly comprehend. He met Emma's eye in disorientation, then David's.

David sighed, rubbing his temples. "Damage control. My advice? Go back to bed," he stated, jogging into the diner after the short man. "Leroy, could you just let me explain …?"

Graham blew out a low breath. "Should we go in?"

Emma shook her head. "I say we take David's advice. I'm pregnant, I get to make these decisions for us."

Graham chuckled, pressing his forehead to hers lovingly. "Avoidance?"

She shook her head. "Postponement. Let's get breakfast with our son."

That, more than anything else, relaxed his whole body. This was still his family. Any changes to the group, any dangers, any judgment ... it meant nothing compared to these four people that were as essential to him as any limb. "I'm not usually one to procrastinate, but I think I'll take you up on it this once."

She flashed a smile. "It's going to work out, isn't it?" she asked lowly.

He squeezed her hand, trying to smile as his heart cracked along the edges at the brokenness in her tone. "As a team."

She nodded. "So, let's get the kid out of bed. We can order room service."
Chapter Summary

The past stays with them in the little things. The three moments when they notice them.

Chapter Notes

Note: I mention Fionn, from Graham's backstory in Wilding, but don't fret! I'm not taking any other part of Graham's origins from that fic.

Prompts: Skagengiirl "Before Graham and Emma kiss at the precinct he asks about the shoelace, and then some time after the kiss she tells him what it is." And Gremma Shoelace "Emma gives Graham his jacket back and find the letter he wrote to her in the inner pocket," and half of "Graham, Emma and Henry discuss the curse and Regina etc. after getting their memories back." I will do the second half in another fic that will be all Hunter Believer.

Five Days After Meeting

Graham pulled up his sleeve, staring at the time ticking away in aggravation. He sighed heavily, pulling his hands over his face. He felt bone-tired, the chill of the artificial cooling bearing down on him.

"Coffee?" Simmons asked, pushing a steaming mug in his direction.

He smiled thankfully, grabbing the handle. "Thanks. I don't know what it is about this one."

Simmons hummed an agreement. "Kid cases are the worst," he said. The keys on his laptop came down in sharp, tempered clicks. "DNA isn't helping. Five years in advances; you'd have thought that would mean something."

"Exactly," Graham replied gruffly. He flicked through the notes again, the precise handwriting of the lead detective showing nothing new from the last thirty times he'd inspected them. "I think I need a break. Want something from the breakroom?"

Simmons bobbed his head almost absently. "Coffee. Need to feed the addiction," he said as he polished off his freshly-filled cup.

"I'll be sure to tell Andie about how I enable you," Graham said dryly. His own cup remained at the desk as he rose.

"That young'un? Why would she care?" Simmons asked without looking up, though he was unable to hide the smirk from settling on his features.

"As long as it gets me out of here for five minutes," Graham said. Then he turned. "Lazo? Garcia?
Want anything?"

Lazo simply waved him off, a scowl half-set on her pursed lips. Garcia rolled backwards, a white mug in his outstretched hands. "And one of those little packs of mints. I can't stay awake," he bemoaned, the casefile not leaving his grasp. "And an éclair!"

"Two more hours," Graham said supportively, glancing at his watch again. "Be right back."

He jogged down the single flight of stairs before navigating the labyrinth of units to the dingy little break room that wedged between the records room and the evidence locker. He shifted both mug handles into one hand, the soft clink the only noise as he twisted the door.

He entered, and froze.

He'd gotten used to the look of her. The long blonde curls would be recognizable even if it weren't for the sound of her voice as she barked orders into her cell. With a sharp click, she disconnected her phone and twisted around. She startled as she met his eye.

"Oh. Graham, hey. Didn't know you worked this floor," she said lamely, fiddling with her phone in her hands.

He raised the mugs with a smile. "One floor up. Cold Cases. Our breakroom's down for repairs."

She smirked, her arms crossing. "Are you gonna go full cliché on me, Detective?" she asked, jerking her head in the direction of the boxed donuts.

Something whispered at the back of his mind, a ghost of a memory that quickly died. He shook his head a little, then leaned forward. "Well, some clichés are true." He grinned as he swiped a confection. "But alas, these aren't for me."

She had paled a little, but the warmth dripping back into her cheeks made him wonder if it was merely a trick of the lights. "Burglary lent me the key. I sent them one of theirs, so it was the least they could do," she said before taking a sip from the styrofoam cup.

"Care for a real mug?" he asked, setting the two down before rustling through the upper cabinets. "Miller leaves hers up here, and she's on leave, so ….

"No, thanks. I'll be leaving in just a sec," she replied shortly. She brushed her hands through her hair, digging against the scalp a little.

"Long day?" he asked sympathetically.

"Understatement. Had to chase the guy through the ramen festival. I bumped into so many stalls, I think I have chili powder all over me," she grumbled.

He grinned. "Well, you don't smell like dashi, if that helps."

She gave him a blank look in response.

Carefully, he tilted his head. "You know … the broth base?"

She raised a brow and shrugged. "You know, you'd think that accent'd taper off after all those years in Maine," she said.

He shrugged, smiling as he realized what had pulled her focus. "Guess some things linger. That and an old red handkerchief that's followed me everywhere I went." He nodded to her wrist.
"Same for you, I suppose?"

Her eyes suddenly fogged over, her hand reaching to wrap around the ties that swathed the thinnest part of her arm. She looked pained a moment before furrowing her brow. "I don't exactly remember where it came from. But … I don't know. It doesn't feel … right. When I take it off, I mean." She looked thoughtful, absently worrying her lip as she trailed the pads of her fingers along the ridges. Finally, she shrugged. "Odd habits from back then, I guess."

"I guess," he echoed. "Strange the things you pick up without realizing."

She took a long swig of her coffee but nodded. "Yeah." Their gazes met and held a long, heavy moment. There was something, always, that lingered between them. It drew them closer each time, before she would snap it shut firmly, just as she did then. "I should go. Get this powder off me, then help Henry with the Olympics."

He felt a pang at her deliberate change in subject, but covered it with a smile. "Ah, Simmons spoke of that. Schooling at Anderson, huh?"

She nodded. "Hardest transfer ever," she agreed. "Thank God for Gia."

He bobbed his head, even though he was a little lost. "Definitely an advanced school. Don't remember anything like that at mine."

"Yeah, Maine wasn't great about the public schools for foster kids," she said dryly. She adjusted her purse. "I definitely didn't have a course in hurdles, diving, and archery."

He brightened at the subject, his hands itching at the thought. "Archery? I'm actually pretty good at that. You know, if you ever want to talk about—"

"You know, I really should go, Henry's waiting on me. See you around, Graham," she cut off, tossing the cup in the trash as she did. She hesitated once she reached the door, turning slightly. "Thanks, though. For the offer."

He swallowed and nodded. "Sure. Anytime."

She looked like she wanted to say something else, but then she turned. "Bye," she called, tracing her hand against the doorframe as she left.

"Bye," he answered quietly. He wasn't sure the break did anything to help his mental state, other than distracting him for a time. She definitely was a distraction. A confusing one.

XX

_Two Days After Memories Returned_

She shifted, placing either knee alongside his hips, sliding into his lap. He dragged his lips down her jaw, delighting in the soft chuckle that escaped her. He smiled slightly. "What?"

She sighed, bringing her head down so they were eye to eye. "No, I was just thinking about the class Henry's retaking. Archery." She grinned, straddling him further. "Well, it's a lot of things, but archery was the big one he didn't get. Could Mr. I-Never-Miss help out with that?"

He curled his arms around her waist with a grin. "I suppose I could," he drawled, using his hand to softly trail down her arm before entwining their fingers. "I had a good teacher, so it shouldn't be so hard."
"Who?" she asked distractedly as she kissed him.

"An older man in the town next to where I grew up. He was the first human I ever met," he replied simply.

She cocked her head to the side. "Forgot that part of Henry's book. Wolves, huh? Then what happened to the guy?"

Graham sighed. "He died protecting me. I don't even ... I don't know why he did it. I still have his handkerchief in this world, though."

"Oh," she said quietly. One hand wound upwards, flattening against his chest. "You kept it to remember him?"

He nodded. An ache began again in his soul, as he remembered seeing the ferocity in his eyes before Fionn ordered him away. "A memento, I guess."

She looked away, her eyes tearing slightly. That surprised him to see. He took a hand to cup her face, but she avoided his eye. "I know about keeping mementos."

He frowned, finally taking in the bracelet he had noticed a few weeks before. "I don't remember this one. You used to have something else."

She chuckled heavily with a nod. "Yeah, it used to be these little bracelets I bought in Tallahassee. Something else to remind myself how stupid it was to trust people, along with the necklace. I don't know where the later went," she said hoarsely.

His brow furrowed, and he carefully pet down the long strands of her hair. "And now?"

She shrugged one shoulder uncomfortably. "It's to say that some people are worth trusting," she finished. Then her eyes came up, resting on his. The deep ocean of her eyes gleamed as they set, swirling with determination and vulnerability. "It's your shoelace."

His breath released from his chest abruptly. He looked down at her wrist, over the twisting braid of the lace across the delicate skin. "Mine?" he asked. Disbelief struck him, even as he began to recognize the brown lace from his work boots. His eyes locked with hers again. "I— why?"

She shifted uncomfortably, glancing away. "I told you."

"But why mine? What about Mary Margaret ... or Henry?" he asked, his mind swirling.

She bit down on her lip. "You were the first person to try and give me roots, and act on it. Even before we had thought about ... us."

He closed his eyes, a smile spreading across his face. "I don't know if I would say 'before,'" he said playfully.

She rolled her eyes. "You know what I mean. You were able to get past my walls before I even realized it. Then, I tried to push you out. But ... but it didn't work," she managed. She swallowed. "You don't realize how bad it hurt, that night. To lose you."

He grimaced. He didn't like thinking of anything beyond when he closed his eyes to lean into her a second time that night. He didn't want to remember the crushing pain in his chest, the instant recognition of what it meant, the hoarse screams he could only listen to. He grabbed her to him, meeting her lips fiercely, bringing himself solidly in the present. When they parted, he remained close. "I'm sorry," he whispered.
Her eyes were closed, tears beading along the lash line. "I was mad at you for a while after. It was stupid, but I … I was angry and I didn't have anyone to be angry at. So I was angry with you."

He swallowed, resting his hand where hers had fisted into his shirt, above his heart. "I have it back, now. I don't know how, but it's not going anywhere this time."

She opened her eyes slowly, peering at him warily. "It was gone? Really?"

His lashes fluttered. He forgot that she was still ignorant of the curse when he left them. Finally, he nodded in response. "Sorry, I forgot … sorry. Yeah, it was gone."

Her breath hitched, and her face twisted into a mask of pain. "Was Henry right? Did she—did she take it?" Her voice cracked along the last words, her breaths panting as her anger rose. "Did she kill you?"

He hesitated. He didn't want to dwell on what happened, to make Regina's presence any more significant than it had to be. "Does it matter now?" he asked.

She pushed back, her expression fiery. "Yes, it matters. I left my son with that woman after it happened. He was terrified, but I was certain you died of natural causes because it's what I was told. I left him with a murderer, and he knew it."

"Hey, hey, hey," he said, taking her face gently in his palms. "You didn't know. And if you had tried to take him away then and there … well, I don't think it would have gone over well, to say the least. You did what you could. You broke the curse."

She made a strangled sound, trying to hold back her tears. "I should have known. I should have believed him. Believed you." Her eyes widened, and he could practically see the thoughts whirling in her head as she centered on one. Her face crumpled. "Oh, God, it was right under our feet. If I hadn't stopped you, we would have found it. I could have saved you."

He wanted to pull her into a hard embrace, but he also fears breaking their stare. His thumbs swirled across her cheeks. "I'm here now. Henry's safe," he whispered. He didn't know how to convey how lucky he felt ever since regaining his memories. "If I had gotten my heart that night, it wouldn't have ensured that I stayed alive. And maybe … maybe I wouldn't have come back."

She didn't look convinced, but her gaze was downturned as she considered it. "I wish you were there with me, though."

Gently, he tilted her chin up. "Maybe I was," he said, bringing one hand to slide off her face, tangling in the lace on her wrist.

She leaned forward, kissing him once again. "Dork," she declared, but then wrapped her arms around him more fully.

The door knob jangled before their lips met again, and they were aligned next to each other to greet Henry by the time the apartment opened.

XX

Two Days After the Return

"It looks too neat in here," Henry declared.

Graham looked up with a grin, taking Emma's hand. "Agreed. Where's the stack of papers my deputy never wants to sort through?"
Emma snorted, walking to the center of the office and widening her arms. "It's just too much space! It doesn't look like anything gets done. It's supposed to be a mess."

"The pitfalls of organization, I guess," David said dryly. "Now, I've got to meet with the midwife with your mother. You three okay in here?"

Graham nodded. "I think I remember the routine," he said.

David walked to his daughter, and Graham turned slightly to give them privacy. "I'll be back later. We—we should," David paused, sighing. "I'll talk with you later."

Graham gave a smile to David in goodbye, and the other man gave a half-hearted one in return. The door shut with a familiar click, leaving the three of them alone once again.

David really seemed to be in the middle of everything; co-governing the town, grappling with impending fatherhood and being a grandfather again, juggling Snow's willingness to forgive Regina with Emma's unwavering unwillingness, trying to soften Henry's fears, and dealing with Graham's mere presence … he understands the man has a lot on his hands.

But he also understands Emma's frustration. The friction between her and Snow has strained their relationship; where they were once great friends, there is now a gaping chasm between them. And David isn't one to choose sides between his wife and daughter, so that frustrates her further.

"How long has it been since you guys have both been here?" Henry asked absently, looking around the room.

Graham looked up, catching Emma's pained expression. Her eyes flick to the floor only briefly before she determinedly forced her gaze up. Her hands cradle her belly protectively. "Oh, it's been awhile. Want to help us look for the maps, kid?"

"Sure," he replied, going to one of the desks and immediately fiddling with the handle on the drawer.

Graham stepped close to Emma, brushing his hand over her stomach. "You okay?" he murmured.

"Fine," she replied shortly. "Let's just get this over with."

He pressed a kiss to her temple, and he felt her relax in response.

"Dad, can you help me with this one?"

He turned, finding Henry at his desk. He grinned as he saw him attempting to open the bottom drawer. "It's locked for a reason. Kept Regina out of it," he said. Then the riffled along the edge of the cork board, finding the key still hidden along there. "Here, open it," he said, tossing the key.

Henry looked at him curiously. "What's in there that you didn't want her to see?"

"Check it out," he replied warmly.

"What is it?" Emma asked quietly.

He grinned. "Just wait," he insisted.

Henry finally clicked the drawer open, bright construction paper revealed. "You … you kept them?" he asked, his voice soft.
"Course I did," he said with a grin.

Henry sifted through the colored paper, a near-decade of notes in varied penmanship stacked neatly. Graham kneeled beside him, fondly looking over the letters.

"What is all this?" Emma asked.

"It's the stuff I gave Graham. Cards and things. I can't believe they're here," Henry replied, awe apparent in his voice.

"I appreciated them," Graham said, bumping shoulders with the boy.

"From during the curse?" Emma asked incredulously, picking up one of the pictures. Stick figures in an unpracticed hard scattered against the orange, a misspelled "Thanks Gram" over the edge.

"Mementos," Graham teased. His heart stirred as he looked through the stack, though. He recalled the times he had tried to be there for Henry, when Regina had prevented it. The fogged memories that had him trying and failing each year. They never had a chance to be close, not truly … but they tried.

Now, Henry was his son. Shared with many others, but his, too.

Henry leaned against him. "Thanks for showing me, Dad."

The warmth fizzled within him again, and he hugged the boy to him. "You made them, kid. Thank you."

Emma stood shakily, her eyes teary. "We should be finding the map, right? We need the plot of the woods and cemetary," she said tightly.

He rose and kissed her lips delicately. He knew she was specifically avoiding falling into an emotional whirl, not when there were important things on the line. "Back to the task at hand," he agreed.

She hesitated before agreeing, pivoting to the side. "Get your jacket," she said stiffly.

He turned, catching sight of his leather coat dangling on the edge of the rack. He reached out, fingering the sturdy edge of the cloth. "Some things don't change," he muttered.

"It'll be nice to see you in it again," she asserted, before moving forward and deeper into the office.

He looked over to Henry, who simply rolled his eyes. "She sucks at changing the subject," he said bluntly, then hopped into the chair. He busied himself with looking through the rest of the stack, immersed in this side of his childhood. His childhood in one life, Graham reminded himself.

Graham's lips quirked up and he pulled the jacket down. Curiously, he rummaged through the pockets. He sighed as his hand hit paper, and he pulled the envelope out.

Now was not the time to bring this up. There were things to do, mysteries to uncover. They've had enough nostalgia for the day.

He tucked the letter back into its place, but not before Emma had emerged with a set of blueprints and maps from the back. "What's that?" she asked.

He looked her over. Her hair was loose around her shoulders, a soft cashmere shirt draped over
the curve of her stomach, her sea-shaded eyes bright even as her eyebrow curved upwards at his continued silence. Finally, he forced a grin. "Nothing. Are we set?"

"Dad's hiding something," Henry said though his teeth, a mock-whisper in sing-song that implied that he was in trouble.

He grimaced. "Nothing important," he amended. "We've got things to work on. And should we leave Henry with Red and Granny while we search?"

Henry immediately began protesting, and he hid a smile at the deflection. Emma's narrowed gaze showed that it hadn't worked completely. He sobered, eyes widening guilelessly. They really should work on such things if they were going to be raising another kid together.

"Yes, we don't want Henry with us while we're investigating potentially dangerous things about this stupid new curse." She raised a hand as Henry's mouth opened. "No excuses, kid. You're going back to Granny's." She paused, turning to him with an outstretched hand. "Now, let me see."

He reluctantly pulled the letter from the inside of his pocket. "It's silly. From before … it really doesn't matter," he protested.

She looked down. "It has my name," she said bluntly.

He nodded. "But really, we should be —"

"We have enough time. We're in no huge rush," Emma said, pulling the letter from his grasp. "If it's addressed to me, it's mine, right?" she said with a smirk.

He sighed. "Technically, yes, but—"

She shushed him, opening the envelope hastily. Graham turned; his cheeks flushed with warmth as he tried to busy himself with sorting through the blueprints left on the table. He couldn't concentrate on them, his mind focused on every shift of weight his wife took.

After a long moment, Emma straightened. She pressed a hand against his shoulder. "When did you write this?" she asked.

He felt himself warm, trying to hide himself from her inspection. "After the mines," he said gruffly.

Emma nodded thoughtfully. Carefully, she refolded the letter, creasing along the edges precisely before tucking it back into the seal. She looked down at it a long moment. "And you meant it?"

He wanted to say that he barely remembered the words he had written down so long ago. That he couldn't recall the ache that had built in his chest when he released her from his arms, that had imbued him with a strange self-awareness that forced the words from his pen easier than any before it. That he can't recall the personal introspection, the delve into her psyche that he just knew upon meeting her, that he was aware would frighten her just as much as he was certain it was true. That he couldn't remember his greatest wish … but that would be a lie.

He gave an embarrassed chuckle and rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah. I meant it."

She took the letter and smacked him across the arm with it. "This is an idiotic thing to put on paper and never have the intention of me reading."

Henry snorted in laughter from his place in the swivel chair. "What did you write, Dad?"
"Don't worry about it," he said, reddening further.

"Yeah, kid, don't worry about it," she echoed, but a smile was crossing her face. She leaned in, pressing her lips to his in a ghost of a kiss. "So that's what you meant by 'never got to say it in the first life,' huh?" she said under her breath.

He looked her over, brushing his hands across her face and resting on her stomach. "Maybe," he said, knocking their foreheads together. "Like I said, not words for a letter."

She hummed an agreement. "Guess not." She gave him a deeper kiss, pulling him closer. "But I'm keeping this," she declared.

"Another memento?" He grinned, fingers trailing across the shoelace on her wrist. "I could live with that."

"True love stuff, huh?" Henry asked.

Graham turned, catching the boy's eager expression. The kid was never going to be like other boys his age, not caring about the mushy stuff his parents did. Things like this gave him hope, something he no longer needed to cling to, but something he needed to remain … Henry. It was too much to show the boy, but Graham could at least agree. "Yeah, true love stuff."

"Cool," he pronounced. He shifted a card out of the stack and stuck it in his pocket. "Some good memories for this life, at least."

Graham stepped forward and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. "Both are real. Both had their good moments. And we're going to have more of them. Right?"

"Right," Emma and Henry said in unison.

"Lots more," Emma asserted. "Now, let's get to breaking this curse, shall we?"
Fashion Choices

Chapter Summary

Gif inspired. During a typical morning, Emma questions her husband's choice in outerwear.

"Graham? What time do you have to leave for the —" Emma paused as she turned from the stove, catching sight of her husband slipping onto the stool by the breakfast bar. She stifled a laugh, unable to stop a smile from creeping along her face.

He offered a smile back, confusion drawing his brows together. "What?"

She smirked and turned back to the stove, reaching for the spices on the upper shelf. "You know, just because you're going to be a dad doesn't mean you suddenly have to start dressing like one."

He looked down at his sweater, the brown cable-knit open over a blue button-up. "I've had this for years. It's good for the weather, and it's comfortable. I'm just going to meet up with McNab and Simmons. And it's not like I said anything about the plaid pants the other day."

She rolled her eyes. "My pants were fashionable. You look about ready to put on some wire-rimmed glasses and scream at the neighbor kids to get off your lawn."

"Fashionable, huh?" he asked, a grin stretching across his face. He rose, curling his arms around her to slide the length of her body against him. His head bowed down, and she can feel the smile in his voice as he leans to her ear. "Did Gia tell you that?"

She flipped the eggs onto a plate, then turned to place a kiss on his lips. "Yes, actually."

"Shouldn't you be glad I'm not wearing fur and raw leather?" he asked.

She chuckled as she pictured him as such, as he must have looked in that other world. Finally, she smoothed the fabric over his sides. "I'll give you that it's soft," she offered. His hands slid down to
her stomach, as they tended to do more and more often over the last month, and she let out a soft sigh. "Little peek into the future, I guess," she murmured.

"Does this mean I get to see you as Grandma Emma at some point?" he teased.

She snorted, turning back to the counter. "I'm going to put that one off for a while," she said. She ignored the little pang inside of her, the thought of grandmothers and family automatically pushing forward the thought of her parents.

Despite her attempt to bury the feeling, Graham had obviously picked up on it. His hands rested on the slightest curve of her stomach that was just forming, and tucked his head into the crook of her neck. "Think Henry has enough stories lined up to tell this one about her grandparents?"

"So, it's a girl today, huh?" she asked, trying to stall in answering his question.

He shrugged. "Trying to switch off until we find out. But who knows? Maybe there's one of each," he said with a grin.

She groaned. "Now you're thinking twins?"

A smile stretched across his face. "Genetically possible. Your dad was one," he replied.

"Luckily, modern medicine begs to differ on that theory," she said dryly. "Only one extra heartbeat in me, Grandpa."

He snickered. "Modern medicine's failed us before," he said brightly.

She shuddered at that, the subtle reminder of where he was not nine months prior unsettling. "I can only imagine how Henry'd react to that."

"If the page I caught him on last night is any indication, he wouldn't be too upset," he mused.

She felt a soft warmth fill her body as she remembered the grin on Graham's face after he checked on their son last night before coming to bed. To have Henry looking up on how to care for newborns was one of the most heart-twistingly sweet things she's ever heard. "That's true. Still, it'd be a lot easier to deal with just one since we're both new to this game."

He nodded. "True," he acquiesced. He paused a moment before brushing his lips against her temple. "They'd be happy for you, Emma. They'd love bring grandparents again."

She breathed a low sigh. "I know," she said hoarsely. Her hand covered his. Then she twisted, meeting the dark blue of his eye. "But David would still not be caught dead in that sweater."

"You love it," he insisted, kissing her once more.

"Yeah," she breathed, settling against him. It was soft against her skin, warm and worn and smelled just like him. "I guess it can stay."

She might even steal it once in a while.

(x)(x)
Chapter Summary

There's one part of pregnancy Emma forgot: the part where nothing fits. Pure fluff.

Chapter Notes

Note: So, this is based off a couple prompts again. Dreamingdreams wanted "Emma steal the sweater." BossLady wanted "Also, depending on how far along you have Emma being pregnant, do they know the sex of the baby, or come up with names, or went baby shopping one day."

Emma heard the door open and shut but didn't bother moving from her position. She was finally comfortable, dressed warmly and sprawled across the bed, annoying tears having dried across her face. She stared blankly at the sitcom on the television, not even remarking as her husband entered the room.

"Long morning?" he surmised as he saw her, shrugging off his coat.

She gave a half-hearted noise of agreement.

He took off the holster and set it against the dresser before joining her. "This is mine, you know," he murmured playfully, tugging on the sweater covering her. He pulled it back away from her neck, kissing along her collarbone. The scratch of his day-old stubble against her skin reminded her of the past, if only briefly.

"Please, I wouldn't want to be wearing this old thing if I had a choice," she bit out. It's not exactly true, though. Despite her prior teasing, she liked the sweater, soft and warm and oversized, smelling just like him. But she's meeting Emilia and Ritu for dinner that evening, and this was not a sweater to wear for a night out. "It's all that fits me," she admitted, feeling the tears cloying the back of her throat again.

His hand slid down to her waist, over one of his T-shirts and the pair of leggings that were still straining against the width of her stomach. "He's making himself known, is all," he said into her skin, rolling circles over the bump.

She huffed a laugh, finally turning into him. "It's stupid. I know I should have gone shopping earlier, before it got to this point."

He rose, grabbing her hands to pull her up as well. "No time like the present. We have a few hours before you meet the girls."

"Graham," she sighed. "You just came from even more overtime at work. It's a Saturday. We don't have to do this, or at least you don't have to come."

His eyes were twinkling as he scooped her close. "Yes, but I'm also back before noon. You get
what that means?"

She hesitated a moment, studying him. He practically buzzed with excitement, just under the surface. Finally, a smile broke over her face, pride seeping through her. "Case closed?"

He grinned and nodded happily. "Solved and full confession given."

She pressed her lips to his firmly. "That's amazing. I'm so happy for you," she stated. She's also very glad she didn't know he was out doing interviews today. She didn't always let her fears of him being in such a dangerous career take root, but the days she knew he was interrogating suspects the nagging dread takes hold to the point where she couldn't shake it.

He pressed his forehead against hers lovingly. "So, I have all this extra energy. Let's get you something a little less Grandma-Emma, shall we?"

She groaned and leaned her head against his shoulder. "It's your sweater, buddy."

"And you love it," he teased.

She nodded. "Just not for a dinner at Carmine's." Then she hesitated. "Wait, should I cancel? This was a big one; we should celebrate."

He shook his head. "No, you've had this planned all week. Besides, we are celebrating. We're going shopping with our kid, for our new kid."

She laughed. "Fine. But you're convincing Henry."

He gave a quick kiss before heading down the hall. "I don't think that will be too hard."

XX

The mall was crowded, as was typical for mid-day on a weekend. Emma couldn't bother to be embarrassed as she wrapped the old cable-knit around her, making their way to the maternity section of the store. She kept watching her son for his eyes to creep toward the electronics section, but he seemed less interested in that area than normal.

"This place is packed," Henry murmured. Then his eyes widened as they passed the DVD bin. "We could stockpile Disney films."

Emma snorted, ruffling the kid's hair. "I don't know about that."

"Comparing notes? Not necessarily a bad idea," Graham said, amusement twinging against his accent.

She sighed. "Kid, if you come back with Snow White, I will ground you," she threatened, then pushed him in the direction of the videos.

Graham chuckled, grabbing her arm to guide her through the stacks of clothing. "You really should go with Gia sometime; you obviously don't trust my taste in clothes," he said with a wink, tugging against the brown sweater.

She rolled her eyes, but smiled despite herself. "Next time. But this kid's already getting too big, way earlier than Henry. You just need to get me through the work week or so. Besides, it's all your fault, anyway."

"Whose idea was it to start stripping in the middle of December in the woods?" he asked without
looking up from sorting through the racks of clothing.

"Yours," she said dryly, then pursed her lips. "And it was still warm."

He grinned, pulling up a sweater that was unusually similar to the one on her shoulders. "No, I think you were the one to bring the blanket originally."

She yanked the sweater back, trying to hide her smile as she replaced it. "Okay, maybe mine. I didn't hear any complaints."

"None here," he agreed, slipping his hand to her waist discretely as he pressed a kiss into her hair.

"Mom, Dad!"

They looked up in unison to see Henry barreling toward them. He held out his choices proudly. "I've narrowed it down."

She looked through the titles quickly. "The Sword in the Stone, Aladdin, Up, Bambi, and The Princess and the Frog? What made you pick those?"

He shrugged. "Variety. And no characters we know."


"Unless we accidently ran in to Thumper at the diner, I think we're good," she said with a shake of her head. "What's up with wanting them, anyway, kid?"

He gave a half smile. "New kid needs some fairytales. And these are fun ones." Then he pulled a final title behind his back, his eyes widening. "Please?"

"Kid…," she trailed off, looking at the cover (that mercifully didn't have an Evil Queen) with a wince.

"It's like one of those bad book adaptations, only this is like a bad adaptation of our history! It's so cool!" Henry exclaimed.

Graham was shaking with laughter beside her, trying to hide it by turning his head. Carefully, she elbowed him in the side. "You're no help," she admonished. She grimaced. "Fine."

Henry grinned proudly. "Now, did you find anything?"

She sighed. "If you two could actually give me a second ….

She couldn't help the grin that was spreading across her face, though. Her boys definitely knew how to cheer her up. She felt like the woman this morning that was crying over the fact that her clothes didn't fit and was so angry over that fact was a whole different person. She could still typically cover the bursts of emotion her hormones were producing, but she just didn't have the energy that morning. She loathed to think it would get worse, but at least she had these two making it better.

Graham and Henry had disappeared into the store while she tried on clothes. She was actually surprised to find a few styles that didn't make her want to scream, flattering her new figure in cuts that hid or accentuated as she pleased. She sighed as she left the dressing room, looking for her men.

She found them in a far corner. Graham's face was slack, soft to Henry's small smile.
"What?" she questioned.

Graham grinned sheepishly, then held out a tiny pair of sneakers. "Too early?"

She bit down on her lip. "No second pair again?" she tried to tease, but her throat felt tight as she looked down at the shoes.

Graham's lips quirked up mischievously. "Henry has the other."

Henry grinned and produced a second set, just as delicate as the first, and Emma felt torn between laughing and crying. "Oh, no, don't tell me he's dragged you into this twin thing."

"You never know. Besides, Leroy's going to need more than one pair of shoes," he joked with a grin.

"For the last time, we are not naming the kid after anyone we know, especially not Leroy. Do you want your brother to be teased forever? I'm getting a baby name book as soon as we leave here, kid, and we are going to find actual name possibilities," she protested. The boy-day names Henry came up with were the worst so far. At least Sophia yesterday wasn't nearly as bad, she thought absently, picking up the sneakers to rest in her hand. She pictured a son for a moment, allowing it just as easily as visions of a daughter came. The thought warmed her as she looked at the shoes, but then again Henry's instance on wanting a tiny princess crown last week had been just as sweet. "Fine. But everything else is too early," she said sternly.

"Everything else?" Graham questioned.

Her nose wrinkled. "What else did you find?"

Henry guiltily pulled the cart from its place on the side of the aisle. "Just a couple things."

"You two are terrible," she exclaimed, looking through the piles of stuffed animals and onsies and … and her head started to hurt. She knew the second she saw it that she wanted to give in.

They were both just so excited. These were things she never had with Henry, even in this life. No one had been excited she had been pregnant with him. No one had even believed that she should keep the baby, all those prison psychologists telling her what was best, up until that one doctor that had helped deliver him (the one she couldn't listen to in one life, the one she was so thankful of in this one). There were never maternity clothes or shopping trips: not until her mad scramble in the cheapest of GoodWills when she had been released, with a two-month old and the most ambitious parole officer ever at her side.

She pressed a hand to her stomach, thinking about how much love this baby was going to get, from the beginning. She tugged Henry into her, pressing him close. She dropped a kiss to his head (much too high now, she didn't have to bend nearly as much as she used to), and he wrapped his arms around her firmly. After a moment, she shook her head and released him. "Let's wait. We'll shop again after Gia throws us the baby shower we didn't ask for."

"Can you blame us for being over-eager?" Graham asked with a hesitant grin.

She turned and pressed her face into his neck, a small smile gracing her features. "No, I can't," she whispered softly.

"At least this one?" Henry asked.

She was about to sigh, about to remind him of the last three "at least this" ones, but she stilled as she saw it. Against a soft cream background, graphic letters stood in bright yellow: "I have the
"coolest brother ever."

"That one was the best," Graham cajoled, rubbing his hand over her lower back.

Emma swallowed hard. "Yeah. That one stays."

Her family, her home: the one thing that always fit.
A Bond That Was Always There

Chapter Summary

Even as the suspicions crept up on her, it still couldn't prepare her for the sight.

Chapter Notes

Note: Three days after their memories were restored. Prompted from Guest on ffnet: "Can we pleeeassse have Emma come home to her men working on said make-up assignment? Pretty please?"

Her brow furrowed curiously as she landed on the floor after the single flight of stairs. She was already feeling lost without Graham's hand on hers, guiding her through the confusing twists. She hadn't paid too much attention, the night she'd been there; she had been focusing more on the cut on her brow and the playful tone he'd been using.

She had never been to these units in the daylight. They were well outside her particular brand of criminal bail jumper. These were for hard crimes: Special Victims, Homicide, and, of course, Cold Cases.

She had just dropped off some paperwork she had borrowed from Surveillance down in Central Robbery. It was after a short day at Anderson, so Henry had tagged along as he often did on these days. He had been rather restless, so she had sent an enthusiastic Henry up a floor to meet Graham. She had trusted him to find it, especially in this wing that seemed constantly covered in officers.

It was unusual territory for her, though. The floor was just as nondescript as the one she had been on, departments sectioned off almost arbitrarily. She had thought she'd reached the right one twice, only to be mistaken. Finally, she saw the doors marked appropriately, and stepped inside.

The place wasn't exactly bustling. Detectives were crunched over computers and casefiles, mumbling into phones or huffing near the water cooler in the corner.

But no Henry. And no Graham.

Finally, a dark haired man crinkled the wrapper on his sandwich, casting a confused look. "Can I help you?" he asked.

She gave a cautious smile. "Sorry, this floor's a little confusing. This is Cold Cases, right?"

The detective bobbed his head up and down before tossing his trash in the circular bin. "Yeah, you'd think they'd have put all us Fugitive Enforcement on the same floor. Not an intuitive station, I'd say," he grumbled, like he's used to the complaint.

Emma coughed, glancing around again. "Yeah, I was looking for Gra—Detective Humbert?" Her words tripped under the unfamiliar title, inwardly chuckling at it. It has been a long while since
she's called him Sheriff, but nonetheless, it is alien to call him "detective" now.

The man's dark eyes flicked over her form before a smirk set on his face. "Humbert, huh? So, you must be Emma?"

An eyebrow rose as she looked at him. "Must be. You seen my kid?"

He bobbed his head before grabbing his coffee mug. "I think so. Anderson, right?"

Emma felt a flush of warmth in the pit of her belly, a realization of how much Graham must have spoke of both of them before the curse broke. "Yeah, Anderson."

The man's serious face broke into a wide grin that changed his whole demeanor. "My kid goes to Anderson, too. Fourth grade, though. Leo Simmons," he said, extending his hand to her.

She shook it, nodding. "Nice to meet you. So, Graham is …?"

He ignored her, plowing through. "Minimum days, right? My own's off with the ex, but she's also a little young for this place."

"Henry knows enough to be mature, here," Emma replied defensively.

He held up his hands. "Hey, not scolding. Besides, Humbert wouldn't let him get into too much trouble. Already pretty attached, I think."

Emma looked down, letting a grin finally spread across her face. She knew he was pretty attached, but to hear it from his coworker was definitely solidifying.

"You know, some loud young thing down at Prohibition said you were good people. Hope so, considering how keeled over Humbert is."

Her eyes shot up and immediately narrowed. She wouldn't stand by as someone insulted her friend. "Excuse me? Who are you to call Andie—"

He raised his hand, showing a band around his left ring finger. "Husband. Nice to meet you."

The rush drifted out of her in a huff, leaving only a spot of confusion. "Oh. Sorry."

He bobbed his head. "I really don't know where your kid is. Humbert said something about going to the basement, but I'm sure he didn't bring your son since civilians typically can't go down there," he said misleadingly. He turned and faced his computer.

"The basement?" she echoed. She shrugged, and turned toward the exit. Then, she hesitated. "Best way to get down there?"

"Oh, you know," Simmons began, brushing a hand through the scruff on his chin. "Down the third elevator, all the way to the bottom. Need a key to get in. Almost forgot I had this baby in my pocket. Wouldn't want it to get lost," he said, sliding it across his desk. Then, he turned his back on it.

"Thanks for your help, Detective," she said with a smirk, pocketing the key.

When she landed on the correct floor, she heard the muffled sound of gunshots. She turned down a hall to find a range, cadets and captains alike working on their form. But still no Graham, no Henry. She frowned, and turned down the next set of hallways.

Suddenly, a faint sound grew louder as she walked. It was soft, the sound of the air being cut
Suddenly, a faint sound grew louder as she walked. It was soft, the sound of the air being cut before the muted sound of something being hit. A smile began tugging at her lips, a certainty coming to her as she made her way.

Even as the suspicions crept up on her, it still couldn't prepare her for the sight.

"See? That was much better. Next time, just remember to breathe. There's no pressure, here. You're just letting it go," Graham said, his hands tightening across her son's shoulders, turning them perpendicular to the target in front of him.

"Like this?" Henry asked, his brow scrunched as he aimed.

"Relax a bit. You're not being graded right now. Pretend it's just an extension of you, not something foreign." Minor adjustments were made to his form, tiny encouragements in every touch.

She watched as Henry's body became less tense, pride seeping through her as he eased his grip from the white-knuckling she had noticed during his tests.

But what made her open her eyes a little wider was the quiet awe that Graham looked at Henry with. Her heart squeezed, feeling it almost burst with the realization of just how much Graham cared for her son.

It almost made her miss when Henry released the bow, the arrow landing in the red lines. "I did it!" he cried.

Graham gripped his shoulder fondly, a grin stretched across his face. "Great job! See, I told you you could!"

She sniffed and finally made her way into the room, announcing her presence. "That jerk Mr. Garrett will be blown away," she said. Henry grinned and ran up to her, hugging her around the waist. She pressed a kiss into his hair. "Just like me," she whispered.

Graham was rubbing the back of his neck, looking sheepish. "Sorry, I probably should have asked first."

She shook her head, her eyes shining. "No, I asked you if you could help. It's fine … it's perfect, really."

"Does that mean we can still do Diablo night?" Henry asked.

Emma pretended to think for a moment. "I guess I told you we would once your homework is done. And this counts as homework."

Graham stepped back, but the smile didn't fall from his face. "I'll leave you two to it, then."

Henry's face, on the other hand, fell. "But—"

"No way, buddy. You've got to pitch in for pizza. And we need to buy another controller on the way home," she said.

Graham looked between the two cautiously. "A controller?"

"Yeah, it'll be boring if you just watch us," Henry countered, already catching onto the game Emma was playing.

He chuckled. "I don't know, I might bring you two down. I don't know much about video
"Payback, then. You teach me this, I'll teach you that," Henry insisted.

"You weren't going to owe me, Henry," Graham said fondly.

"All it means is that you're part of this," Emma cut in, her eyes steady on his, hoping he'd get her meaning. She watched as those dark blue irises changed, disbelief and hope lingering there. "And the Swan household requires video game usage."

He grinned. "Guess that's okay, then." His eyes gleamed as he collected the bow from Henry, and then tucked the arrows into the quiver. "But that means we go to Numero 28."

She scoffed. "Obviously, Celeste's pizza is far superior."

"Celeste's? No way," Graham teased, his eyes sparkling.

"I like Pete's," Henry chimed in.

"Pete's?" Graham and Emma said simultaneously, noses scrunched.

"Maybe a taste test's in order, then," Graham said with a shake of his head, pulling her close as he led them all back down the hall. "I think we'll need the amount anyway, if we're going to be teaching me."

"Fair!" Henry raced ahead of them, heading to the equipment desk with enthusiasm.

She leaned into Graham further. "Thank you," she breathed, pressing her face close.

He shifted, lips pressed against her forehead. "Just wanted to help the kid."

She smiled, lashes fluttering across her cheeks. "Yeah, I know," she murmured. She can't remember a time she'd felt like someone cared equally about her and Henry both, not in either of the lives sifting around her head. And she knew it wasn't because of her. This was just an evolution of something that was already there. "Just … thank you."

A blush began on his cheeks, only slightly covered by the stubble along his jaw. He chuckled. "We'll see how much you thank me when you're admitting that Numero 28 is the best pizza on the Upper West side."

"Never," she vowed with a grin.

She couldn't remember the last time she had smiled this much, either.
"Hey, kid," Graham whispered, shaking Henry's shoulder slightly.

It was early, even before sunrise. The sky hadn't even begun to lighten to a pearl, the stars still alight. It was far earlier than the kid would normally be up, especially on the first day of Spring Break.

Henry groaned, barely stirring before falling back into a pattern of heavy, rhythmic breathing. Graham grinned and shook him slightly harder. "Gotta get up."

Henry threw an arm over his eyes, a protest incoherently jumbled out. "Dad," he mumbled tiredly, pulling away.

Graham felt his throat tighten and he swallowed hard. "No, buddy, it's Graham," he corrected wistfully, pushing back the boy's bed-mussed hair.

Henry blinked up at him, his eyes still hazy from sleep. To Graham's surprise, there was no confusion, no hesitance. "I know," he said, a small smile forming on his lips. "You're the only one to be up this early."

Graham stared at him a long moment, realizing that Henry hadn't been mistaking him for Neal. Henry had just acknowledged him, not anyone else, as "dad." He was Dad. His stomach twisted with emotion, and he could feel it beading beneath his eyelids. Firmly, he set a kiss on the crown of his head, hands tight on his shoulders. "Well, you knew it wouldn't be your mom," he joked, even as his voice thickened with tears.

"It's way too early," he sighed, dragging his fingers across his face.

"I know. But we're going on a trip," Graham replied. He looked down on him fondly, the pleasant, overwhelmed buzz still lighting through him. He nudged him. "There's a donut stop on the way if you're quick enough."
Henry leaned up, yawning widely. "A trip?" he asked before rubbing his eyes. "Mom get a runner?"

"Not this time. It's a little different. Your mom and I got your bag packed, but feel free to throw in anything you'd like to have. Warm weather," he replied vaguely. He clapped a hand on his shoulder and rose. "Teeth brushed. Be ready in ten."

"'Kay," he grumbled, but then the smile widened as he looked back at him. "Dad."

He grinned back, unable to stop the flood of happiness. "Kid," he replied tenderly, using the term of endearment he and Emma had both always used.

He left then, to give the boy some privacy. He startled to find Emma just outside the door. She leaned against the doorframe with a knowing smile on her lips, bathed in the barest of light seeping in from their bedroom. Her hands cupped her stomach, framing the small distention just slightly. He couldn't help matching her smile, the bright emotion still caught in his throat. She reached a hand out to him. "Told you," she murmured as she pulled him into her arms.

"First time," he breathed.

She looked away. "Yeah, I remember how that feels," she said with a small tug of her lips.

He brushed a strand of hair behind her ear, fingers feather-lights across her cheek as he wondered about the first moment Henry called her "mom," in either life. "Tell me?"

She peered back up at him, her sea colored eyes bright even in the dim light. "Later. Once we're settled. You got the tickets?"

He patted his jacket pocket. "And the letter. And the hotel numbers."

"Good. Cab's on the way," Emma answered.

Forty minutes later had them in the back of a cab and nearing JFK, next to no traffic on the 678 that early in the morning. Henry was back to dozing lightly against his shoulder.

He looked up at Emma only to find her staring at them. She took in a long breath, resting her own head against Henry's before mouthing a clear "I love you." He reached over and entwined their fingers, stamping down the flutter of nervousness at their plan.

Everything would go smoothly, he was sure, and even if it didn't … did it really matter?

Henry came to quickly when the car stopped, but still seemed to drift zombie-like through the motions as he was led around the airport. "Where we going, anyway?" Henry mumbled as he pulled off his shoes at security. It surprised him slightly that it's taken Henry this long to ask. The kid was nothing if not inquisitive.

"McCoy Airport. We'll be staying there for a bit while we clear this thing up," Emma replied, keeping her tone light even as her words became vaguer. Graham grinned at her mischievously over his shoulder.

"Headphones, kid?" Graham asked innocently, tossing them at him.

Henry's brow furrowed, but he plugged them into his game system. It would keep him occupied and unaware, as long as they made it discrete when the flight attendants walked through the cabins.
Graham sighed as they entered the plane. He had memories of flying. Not often, but enough that it wasn't anything new to have ID and information ready and on-hand, bags stored in overhead bins, emergency exits likely behind you. But still, a tingling of apprehension built as soon as he buckled his seatbelt.

Emma looked over at him in concern, and then placed her hand on top of his. She took a deep breath before rolling her fingers along his knuckles. "It was a Sunday. Maggie was off at work. I was alone with the kid, just making breakfast. It was simple, like toast or something, and I was heating up his bottle at the same time."

His fingers unclenched from on the armrests, realizing what she was saying. He breathed out a shaky sigh, and nodded. "No toaster mishaps?"

She chuckled and shook her head. "No toaster mishaps. But it was a busy morning, and I was supposed to be preparing answers for an interview Maggie set up for the next day. So, I was rambling, just talking out loud to Henry so I could get a feel for the answers. He was eleven months old, and he had been making the usual little babbling sounds back. So, I just continued on like we were in a conversation."

He looked down, watching her make soothing circles on the webbing of his thumb and index finger with her own thumb. He eased his grip further, relaxing into the seat. "And then?"

She looked over at Henry, a smirk on her face. "Then, all of a sudden I heard a 'no.' Almost like he was stopping me from talking. So, I turn to him in shock, and I ask him what he said. And he just grins, this big grin with these four tiny teeth up front, and says 'mama.' That was the first time."

He glanced at Henry, still busy with his game. Carefully, he placed one hand on her stomach, rolling his palm over the bump. "So, you're telling me it'll be about sixteen months before I get to hear this little one?" he asked, his eyes twinkling as he nodded his head toward Henry. "Or five months plus twelve years?"

She huffed a laugh. "I hope it doesn't take that long for kid number two to call you 'dad.'"

There's a hint of something that was not humor in her tone, a catch of fear. So, he leaned closer to kiss her temple. "Going to be around for everything. And going to be legal dad from the start," he whispered.

She smiled a little tightly but nodded. "Twenty weeks."

He nodded. "Twenty weeks 'til we can put mom and dad on legal forms, for her," he clarified.

She rolled her eyes, but patted his jacket pocket. "As soon as we hit the ground?"

He shook his head. "I want him to see it, first. Maybe once we're settled at the hotel."

Emma raised one brow before digging her magazine out from her bag. "Ten bucks says you tell him five minutes after we've gotten off the plane and no later."

Graham wrinkled his nose. "We'll see, Deputy."

"Co-sheriff," she corrected plainly before sticking her nose in her reading. "I won the election."

"Yeah, yeah, Bail Bonds Person."

"Detective," she shot back, like an insult, even as the corner of her lips tugged upward.
As soon as they disembarked two hours later, he heard Henry's sharp inhale. "Orlando?" he asked, suspicion in his voice now that a couple more hours of sleep were in him.

"Orlando," Graham confirmed, wrapping an arm around him. "McCoy Airport. What, was that confusing?"

"You dorks," Henry said as he ran ahead to press his face against the glass. He looked wistfully out at the skyline. "You said … you said there were things to clear up? Why … what's here?"

"Several things, I'd say," Graham teased. He leaned against the window near him, then pulled a few documents out of his pocket. "This might interest you the most."

Henry took the brightly colored tickets with shaking hands. "Disney?"

Graham grinned. "What, you thought a couple games and a new backpack was enough on your wish-list?"

"But … but there wasn't enough time. We couldn't afford it," he said, staring down at the passes as if they'd disappear if he clutched them too tightly.

"It's your first birthday with all of us, for real. I'd say that warrants a little time away," he replied. The wind was knocked out of him as Henry threw himself into his arms. He hugged him back, just as tightly. "Thank you, Dad."

Graham held him closer before pulling back. "Yeah, about that," he said, pulling out the final item, a thick envelope. "Thought you'd like to see it. Officially."

"Officially?" Henry took the documents, turning to the first page. Graham eyed him carefully as he read the certificate of adoption. "You're really my dad, now. Legally," he breathed.

"Yeah," Graham replied just as softly. "Not having second thoughts about it, are you?"

He shook his head quickly. "It's just … it's real. Not that it wasn't before … but it feels …."

"More?" Graham supplied.

Henry nodded.

Graham twisted his ring around his finger and bobbed his head. "That's how it felt when your mom and I got married. Everything was already there, but now that it can be legal, it feels like it can't be taken away," Graham said with a wry smile.

"It sounds silly," Henry said, staring down at the documents again. "You've been 'dad' for so long, even before I could say it, but now –"

"I know, kid," he said, brushing back his hair. "Happy early birthday. I love you."

"Love you, too," Henry said.

Emma walked over from her place on the chairs opposite, eyes teary but carefully trying to hide it. "Four and a half minutes. You owe me, Humbert."

"Which one?" Henry asked, picking up the letter as proof. "We're all Humberts, now."

with it?"

Henry nodded enthusiastically, then hugged his mother as well. "Thanks, Mom."

"Happy early birthday. You're lucky Spring Break coincided," she said, nudging his side.  "Disney's going to take some time to get through."

"I can still take you on the tea cups, so that's a plus," Henry said with bright eyes. Graham chuckled, recalling how Emma had spoken about him pressed up to the TV screen as a kid to the Disney Sing Alongs.

"Yeah, yeah, and I'll do some shopping while you and Graham go on Space Mountain. Deal?" she asked.

"Deal," Henry said quickly. "Keep Abby safe."

Graham shook his head. "Already an Abigail. We'll get the perfect one eventually."

"Fine," he huffed. He looked thoughtfully up at Emma for a moment. "We should take pictures with Disney-Snow, and her prince if we can."

Emma shook her head, and placed her face in her hands. "Fine."

"So, it'll be like a whole family photo, with everyone," he said, a little softer.

Everyone was silent at that, tensely so. The past sometimes threatened to swallow them in a confused haze, so painful was it in its implications. But right now wasn't time for that, not in this moment. Finally, Graham placed a hand on his shoulder. "I think that'd be nice."

"David would love that," Emma said sarcastically, but chuckled nonetheless. "Your birthday, kid. Family photo it is. But let's get to the hotel first, before we start making plans."

"Cool," Henry agreed, standing up once again.

"And you still owe me ten bucks," Emma said, tugging on Graham's sleeve.

"I'll buy you a turkey leg," Graham replied, kissing her on the lips.

Right now, the parts of their family that could be together were more firmly knitted together. And that was cause for celebration.
Safety Measures

Chapter Summary

Summary: Sometimes, people help too much.

Chapter Notes

Author's Note: Not prompted, but a counterpoint to a future one-shot (It Was For Us).

She came in, keys jangling from her grip, balancing a bag of groceries on one hip. She bobbed her head at a familiar guitar riff that greeted her, smiling slightly as she closed the door.

She found Graham sitting in the middle of the living room floor, shoes off, hair tousled, and surrounded by scattered plastic and tiny screws.

"Is that Cage the Elephant I hear? We're getting closer," she teased, setting the bag and her purse on the coffee table.

He smiled somewhat distractedly before setting down the paper covered in tiny print to the side. He leaned over, grabbing her across the waist. He pressed his face into her stomach, placing a small kiss there. "I was given clear instructions and a playlist from Henry. You'll be proud: Jack White is next."

She smirked and pushed him back. "Okay, hubby, what is all this?"

He scowled at the tiny pieces, a dark look settling over him. "Baby proofing."

Her eyebrows quirked up, and she huffed a short laugh. Then harder. Then harder. Then harder. "Seriously, Graham?"

He sighed and leaned his head into his hands. "Instructions that make no sense, parts that don't fit … this is ridiculous," he said, muffled by his covered face.

She knelt beside him, bumping his shoulder. "I'm just barely in my second trimester. She's the size of a lemon. And we don't even need this stuff until the kid's crawling. Way too early, babe."

"I know that," he grumbled, but leaned his head into her neck, placing a soft kiss there.

She closed her eyes, but had to grin. It was funny, seeing him so flustered over something so silly. "Then why are you …," she trailed off, looking over at the box. She shook her head as her thoughts finally centered. "Which one?"

"Who else? Gia, at least, would have sent over a professional to install it," he said with a sigh.

"She's just trying to be helpful," Emma said, but couldn't keep a straight face. Ritu had been getting a bit overprotective as of late. Being that she lived just down the hall, she was also the
closest of their friends to see everything that went on with their little family. After Emma had
gotten over the hyperemesis, Ritu's hovering had expanded to the rest of them.

"You know how much I appreciate Ritu. If I could have taken more time off—"

"You would have," she finished. The furrows on his brow smoothed as he sighed. "But we
needed the income with me pretty much out of commission."

She knew he still felt guilty about it, but one thing about this life was the sheer amount of people
who were willing to help. They didn't have to depend on only themselves; they had a whole
support system with them. Still, she saw how it killed him every time he left the apartment in those
months, as she tried desperately to hold back her symptoms until the door shut.

"And having Ritu then was a godsend. But it'd be nice if she'd tone it down a bit," he sighed. He
peeked up at her from where his head rested. "Henry came to me yesterday with her latest gift.
She bought him pepper spray."

Emma groaned. "Seriously? Yeah, I'll talk with her."

"It's a wonder you guys survived this long without me."

Emma looked up with a roll of her eyes. Graham's head shot up as well, a bright smile covering
his face. "Maggie! I didn't know you were coming in!"

"Em, I gave you a whole five minutes. You didn't bother telling him I was here?" she asked,
folding her arms in front of her.

She shook her head. Then, she made a sweeping gesture to the scattered parts. "You put all this
stuff together last time. Remember any of it?" she asked.

Maggie raised an eyebrow with a look of disbelief. "I did it once: you're gonna make me go
through that torture again?"

Emma scowled. "Serves you right for crashing on my couch for three years."

Maggie placed her hands on her hips. "Hey, I didn't leech. I bought groceries. Even helped you
cook that once."

"Are you sure that's your argument?" Emma asked incredulously. "Bringing up that
incident?"

"Hey, I still fixed the place up with these torture devices. I have nightmares about locked toilets to
this day, I'll have you know."

Graham gave a sheepish smile. "I'll help?" he offered.

Her dark eyes narrowed. "You know what? I'll take big brother's help before daddy's, here.
Detectives are too clinical for this sort of job," she groused, falling to the carpet and immediately
digging through the parts. "Where is the little weed?"

"Yearbook club. Selena joined, so he's been going extra hours," Emma explained, her eyes
twinkling mischievously at the mention of her son's crush.

"She a good kid?" Maggie asked, holding up a section to look at in the light.

"Yeah, she's a good kid: smart, active, sweet. Henry hasn't even pursued anything, so can't say
how it will go, anyway," she replied. She leaned against Graham and held a hand over her
stomach. It's still a bit strange to see Henry so enamored, but in a good way. However, there was another part of her that was very, very glad that she would have to wait a long time before the new one got to the point of crushes.

"What brings you to town, anyway, Maggie?" Graham asked, settling his arms around Emma as he watched the slender woman piece together a kitchen latch.

"Hawley got promoted, and I decided to come to support her. Em said I could crash for a meal," she explained with a shrug.

"Big of you," Graham commented.

Maggie sighed. "Yeah, well. Just 'cause it didn't work doesn't mean I stopped caring."

"C'mon," Emma broke in, rising to her feet. "We'll make dinner while Mags does the grunt work. She's got to earn her keep somehow."

"So supportive!" Maggie yelled back.

"Couch is free," Graham said once Emma reached the refrigerator.

"You read my mind," she replied, glancing back at her friend. "Not like she booked a hotel or anything."

"A couch in return for free installation and Ritu backing off for a few days? Worth it," Graham chuckled, resting his chin on her shoulder as he looked at the food with her.

"Agreed. By the way, you don't have to go out. Emilia already agreed to drop off Henry on the way to Michael's PT."

He bobbed his head, the scratch of his stubble unintentionally sending pleasant shivers down her spine. "Sounds good."

Emma glanced backwards before meeting his eye. "Can we get Maggie tickets to Irving's thing tomorrow?"

He shrugged. "Shouldn't be too hard to get an extra. Lazo's already bringing half her family. Simmons and Andie will be there, so I'm sure they'll get into enough trouble for six people."

She laughed. "Yeah, well, Mags will likely add to that, especially if she takes our drink tickets," Emma paused, then leaned back to kiss his jaw. "Never thought I'd have a situation that would require four tickets to a police officer's retirement party."

Graham smiled slowly, rolling his hands over her stomach. "Never thought I'd enjoy being around people in general this much," he murmured back. He kissed her soundly.

"You too going to stand around being nauseating all day, or are you going to cook for the unpaid laborer over here?" Maggie shouted.

"Unpaid? You're getting room and board, missy!" Emma countered.

"Cheap labor, then," she amended with a grin. "Sure I can stay?"

"I guess I could support it," Graham teased.

"Oh, he's going to lay the guilt on me. I knew he was trouble," Maggie mocked. "Shoulda first suspected when he agreed to marry you."
Emma rolled her eyes. "Hilarious. And here I was thinking of feeding you."

"I'll be good, I swear!"

"Lies," Emma insisted, but yanked the ground beef off the lower shelf. "But I'll let it slide. This time."

Graham was already filling a pot with water, and slid over a mixing bowl to her side of the counter. In sync, they worked through the prep until the door chimed.

When Emma got there, Emilia excitedly pushed Henry forward. Henry was blushing furiously. "What?" Emma asked as Henry bolted inside.

Emilia grinned. "Henry offered to help Selena with her programming homework. Little stud got her Skype number."

Emma's eyes widened. "What?"

Emilia only nodded, the sly grin still in place. "Just thought you'd like that lovely piece of information before I run to PT."

"Yeah, thanks," Emma said, bewildered. She shut the door, and raised a single brow. "Selena's number, huh?"

"I'm just helping with her homework," Henry insisted, but was unable to keep the redness from covering his face.

Graham grinned and put him in a loose headlock. "We might have to limit your internet time, then," he teased.

"Dad," Henry groaned. "It's not that big a deal."

"Hey, kid, come help me with this. Then you can tell me all about this girl," Maggie coaxed from the living room.

"Maggie! You're here! Save me!" he cried, rushing to the older woman and into her arms in a tight hug.

"Sure, sure, go to the woman that ratted you out for keeping that squirrel in your closet," Emma grumbled good-naturedly.

"Squirrel?" Graham asked.

Emma sighed. "I'll tell you later."

"Help me with this, kid. We're going to make sure your sibling doesn't drink shaving cream," Maggie pressed, handing him a screwdriver while she scooped up a couple more parts. Together, they disappeared into the bathroom.

"I'm never going to be able to access the bathroom again, am I?" Graham sighed, cracking his neck tiredly.

Emma smirked as she began to brown the meat. "It'll take a few tries. What's going to be bad is getting up in the middle of the night."

"I think I feel sorry for Sam and the boys," Graham muttered half-sarcastically. "Do you think this
will finally settle Ritu down, though?"

Emma winced. "Nah," she said. She looked up with a grin. "She'll find some other things to keep us extra safe."

"But you'll talk to her?" Graham said.

She nodded. "I'll talk to her."

When dinner was finally ready, they all gathered around the table, busying themselves in conversation. As she looked out over her family as they started eating, she felt a sudden burst of warmth. She reached under the table to entwine Graham's free hand in hers. Immediately, his fingers laced with hers and he pressed against her side.

"Seriously? You too are disgustingly cute," Maggie cut in, a smile betraying her actual feelings on the matter.

"Right? This is why I need you around more often," Henry added with a laugh.

"C'mon, we save some gross cuteness for you, too," Graham said, leaning over to kiss him on his forehead.

He sighed heavily and slumped against Maggie. "True Love stuff," he said in exasperation, even though his eyes were soft.

Maggie chuckled, bumping her shoulder against the kid's. "Guess so. Pass the bread."

Henry's nose wrinkled as he did. "It's too normal. It's weird."


Henry shrugged. "True." Then he smiled. "Don't worry; Dad confiscated it."

"I guess we should just be glad that one of your cop buddies didn't try to give him something with a little more power," Maggie deadpanned.

Henry grinned. "They're too smart to do that. Mom and Dad'd kill them."

"Damn straight," Emma mumbled.

"Wouldn't want the twerp to get a firearm, huh?" Maggie asked.

"Not when he knows how to use a bow," Graham joked.

Maggie nodded enthusiastically. "Safety first."

Emma snorted, pulling another helping onto her plate. "I hope safety doesn't always come with the prereq of archery skill."

Graham chuckled, his fingers twisting into the lace on her wrist. "Whatever helps."

She pointed at him, narrowing her eyes. "Just don't tell Ritu that." Finally, she grinned, kissing him quickly. If this was the worst she had to worry about, it wasn't half bad.
Summary: Snow doesn't understand Emma's predicament. And that's the most hurtful thing.

Prompts from lessawildmoon "Please tell me you are intending to write some of the Emma/Snow stuff. I really need to see Emma reading Snow the riot act over her coddling of Regina."

And fantasywriter13 "Okay, now you got me thinking again. Can we get a drabble on this scene (http://arianakristine.tumblr.com/post/87118249471/fantasywriter13-arianakristine-i-understand) (or something similar between Emma and Snow) and Graham's reaction in Redefining Home verse, please?"

And JosieSwan "Snow gets a "come to Jesus" talk, where she learns that defending the woman who murdered her daughter's true love with her grandson's (and Regina's adoptive son's) knowledge, is something Henry can't forgive."

This is part 1 of this talk.

Emma walked into the loft, shrugging out of her coat. She leaned against the wood frame with a sigh, rubbing her temples in frustration. Things had been piling up to the point of near-bursting in every facet but the ones in her family.

No, that's not what she meant. She meant with her husband and son. Mentally, she cursed; including Mary Margaret and David back into the fold was more difficult than she had assumed. And the situation with both was strained at best. That didn't mean that Emma didn't care, though. She was trying to mend things where she could, and had gained some ground with David. It was Mary Margaret that held the bigger chasm in fixing their relationship.

"Oh, Emma, you're here!"

She looked up, finding Mary Margaret's excited face. She forced a smile on her own and pushed off the doorway. "Hi. We were just convening on things, and David said I could find you here to catch you up."

"I guess I've been a little holed up," Mary Margaret said, but her grin was still wide. The previous timidity that had colored their previous interactions had melted away, and the pixie haired woman was absolutely bubbly. "Come, I want to show you!"

Emma tossed her jacket over the couch, and followed her deeper inside the loft and up the stairs.

When she was close enough, Mary Margaret tugged on her hand like an enthusiastic child. Once
they reached their destination, she threw out her hands. "Look!"

Emma's eyes bounced around, and abruptly she felt her throat tighten. There, in the center of the room that used to be hers, was a pure white crib. The walls were painted in pastels and a snowy backdrop. Softly colored in blues and greens, baby items were strewn about in meticulous fashion. Bottles and diapers were organized into a wicker basket on a shelf. Neatly folded onsies and blankets and towels sat on the dresser next to an intricately designed music box. Bears and bunnies and other stuffed toys were placed on a glider in the corner.

"Do you like it?" Mary Margaret asked eagerly.

Emma looked over it again, smoothing her hands over her belly. With some nausea, she noted how easily they had each moved on from each other. She swallowed and closed her eyes, pushing back the deep ache. "It's beautiful. I'm sure the baby will love it."

"I was thinking that we could start getting your nursery together, too. I know you and Graham don't have a place yet, but we can start getting some things," she plowed on.

Emma shook her head, visions of the corner of their bedroom's far corner stacked with half-unwrapped presents bright in her memory. "Oh, we've already got the nursery mostly set up back in New York."

Mary Margaret froze, her hands falling to her stomach protectively. "You … you're not going to stay?" she asked brokenly.

She looked up in surprise. Honestly, she hadn't really decided yet. They hadn't truly had time to discuss their plans after the Wicked Witch was defeated. Except, in her heart, she knew that witches and holy wars and magic were things that were not going to end with this most recent battle. Danger and Storybrooke seemed synonymous, and living here meant living one crisis to the next.

Being here also meant Mary Margaret and David, her parents, the people she craved abstractly for the first part of her life and tangibly throughout the last year. But, she couldn't just think of herself. Henry, Graham, and the baby deserved better, safer than this place.

"I guess not," she finally replied slowly. "After this is done."

Mary Margaret fell against the crib, looking downwards. "That's why you haven't been around much. You're trying not to get attached."

She sighed. "No, that's not it. You know that's not it," she replied pointedly. She hadn't been around much because all they seemed to do was argue about Regina's presence in this mess.

"So, you're just going to leave us behind."

"Don't make it like that. You don't know what it's like. Our life in New York was really good," she countered. *Exceptionally good*, she added internally. It was stable, happy, safe, filled with love … everything she ever wanted or dreamed about. Except … just not with her parents.

Mary Margaret's mouth formed a tight line. "I'm sure it was. But it wasn't home."

Emma's mouth fell open, a shocked burst of breath leaving her. She couldn't believe the audacity of the statement. She shook her head, her eyes brightening with tears. She sniffed and turned away. "It was for us," she replied stiffly.

"That's because you forgot about us," Snow countered stubbornly. She pushed off the rails and
headed for the door. "Let's go find Henry."

Emma grabbed her arm, feeling the leftover curdles of ire pearling into beads of incredulous anger. "No, you don't get to say something like that to me. You felt like Henry and I were gone for one day. I lived with your absence for over eleven months. It only took three weeks for Graham and me to regain our memories, and ever since it has been torture knowing you were gone and that I'd never see you again! We have done everything in our power to make sure your presence has been with us the entire time. Hell, Henry even made us get photos at Disney with your animated counterparts! You don't get to say that I forgot you. New York is home because we didn't."

Mary Margaret turned to her, eyes flashing. "Are you trying to say I should get over it? Do you think it's easy, seeing you this age? Knowing I missed out on everything? And now knowing that your life was so perfect that you'd rather leave us behind to go back?"

Emma fumed. "Well, you didn't seem to have much difficulty moving on!"

Mary Margaret looked at her as if she had just been slapped. "Do you think that's what this is? Moving on? Replacing you? Nothing could do that," her voice had lost its hard edge, softening into something with a lash of pain.

Emma looked away and finally shook her head. The heat still itched beneath her skin, but some of it tempered with the hurt in Mary's voice. "No. I know – look, I know it's not that. But you have a chance to start again, and I'm in the middle of my life."

"The life that doesn't include us," Mary Margaret pressed.

Emma's head fell into her hands. "That's not what I'm trying to say. Look at this from my perspective. If I stay, then I have to push four people into this dangerous town. I have to have this new baby in a place where there are beings that covet its potential for magic. I have to have Henry live in the place that caused him so much pain. I have to bring Graham live in the place where he died, with Regina still walking around like she owns it."

Mary Margaret winced. "Why do you always bring it back to Regina? She's trying, she's helping on our side."

"For her own gains," Emma grumbled.

"Just because you can't see the good in her –"

The heat rushed back into her, fists clenching around the hair at her scalp. "See the good? See the good in the woman that abused my son? See the good in the woman that abused and murdered my husband? The woman that's the reason I never knew my parents until I was twenty-eight? That woman?"

Mary Margaret turned away. "You don't understand –"

"No, I don't understand! I don't understand how you can stand by her side and insist she's changed when she doesn't regret a thing she's done!"

Mary faced her, her eyes wild. "If I don't, what's stopping her from going after you all again!"

Emma froze, her chest heaving as the adrenaline slowed its pumping into her veins. "What?"

A couple tears fell down Mary Margaret's cheeks, her reddened eyes wide. "I have to believe in her. I have to support her right now. I'm the only thing in the way from her falling back into her old routines."
Emma gaped at her a moment, unsure what to do with this information. She was sure Mary Margaret had just been being her frustratingly optimistic self, in regards to Regina. She had never assumed that she was just as certain of the thin line the woman walked on. "Mary Margaret—"

"Don't you see? I'm trying to protect you."

Emma blew out a breath. "I appreciate it, but you don't have to do this; she doesn't deserve your support. She … she's hurt us all." Emma bit down on her lip, recalling the flashes of fear or pain she still sometimes caught in both Henry and Graham. And herself, if she was being honest. She shook her head. "But you're the one she targeted, the one she specifically set out against."

Mary Margaret's lashes fluttered. "Exactly. I'm the reason for all of this. I have to support the idea that she can be good. I can't be responsible for her going evil again."

Emma's entire being rang through with sympathy. "Oh, Mary, you wouldn't be responsible if—"

She raised a single hand, halting her attempt to rationalize. "I really wish you'd help me with it. And Henry, too," Mary Margaret implored.

Her insides turned to ice and she steeled herself once again. She shook her head. "You can't ask me to do that. And you can't ask me to ask Henry to do that. You don't know what it did to him, getting his memories back. I can't ask him to forgive her and support her now. And while you may be able to push everything aside … I just –I can't. You didn't have to go through everything I did when we all remembered that life."

"'That life'? Don't you mean this life?" Mary Margaret said skeptically. "The other wasn't real."

Her brow furrowed. "No, that's what I was trying to say; it was real for us. Everything leading up to where our life was, it continues in New York. It still shapes us. Our jobs, our friends, our personalities, everything. You don't understand—it's both real."

"Friends," Mary Margaret murmured.

She paused, recalling the time she told her first friend she had been alone all her life. It felt like decades ago, and in a way it was. "Yeah," she breathed. "Friends. We all have a lot of them. Close friends, ones we'd never have without the reset."

Mary Margaret wiped away her tears and sniffed. "I get that," she said hollowly. "But you have family here."

"And I have family in New York, too," Emma gently reminded.

Her face hardened. "So, that's it? You've weighed your options, and your father and I came up short?" Mary Margaret asked.

Her hands clenched, and part of her wanting to shake the dark haired woman. It was like she wouldn't, or couldn't, listen. She couldn't make her understand that, despite appearances, this was actually a hard decision. "Not that you came up short, but that the risks outweigh the benefits. And not only the risks, but the actual emotional strain it's putting on Henry to even be here. And Graham, and me."

Mary Margaret looked away sharply. Her knuckles were white against the navy blanket clutched in her hands.

Emma blew out a breath. "Look, I appreciate you two. But you can't leave, and I don't see a way
that we can stay. That was one of the first things Henry asked Graham, and then me about: can we go back when it's done? He's so afraid, and he just wants to go home. How can I deny him that?"

The older woman blinked back tears fruitlessly. "We've managed to find each other again, against all odds. But still you're willing to just … throw it away again."

"We're getting nowhere, here," Emma said quietly, facing the door. The insistent press of Mary Margaret's words was stifling, making her breaths shorten in overwhelmed pants. "Let's just move on. We still have a witch to defeat before any of this becomes a reality, anyway."

"Emma."

She paused, curling her hands over her stomach. The baby had been still within her, despite the thrall of emotions that was making her heart race. At the sound of her mother's broken, pained voice, though, her child shifted, pressing out as if toward its grandmother. She shuddered out a low breath, finally letting the non-rational side of her flow out. *I'd miss you. You have no idea how much. I want to be here, be your daughter, be with you and David. If it was just me, you'd be enough.*

She didn't voice those thoughts. Instead she turned the knob and fled the apartment.
Nightmares and Daydreams

Chapter Summary

He had lived so long in this reality that the demons of his past hadn't had a chance to bear down on him.

Chapter Notes

Set the morning after Outside Looking In. Accompanied by picspam for Gremma Appreciation Month.
He woke with a jerk, panting as he leaned up on his elbows. His hair clung to his face, dampened and mussed from the thrashing he had been doing. He shut his eyes hard, trying to drive back the pieces of the nightmare that still clung to him like tar. His dreams were often plagued by memories, visions of another time and place.

After yesterday, though, they were mixing with the worst of his fears.

He dragged a hand over his face and rolled back down to his pillow. Emma shifted beside him, a soft sigh escaping her lips, though she remained asleep. He took a long breath in and released it slowly.

The imprints were fading, the dream hazing back into its unreality. All he could recall was that somehow the memory of being in that room in the castle, punished for being unable to fulfill her wishes, had melded with her punishing him for finding a way to fulfill his own. More than images of the dream, feelings were prominent. The threat on his family that caused the crushing fear, the unyielding rage still made his blood run hot and cold in surprising intervals. The feel of her squeezing his heart was so vivid that it made him press his hand over his chest to remind himself that it was still beating.

He swallowed thickly and turned to his side. Emma steeped him in reality better than anything else after nights like these. She was warm and real and present, the rising and sinking of her chest a calm, meditative pattern. Her hair cascaded onto the pillow, her left arm thrown above her head, and the light that was beginning to crest on the horizon made the ring on her finger glow. He leaned closer, inhaling her deeply. Two fingers wound up to barely graze the pulse under the lace around her wrist, further grounding him in the moment.

He kissed the golden tresses on his side of the pillow and curled his fingers around the strands. Whatever the next few hours would bring, they would still all be together. Going back to Storybrooke would not change that. It just seemed that his fears were not as buried as he first wished.

He didn't want to think beyond this moment. He didn't want to think about the past sleeping on their couch, or the evil waiting for them a few hours north in all its forms.

In this cocoon of the red-gold light of dawn and soft white blankets, he could almost pretend it was a normal morning. That in a couple hours, they would wake Henry. That they would start a normal Monday. He would make breakfast, Emma would make coffee, and Henry would water the plants. Together, they would eat before all walking to the bus stop so Henry could go to the Writer's Workshop and he and Emma could go to work. That he'd work hard on the Linetti case, have Simmons rib on him for the extra tabs he'd have open on his computer, and hear Assistant Chief Miller making her rounds. Then, they would come home, have dinner with Ritu and Sam and the kids, and finally watch a movie or play Diablo III until it was time for bed.

Instead, he had to prepare himself for the town where he'd been a slave. For seeing her, still unpunished. For feeling eyes on him, condemning him for the acts he'd committed under her rule.

He had become so ingrained in this life that the demons of his past hadn't fully come down on him. As lucky as he knew he was to have this life and family … there was still a part of him that felt he didn't deserve it, that he still had too much to atone for to deserve even a shred of happiness, let alone the bliss of true love thrice over.

He leaned down, taking the sheets with him, until he was eye level with Emma's stomach. A twist beneath skin showed a hand for the briefest moment, and he felt a spring of tears behind his eyes.
He would be strong, for her, for them. They were running right back into the danger, and that made him fear for his little family so much. It made him want to fight to stay in Manhattan, to stay with their friends and the department and their home and life.

On the other hand, he knew Emma wouldn't be able to live with herself if something happened to her parents, which she could have prevented. The Savior title was such a huge burden on her shoulders, one he hadn't seen since the first couple months of regaining their memories. He knew that she missed them every day, even if the flashes of hurt were covered as quickly as she could hide them.

And there was one more troubling aspect. If Captain Hook could leave Storybrooke … who else could? Were they really as safe as they assumed in New York?

He lightly traced over her belly, watching the rippling just beneath as the baby jutted towards him. As usual, he quickly counted the days in his head before pressing his lips to the skin. "Morning, my little girl," he whispered. "This is going to be a long, strange trip and we're going to be around a lot of evil things. But I'll keep you, your mommy, and your brother safe. I promise."

"Hey," a soft, hoarse murmur called from above.

He looked up. Emma was peeking at him through a half-lidded, sleepy gaze. Embarrassed, he pulled the comforter back up and drifted back to his pillow. "Hey."

Her brow furrowed and she sat up. "What's wrong?"

He huffed and leaned back up. He brushed a hand down her arm before shaking his head solemnly. "Do I have to list?"

He watched as her face firmed. "No. I don't even want to think about it right now." She leaned her head against his shoulder, then fumbled for her phone and sighed. "We can pretend to be asleep for two more hours, I think. Act like we won't be in Storybrooke this evening."

He used a thumb to trace a line across her bottom lip. "I wish pretending was easier."

She studied him with a careful gaze, her palm covering her belly thoughtfully. After a beat, she pressed softly, "you don't have to act like you don't talk to her. I hear you, you know. It's one of my favorite morning rituals now."

He offered a small smile and a shrug. He knew that she likely heard him on early mornings, had seen the smile that would quirk on her lips even as she feigned sleep.

She took his hand in hers and slid it across her stomach, letting their rings clink together a couple times before finally settling where their child was most active. "She's getting used to her daddy's voice. I like that." Her voice was low, like this was some great secret she was willing to share.

He smiled at their layered hands. "Henry likes talking to her, too. She'll know us all before she comes," he murmured. Henry tended to talk quietly to his sister mostly during the boring parts of the movies Graham and Emma chose.

Emma used a hand to press against his cheek. "And I love it. I love you," she said, leaning up to kiss him gently.

He chuckled against her lips, a soft breath of sound. "I love you. Whatever happens when we get to Storybrooke, we have that."

"Hmm," she said, and then kissed him a little deeper. "And usually I'm so good at distracting you
like this.” Her smile turned slightly wicked as she moved her leg over his, straddling him.

He groaned as she settled on top of him. "Need I remind you that we have a houseguest?"

She grinned and shifted closer. "We can be quiet. It'll get your mind off things," she suggested.

"Quiet. Sure. Not like we haven't been caught be three of our friends, including one that made fun of us for months because she was sleeping on our couch and heard us," Graham rasped, even as his hands settled on her hips.

She shrugged gracefully. "We'll have to book a room with Henry during our stay. This could be our last chance for a while. Then again, at this point I'm sure I'd find a way somehow."

His eyebrow raised in a sort of agreement. Her hormones had made way for some creativity in recent weeks. However, there were other things to consider at this point, like sharing a wall with the living room. "We shouldn't shove it in his face."

She stopped moving and looked down thoughtfully. "I get that. I do. But I meant it when I said we can be quiet. I need my husband right now because I'm … I need to be grounded, too."

He closed his eyes, not really surprised that she knew exactly what brought about his actions earlier. "Grounded or avoiding?" he asked finally, sliding his hands up her sides.

She shivered. "Both. Neither." She sighed and traced patterns along his chest. "I want to focus on us for a moment before we have to work to include everyone else in our lives."

It was the flash of vulnerability that crossed her features more than anything else that was making him give in. "A bit of normalcy before the abnormal?" He shifted back, just enough to be able to lean up and kiss her cheek tenderly.

She nodded, and her eyes shined with love as she tried to get closer. "And, you know, the new mattress doesn't squeak."

"Well, who could argue with that," Graham murmured before pulling a strap down her shoulder, followed closely by his lips.

She had a point, after all.
Storm

Chapter Summary

There’s a storm raging, and Emma is not the only one who worries.

Chapter Notes

Based off a prompt from gremma shoelace on FFnet. “Emma and Henry discuss the curse and Regina etc. after getting their memories back.” Majorly Swan Believer-based, with hints of gremma and hunted believer. They needed a moment.

The windows shuddered, the echoing boom of the late summer storm an overzealous punctuation to Emma’s sigh.

She turned in her bed, listening to the pounding of the rain. She ran her teeth over her lip once, twice before finally giving in and checking her phone once more.

No messages.

Emma grimaced and laid flat on her back. She rubbed her temples, trying to remind herself that no news wasn't bad news.

Suddenly, her bedroom door clicked open, and her heart thundered with anticipation.

She released a low breath when only Henry entered, his hair messy and his eyes droopy. He crawled into bed beside her, and curled into her carefully.

"Hey, kid," she murmured, then pushed back the dark tresses that got in her face. She pressed a kiss to the crown of his head. "Storm keeping you up?"

He shrugged as he buried his face in her neck. "Kinda."

She smiled slightly, feeling the tight coil of anticipation in her stomach begin to disperse somewhat. The closeness was familiar and soothing, and she knew it likely helped him as well. "You used to be scared of the thunder," she commented matter-of-factly.

He hesitated a long time before responding. "Yeah." Short and flat, just like before.

Emma's brow furrowed, and she pulled back a bit to look at his face. "What's up?"

His lashes flicked the tops of his cheeks, avoiding her eye. "It feels like how it used to be," he whispered, his tone almost unsure, betraying his words.

She nodded, and resting her palm on his cheek. "I know. But you take up a lot more room now than when you were two," she joked softly.
He gave a wavering smile in response, and Emma felt her chest tighten uncomfortably. He looked lost.

"Kid," she said gently, lovingly, as a way to reassure even though her heartbeat had increased again. "What is it?"

He swallowed. "It wasn't real."

It took her a moment to understand, and once she did she felt like she had been shot in the gut. Her eyes widened as a bright lash of pain ripped through her, panic climbing in response to his words. "Henry … do you mean … do you mean us?"

He sniffed and nodded. "When I got scared for real, there was no one. She … she didn't have time, I guess. I just had my nightlight and my books. That—that was real life."

"No, Henry," she said firmly. Her stomach tightened as she pictured her tiny kid, clutched in her arms, how scared and desperate for comfort he had been. How Regina could have ignored those big eyes and quivering chin … she would never understand that. Her head hurt thinking about it. "No. It was real. Both are."

A part of her, the deepest darkest part, questioned her own words. Was that life real? That life she spent with her son, with friends as close as family, all the struggles and accomplishments? A part of her insisted, yes, it had to be real, because she still had those friends, still had her degree and career.

But Henry … Henry who knew, Henry whose life was still tainted by those years in the never-ending cycle of Regina's curse … how could their life together be real when they knew the other side of it?

Henry released a tremulous breath that might have been a sob. "But —"

Emma's heart sank to hear the dejection in his voice. For him, she steeled herself. "Do you remember it?" Emma asked.

Henry looked up with wet eyes. "Yeah."

Emma stared down at him seriously, and pet back his hair. Suddenly, it was easy.

It had to be real. She knew that expression on his face, and not from the months knowing him in Storybrooke. She knew that look from when she comforted him after he first failed his science test, and when she insisted he get back on the bike after his skinned knees healed. She knew that look from their life together, and had learned how to comfort and love him the way he needed.

She nodded sharply. "Do you remember not just how it was, but how you felt?"

His eyes bounced across her face skittishly before finally nodding. "Yeah."

Emma smiled a little brokenly. "Then how can't it be real, too?"

He nodded hastily, and buried his head into her once more. Her arms went around him, pulling him close. "I love you, mom," he murmured.

"I love you, too, kid," she replied, kissing his head. Softer, she reiterated, "that's how I know."

Henry looked up with a small smile, but there was still worry attached to it. "Nothing can separate us, right?"
"Nothing," she vowed. "If curses and vortexes and demon-boys couldn't, what could?"

He looked away sharply, and her throat tightened once more. "But—"

"You know I'd fight for you. With everything in me, forever. Nothing will keep me away from you," she swore.

"I know," he said, a smile playing across his lips. His frown came back almost immediately. "But what about Graham?"

Graham. She had been able to push her worries for him back while comforting her son.

"I know he's your true love, and I know he loves us both, and I know he doesn't want to leave. But last time, he left. He didn't have a choice," Henry went on.

She bit down hard on her lip. Henry was voicing her worst fears for her boyfriend. "He has his heart back," she said hoarsely.

"I know," he replied quickly. "And Regina can't get to him again. But even you're worried for him, mom."

She grimaced. "Yeah, I'm worried for him," she said honestly. She didn't want to lie to him, not ever again. "We don't know how he came back, so I'm worried. His job is dangerous, so I'm worried. But I can't let the worry rule me."

"You're not telling me not to worry," he murmured curiously.

She chuckled dryly. "No, I'm not. I can't ask you not to worry when I've been glued to my phone ever since he was called in. But he's back, and he's with us. That should count for something."

Henry gave a half smile. "Maybe—never mind," he said, turning away.

A flash of light lit him briefly and Emma leaned over his form curiously. "Maybe what?"

He looked up. "Sometimes I'm worried he won't come back when he goes to his apartment. That he'll just … disappear, just as quick as he reappeared."

"I get that," Emma replied. She's had similar fears.

"Could we, maybe, ask him to live here?" he asked in a small voice.

She cocked her head to the side. "You'd want that?" she asked. She had recently been feeling the words on her tongue whenever he left at night, itching to invite him to stay. She had wanted Henry's permission first, and had been too anxious to broach the topic.

He nodded. "We said we should stick together. We should try to be together as much as possible, just in case."

"I don't want to ask him if you're just scared to lose someone else. If he were to move in, I want it to be because we all want to."

Henry's eyebrows rose. "I want him here," he said, his tone leaving no doubt. "In the other life … well, I knew him all of that life. And he was good to me, but we didn't get many chances to get closer. I like that I have the chance, now."

Emma smiled. "If you're sure …."
He grinned. "I'm sure."

Emma mirrored his grin, throwing an arm over him. "I think we should invite him over for breakfast tomorrow, then. Get him used to our Sunday mornings before we ask."

"Yeah," he breathed, tiredness filling his tone. "That sounds good."

A buzz from behind her shifted her focus, and she grabbed the phone off her nightstand. [Just got home], it read.

Emma chuckled softly, and rested her head on her son's. [We'll see], she replied. [Come to breakfast tomorrow.]
It's only on the third day after they returned, after finding the cage filled with gold thread, that Emma realized that she hadn't seen Neal at all.

It hadn't been a priority, not with everything else going on. She was dealing with a lot, all at once, so it was no surprise that her ex had been forgotten in the midst. However, when she finally realized his absence, she recognized how suspicious it was. By now, everyone knew they were back in town. More importantly, everyone knew that Henry was there.

So, where was Neal?

Emma leaned her head against her hand, sighing deeply. She set aside a stack of papers and looked back to the white board that dwarfed the far left wall. It was covered in writing, from David's neat hand, to Graham's sharp lines. Question marks blanketed every statement. There were still no leads to speak of, and each piece only added a new branch to each mystery.

Suddenly she felt hands on the back of her neck and she relaxed immediately, letting the comfort soak into her skin. "This is frustrating," she said simply.

Graham leaned his chin on her head as he continued working on the knots in her muscles. "Dead ends, everywhere. I don't get it. Whoever it is, they are really waiting to make their first move."
"Unless they're already making it," she grumbled darkly.

He nodded. "If that's the case, then we're several steps behind. Not a good place to be right now."

"Agreed," she muttered.

"The curse is strange," Graham murmured with a shake of his head. "Just a year of forgotten memories, but everything else in place? What would that serve?"

She rocked her head back and stared at the ceiling. "Something important must have happened in that time. It couldn't have been … couldn't have been her that cast the curse. Not with Mary Margaret and David still together."

He huffed a sigh and tilted her face so he could press a chaste kiss onto her jaw. She shivered pleasantly; he hadn't shaved yet, and the stubble that scratched against her was nostalgic. She made a mental note to hide his razor for the next couple days. "Yeah," he agreed, his voice barely audible.

She closed her eyes, concentrating on the feel of his pulse in his neck thumping steadily against her shoulder. It was deceptively mellowed, and from the corner of her eye she tried to gauge his reaction. Being so near Regina had been difficult for her, especially with her mother working so hard to keep the woman at her side. She can only imagine how difficult it all was for Graham. She gave herself a mental shake, and refocused on their conundrum.

"So we need to go over the other options. Someone that had access to magic, and the spell. Someone who's missing a loved one," he stated, his fingers moving to once more massage her neck.

"'The heart of the thing you love most,'" Emma quoted as she brushed her hands over Henry's story book. Numbness was settling over her as her thoughts sharply centered.

"Exactly. We need to work backward, and quick. Picking up clues like this has been fruitless."

Emma rolled her neck deeper into his touch, staring blankly at the ceiling above her. "And we know Gold is alive. And that Neal is missing." She's almost surprised when the words slip out of her mouth, so clinical and cold. The thought had come to her so suddenly, and idea gnawed through her nerves. But the pieces fit a little too neatly. That Gold could have killed his son after dying to save him … it didn't seem to add up. What else could she believe, though? Nothing else made sense.

Graham swallowed. "We don't know if that's connected," he said, but his voice wasn't as sure.

"If it was true … oh, God, Henry," she thought. The lights above them flickered, and she took a deep breath inwards to calm herself as she felt veins sparking.

His eyes locked on the electrical units before carefully setting back on to her.

"Sorry," she muttered.

He shook his head, waving off her apology. "We figured it would be more here."

Her magic only rarely showed up in New York. There had been a little more frequency after they conceived, but usually it made itself known in tiny, barely noticeable ways. Her magic hadn't exactly gone haywire since their entrance into Storybrooke, but no more was it inconspicuous.

They had talked about it when it had first appeared, and now she barely noticed the tremor that
bounced in his jaw as he saw it.

"If I could control it –"

"I know. And we'll work on that. But hiding from it will do none of us any good," he reminded before bending to kiss her sweetly. His arms surrounded her, soothingly brushing his hands over her forearms and then cradling her stomach. She feels herself sink into the embrace, the soft reassurance coursing through her.

*If I had known, I wouldn't have gone near you.* Neal's words echoed back at her, as did the pang that had accompanied them at the time. It was fainter now, less powerful than it had been when she first realized the man that fathered her son hated what she was. The fact that the man next to her, who had been abused for so long by magic, worked to reassure *her* about her power … that sent a thrum of contentment through her whole body. Her soul felt lighter in knowing that her husband's feelings didn't change because of it. Those old wounds left by her first love were definitely healing up from the trust that colored this relationship.

A small smile crossed his handsome face before he buried it in her neck, and she knew he could see the relief in her. "Your mom's meeting with the midwife again today. Are you going to join her?"

She shook her head immediately. She didn't like the way the redhead looked at her belly, how she had immediately known the significance of their child. It sent shivers up her spine just thinking about it. There was just something that felt … off. "David was thinking of looking for Gold. We should probably focus on that."

"And Belle?" he asked.

She sighed. "She's on edge since we found the cage. I'd have you go calm her down, but I don't want Henry alone right now."

"You're right. But if it's someone targeting Gold, then they might go after Belle." Emma heard the hard edge in his voice, the worry for the one person that he could talk to during his enslavement.

She shrugged, her teeth running along her lip as her mind skipped over possibilities. "Red? Maybe she's available."

Graham brushed a hand over his chin. "Hook's looking for something to do."

Emma winced. "I don't know. They're not exactly two people I'd stick together just yet."

Graham frowned. "Do I want to ask why?"

She chuckled mirthlessly with a shake of her head. "Probably not today. Let's call Red to see if she's able. If not, maybe I can convince her to tag along with me and David. If she's a target, I don't want her with you and Henry."

Graham grimaced, and she watched the concern pass over him once again. "Let's hope it doesn't come to that."

"Hey," she said softly. She pressed her hand onto his jaw. "She'll be all right. As long as we work together, we'll all be safe."

He laughed in a short huff of breath. "Is that optimism I hear?"

Emma rolled her eyes. "Blame your kid. He's messing with my realism."
A grin stretched across his features. "You really think I'm the optimist in this family?"

"Maybe Henry's influencing me," she grumbled good-naturedly.

Before he could respond, the phone of the table chimed. She sighed and picked it up, holding up a finger to her husband. "Hello?"

"Emma? It's Belle. We have a development."

XX

She walked down the hall like her legs were filled with lead, her arms crossed in front of her stomach self-consciously. She didn't know why the idea of seeing Neal made her feel like that young girl again, all the strength and confidence she had built in the last thirteen years fleeing her at just the thought. She braced herself, tangling her fingers in the shoelace on her wrist, before finally making her way into the room.

"Neal," she said in greeting. Even on the stark white of the hospital bed and covered in wires, he looked the same. He appeared mostly uninjured, though Belle had mentioned him being weak when he broke into Gold's shop that morning.

A small smile turned the corner of his lips. "Hey, Emma."

The anticipation in his voice was uncomfortable; she felt as on edge as she did when they had first returned from Neverland, like he expected her to fall back into the same routine they had when she was sixteen. A part of her wished she had taken Graham with her, so she didn't feel so vulnerable. Another part was relieved to finally be able to part with him and his feelings on her own terms. She tightened her arms around herself before nodding. "We've been looking for you."

He nodded. "So I heard."

She swallowed. "I expected you sooner. With Henry around, I mean."

A dark look passed his face. "I'm sorry, I didn't know. I don't really know what happened. One day, I'm watching the yellow bug pass the town line, the next I'm wandering around the forest back in Storybrooke." His eyes flicked down her body. "And apparently there's been a whole lot going on."

She looked down, realizing that she had pulled her shirt tighter around herself in the process of curling inward, and her swollen stomach was as prominent as the ring on her finger. "I'd say so," she murmured. "But first, I need to tell you that we think Gold is alive."


Emma held out a hand to stop him. "Take it easy. They still don't know why you were in so much pain when you were brought in."

Neal huffed. "I'm fine."

She glanced away, feeling her ire rise at his impatient tone. "Whatever. We found a room and there was gold thread. Unless you know someone else with that talent, your dad has somehow
managed to resurrect himself." She paused thoughtfully. "And he wouldn't be the only one to manage it. But that's all we know right now."

"Magic," he spat bitterly. "But even he used to be fond of the saying 'dead is dead.' There has to be another explanation."

She sighed. "Maybe there's someone else that knows, but I don't think so. Whoever has him is going through pretty great lengths to keep him, and the reasons for this curse, hidden."

He shook his head, his jaw tight. "You said he's not the only one?" he finally asked.

She nodded, and her teeth grazed her bottom lip. "Yeah. My—my husband. He's from here, too. He died in Storybrooke, about four months before Gold found you. He's here, he's alive, and he's … well, normal," she murmured, her hand resting on top of her stomach gently.

His focus pulled downward. He was silent a long moment. "A kid, huh?"

She smiled despite herself. "Yeah." She looked up, meeting his eye seriously to make sure she got her next point across. "I'm happy."

He gave a stiff smile in return, folding his hands together. "I think back … leaving you back then. If I had known about Henry—"

"You would have stayed?" she asked incredulously. She shook her head, feeling frustration pull at her. "Then we really wouldn't have worked, Neal, if that was the one thing that could have made you stay." She hesitated, trying to wrap her mind around his words, the implications thrumming in her head. "Things would have ended that much worse. You said it: I wasn't enough. Not for you to stay."

His face tightened. "I—your magic, my dad—"

"I get it," she said sharply. She didn't want to hear the excuses again, the same words that made her feel less and less each time. "It may have been better for Henry, I don't know. You were still a wanted thief, I was still young, and we weren't exactly living the safest life. Getting away from Regina, away from this town, though … his life would have been more normal. And I don't doubt that you would have loved him. But we would have never worked. I mean, even ignoring that, I was sixteen. I had been alone so long, and you were the first person I ever—"

She felt an annoying cloy of tears interrupt her speech, the burst of her emotion casting aside the reason she had been speaking with before. She had been so young, so willing to believe that what they had was love, so desperate to belong somewhere, to someone. And there was that older man, who gave her attention and was attracted to her, who she thought loved her (I wanted to love you, but I was afraid) ….

Her eyes squeezed shut, and she felt a sudden fluttering within her. She drew in a deep breath, letting the feeling of her baby calm her nerves back down. She had still gotten Henry; she had still gotten true love. Her life had still managed to fall into place.

But the scars of that time still played a factor for her, in both lives.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

She laughed lightly, surprised to find herself put at ease. This was the first time she'd heard him say it, when it hadn't been accompanied by a million excuses; pulling the blame on her destiny, easing the blame from himself. She could hear the sincerity; it was an honest apology.
It was a start.

"Thank you," she said after a beat. Maybe, finally, there would be closure. Maybe, then, they could become friends.

"But you're—you're good now. You found Tallahassee," he said, his tone implying a question.

She winced and glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. "It's not Tallahassee." She saw something briefly pass over his face, something like hope, and she grabbed his arm, careful to correct him. "Tallahassee was a dream. A good one. But it was something that wasn't ever going to be real. What I have, not only is it real," she hesitated, thinking about her life.

She pictured Emilia laughing so hard wine came out her nose, of Maggie with her arms full of groceries showing up at her Boston apartment, of Gia furiously arguing with the director of the Anderson school to get her kid in, of Ritu holding her hair back with one hand and calling the doctor with the other, of Andie with a bright smile and an open ear behind the bar.

She pictured Henry, diving into her arms after school, looking up at her as if she were the world. Of Graham, pulling her close at night, feeling the love seep off of him, curling deep into her soul. Of their baby, growing and loved by all three, and the excitement brewing for his entrance into the world.

A soft, slow grin covered her face. "It's more than I could have asked for," she finished tenderly.

He looked disappointed, in a way, but offered a smile. "I'm glad, Emma." He scratched his ear. "I mean it."

She didn't want to offer any platitudes back, no empty words about what she speculated his life would be. Instead, she simply nodded. Another movement made her catch sight of his hand, a strange scarring focusing her attention. "What the hell is that?"

"That's strange," she murmured. She rummaged through her purse to find her phone. She took a quick snap of the strange insignia that appeared to be burned into his flesh. "Does it hurt?"

He shook his head. "No." He brushed a thumb over the skin.

"Belle would know what it is," she mused, quickly composing a message to the brunette.

"It will be good to see everyone again," he said with a sigh.

She cocked her head to the side. "Would you like to see Henry?"

His eyes changed, brightening in a way. "Yes," he answered simply, eagerly.

She rose. "I think him and Graham are still at Granny's—"

"I could go for some food," Neal said, pivoting on the bed.

She frowned. "Whale hasn't cleared you yet."

"And since when am I a rule follower?" he asked, flashing a cocky grin. "I want to see my son."

She sighed, knowing it would be futile to argue. Neal wouldn't care that it would only be a matter of fifteen or so minutes to get Henry over.
She walked next to him, watching him carefully for signs of fatigue as they entered the elevator. "There's a couple things we should probably talk about, with Henry."

"Oh, yeah?" he asked, distracted.

She nodded. She wasn't sure how to broach this with him. The Henry that grew up with her knew that he sent her to jail. Henry now knew Neal's reasoning, but it still made him less than enthusiastic regarding him. How she could tell Neal that a year meant that Henry's feelings had tempered from the enthusiastic, eager boy was a bit daunting.

The doors slid open before she could speak, though, and Neal darted out. She huffed, reaching out to stop him before he could go further without her explaining.

"Dad."

Two things occurred to Emma as soon as the word was spoken. The first was Neal. The voice was unmistakably Henry, and the fact changed the whole of Neal's face. He looked ecstatic, softened, filled with pride.

But Emma recognized the tone her son was using. It wasn't in greeting, not in excitement. It was mild, the word extended, slightly whiny … the tone he used when he was trying to get Graham to do something.

"I don't know how gullible you think I am in Storybrooke, kid. Fifteen and a half, then you can drive with me or your mom." Her husband's humored response confirmed Emma's thoughts, and her heart sank.

She had forgotten that other piece. The one that had warmed her heart so many times when he had said it before, now coiled sympathy deep in her belly. For Henry, Graham was Dad in basically every sense … even legally. He had earned that title, again and again, and Henry used it freely.

Emma and Neal turned the corner at the same time, as she watched the other pair walk into the gift shop, Graham's arm locking Henry into a playful headlock to the boy's clear amusement. She studied Neal's frozen face, as a multitude of emotion crossed it. Shock, disbelief, disappointment … then the slow burn of anger before he turned to her sharply.

"What was that?" he demanded.

She sighed and squeezed her eyes shut. "It's been a long time, Neal. We didn't think we'd ever see you again."

He looked stricken. "You didn't have faith? I told you. I told you it wouldn't be the last time we saw each other."

"You've broken promises before," she countered, then winced at her own words. Apparently, the hurt hadn't been fully resolved, and her hormone-quickened reactions weren't helpful in dealing with it. "I'm sorry, that wasn't fair."

He fumed, and shoved his hands in the air. "So, because I made one mistake, you're letting another guy take over my role in my kid's life?"

She shook her head angrily. "One mistake? Is that really all you can …," she trailed off, balling her hands into fists. Her veins buzzed with magic, and she drove the instinct back as much as she could. Carefully, she ignored his words for now, knowing that wasn't the point. "He's not taking over your role. He knew Henry longer than either of us in that first life. He loves him. And when we got married, Graham asked Henry if he could adopt him. Henry agreed. Legally,
Graham is his father."

"I am his father," he hissed.

She took a breath. "Biologically, yes. But what I found out through the lawyers is that you haven't had a legal claim on Henry since 30 days after he was born. I'm sure that Henry will welcome you back into his life. And I'm sure he'll call you 'dad.' But you can't demand anything, okay? We can find some way to get legal visitation on the books if that makes you happy, or we can work something out between us all."

"This is bullshit," he muttered thickly. He paced the width of the hallway, hands fisted against his skull.

"I know it's a shock," she said cautiously.

"A shock? You think that's all this is? To see you here, with your perfect life, and my kid calling someone else dad?" he demanded.

She looked away as the lighting brightened then snapped off above them. This was the second time in as many days that someone who was supposed to support her instead accused her of not only having a perfect life, but that she should feel ashamed because of it. "My life is not an attack on you," she said stiffly, nails digging into her skin.

He sneered. "When you don't prepare me, and shove this fact in my face? Then, I think it kind of is."

She narrowed her eyes, looking up with a dark expression. "I am not shoving this in your face. I was trying to prepare you for it, if you can think back for two seconds." She blinked back a few tears as she straightened her spine. "I won't be sorry that Henry thinks of Graham as a father. He deserves every bit of love this world wants to offer him. So, please, please … just don't hold this against Henry. Accept it now, because I can't have you make him feel guilty about this."

"You want me to just ignore everything so you can feel better about this?" he asked incredulously.

"No," she hissed. "I want you to understand where I'm coming from so you don't give Henry a complex."

His jaw tightened, his face puckering. "I can't deal with this right now."

"Neal—"

"No, Emma, if you want me to act like this is okay, then I can't do this right now," he said firmly. "I'm leaving. I'll start a search for my father."

His voice was low, rough, and with a thread of anger that she could still plainly hear. A part of her wanted to remind him that Henry would only be here to see him, but another understood. He needed time to come to grip with this. "Fine. Don't be gone too long."

He waved her off, the scarring prominent once more as he stalked off in the direction of the exit.

She was suddenly filled with an immediate sense of dread as she watched him leave, that she would never again see him like this. A panic climbed up her, and she opened her mouth to call to him, to stop him, to Neal, don't make me do it—

"Hey."
She sagged in relief to hear the familiar tones.

"Mom!"

She turned, feeling her son wrap his arms around her. She forced a smile and looked over the flowers that Henry held. A wash of frustration in Neal covered her. Henry cared so much, about all of them. She made sure her façade didn't slip as she brushed back his hair. "Those are pretty. Neal's already left AMA, though. We'll have to save them for when he gets home."

Henry frowned. "Oh. I thought I'd be able to see him again."

Her heart tugged at the disappointment in her son's voice. "You'll get to see him soon," she soothed.

But again, that something whispered at the back of her mind. _No, he won't._

Graham's brow was furrowed. He leaned forward, pressing a kiss to her temple. As he lingered there, an "everything okay?" was breathed against her ear.

She nodded with a jerk. "It'll be fine," she said, more to herself than her husband.

A shadow crossed his face, an innate protectiveness she had glimpsed several times before. She knew he was thinking the worst, of the fight that occurred that Graham had anticipated. His dark blue eyes were studying her, easily finding the cracks in her veneer. "We'll talk later," he promised, then reached down to entwine their fingers.

"Do you think my father will be able to leave town once the curse is broken?" Henry asked curiously.

"I—" she paused, considering. "I don't actually know."

Henry shrugged. "I guess we can ask Mr. Gold once we find him, right?"

"Right," she said uncertainly.

"If Mr. Gold knows, Henry," Graham countered. "But it wouldn't be too far-fetched, I don't think."

She started to nod, even though the feeling was creeping back up her spine, when her phone buzzed against her. She picked it up, noting David's information on the screen. "David, what's up?"

"Emma? I'm at the edge of the woods, near the hospital. I just saw Gold."
Chapter Summary

Emma wonders if the past is doomed to repeat itself, and if she will ever be prepared for that sort of thing.

Chapter Notes

Note: Set after Storm, but before Emma’s birthday. Skagengirl’s prompts: “One day Graham clutches his chest in pain” and “Graham and Emma have a huge a fight that almost leads to them breaking up.” Also incorporates BossLady’s "them talking about Emma's fears about Graham perhaps being force to leave her and Henry again." Somehow this turned from a fight to side character backstory to Emma development. IDEK, guys. It exploded on me. It’s not exactly the fluffy NY scenes you all have come to expect.

**

“Did I lose you?”

Graham looked up from the papers to meet Emma’s eye. His body shivered, and the room was slowly coming back to center. He worked on focusing back on the task at hand, pulling his mind out of the murkiness. “What?”

Emma’s eyebrow arched. “Did I lose you?” she repeated. Her lips quirked up. “You look like you’re about to fall asleep.”

“No. ‘Course not.” He swallowed, trying to pull back from the strange wave of nausea. He coughed a couple times, trying to hold back the worst of it. “Wouldn’t want you to have to work on this alone.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “I don’t need your help, detective. You just offered it.” She stretched like a cat, limbs extending and joints popping as she pushed away another copy of the arrest report. She leaned over, resting her head against his shoulder. “He may have started in your department, but he’s my case, now.”

He chuckled, then grimaced. A burning tightened across his chest from the action, and he rubbed it absently. “For the time being,” he managed to tease.

Emma snorted. She fit well into the crook of his arm, comfortable as she flipped through the report. Graham couldn’t focus on his own, the pen in his hand held loosely as he tried to bite down the strange symptoms cropping up. The hair on his scalp felt too hot, sweat beading at his temples.

He looked down, the letters blurring. His throat was dry, but his stomach protested against even the thought of water.
Emma sighed, her pen scrawling loudly against the paper. “Where’s the main file?”

He glanced around. “I’ll go find it,” he said. Carefully, he extracted himself from her. He rose, walking to the kitchen to where he vaguely remembers dropping the folder. His gait weakened, and he stumbled into the adjacent room, his vision fogging grey and black for a moment. Graham grasped the countertop, swallowing hard. The dizziness passed less quickly than last time, but finally he managed to steady his spinning head.

“Graham?”

He looked up, twisting a smile on his face. “Hey. Found the file,” he stated, picking it up to brandish in front of her.

Emma’s face was set on a frown, her eyes concerned. “You okay?”

“Me?” he asked. His palm rubbed against his chest, where the tightness in his lungs was worst. “Fine.”

Her eyes dropped to where his hand was working, fear flashing in those sea-colored depths.

“Oh,” he remarked, his hand dropping as if burned. He stepped to her a couple paces. “No, that’s—“

Before he could get the words out, his body protested the movement. His legs felt jellied, weak as they collapsed under him.

Emma was frozen in front of him, the fear transforming into outright horror. He couldn’t manage to reassure her as his eyes rolled back, black encroaching his vision until it enveloped him completely.

**

He came back into consciousness to the sound of steady beats.

His head was throbbing, like the last time Simmons and McNab had challenged him to a drinking contest. The rest was different, though. His throat felt raw and scratchy, his lungs burning as he inhaled. He blinked to push back the fuzz of the headache and aching tiredness, and began to lean up.

“Get back down.”

He looked to his right, finding Emma beside him. A Styrofoam cup was grasped between her white-knuckled hands, her eyes red and dry. Her voice was rough like sandpaper, grainy and tight.

His smile was less forced than it could have been at the sight of her, given his current state. “You get a number off that bus?”

She frowned deeply. “You’re an idiot,” she bit out. She crushed the cup in her hand and tossed it in the waste bin. She crossed her arms in front of her, staring at the ground with a blank expression.

He switched tactics, burying any further attempts at humor. He threw his head against the pillow, before finally getting his bearings. An IV was in the back of his hand, linked to
a bag of clear fluid. His index finger was clamped with a probe, the wires lifting upwards to a monitor beeping out his vitals. His hand tugged over his face tiredly. “What happened?”

She brushed her hands over her arms like she was warding off a chill. “Upper respiratory virus, is what they said. But you’re the idiot that hasn’t been drinking any fluids, so you passed out.”

He winced. “Oh,” he said simply.

Her cool hands came down on his forehead, and he sighed pleasantly at the feel. “Still feverish,” she murmured. But then she backed off, pacing to the window as quick as she was able.

She was folded into herself, and defensiveness was reading throughout her entire stance. She was trembling, just barely but enough that he could catch it. She looked sallow and grey in the bleached-out fluorescent light.

“Em?”

She shook her head. “I can’t do this.”

His brow furrowed. “Do what?”

She gestured wildly between them. “This! I can’t—I can’t see—“ she paused, turning away. A beat passed, tensely. “I don’t want to do this anymore.”

He watched her carefully. “I’ll drink more water, then.”

“No,” she said, and when she faced him her eyes were flashing. “No, they said you would have been feeling this for days and you said nothing. You didn’t tell anyone, you didn’t complain, you just – you just collapsed on my kitchen floor and you didn’t let me know—“

Her breath hitched, a fist clenched against her mouth before her features pulled once again into a blank mask.

“Our kitchen floor,” he corrected softly. He watched her in alarm as she looked sharply away, finally understanding. “Emma, don’t—“

“No,” she said firmly. “No more. I can’t, I can’t ….”

… go through that again.

The end of her sentence hung heavy between them, unsaid but clear all the same. The space between them seemed a chasm, and he was leashed to medical equipment and illness while she was drifting away. “It didn’t seem serious,” he murmured. “I’m sorry.”

“It didn’t seem serious?” she asked incredulously. “Graham, you were so feverish and dehydrated that you passed out. You were acting strange all night, and you never said anything about it. You were clutching your heart, and then you collapsed, and it was … it was ….”

His hand sought out his heart, beating steadily in time with the machine pulsing away. He scrambled for a way to reassure her. “It’s fine. It wasn’t ever that, I swear.”

Tears glassed her gaze before they were blinked away, just as quickly as they appeared. “What about next time? What if something goes wrong again?”
He dropped his gaze to the blankets, focusing on the scratchy feel of the cheap fabric. “I wasn’t exactly raised to mention when things don’t feel right,” he said truthfully. “The exact opposite, actually.”

He had had to be self-sufficient in the other world; it had been required for his survival. His brothers may have instinctively knew about injury and illness, and they only helped when it was truly needed. He never went about asking for help in the Enchanted Forest, even less so after he was recruited. If you told someone, it left you vulnerable. It was easier to hide the weaknesses and figure them out alone.

In Storybrooke, he had been no better. Not that the recycled days left him with sickness, but isolation was indeed prevalent. And on that last day, his fever had been blatantly ignored even around Emma.

She blinked hard, then nodded once. “I’m going to go. I’ll get your things sent back to you.”

His eyes widened as his stomach dropped. “You’re really going to—“

“I’ll see you,” she said firmly, cutting him off. Her heels clicked loudly as she walked out, tension stiffening her body into a steel rail as she took a wide berth away from the bed. His face flushed with annoyed heat to see it.

“What’s the point?” he called out after her.

She paused in the doorway, her nails digging into the frame. A flash of something crossed her face, a slight twinge in her veneer. It was gone before he could name it. “Do I even get a say in this?” he called out after her.

She paused in the doorway, her nails digging into the frame. A flash of something crossed her face, a slight twinge in her veneer. It was gone before he could name it. “What’s the point?” she bit out.

He saw red for a moment, a feeling of both strong anger and strong fear mixing in his gut. It slashed through him even more than the illness boiling inside him. That she would give up this easily, over something so inane, was paralyzing. A creep of insecurity, in the deepest layer of him, ripped wide open at the callous words.

*Not enough to fight for.*

He had *never* been enough to fight for. Not for his parents, leaving him when he was too young to be alone with no explanation or memory to leave attached to him. Not for the townspeople, the ones he kept fed through winter turning a blind eye whenever he was attacked. Not for the royals, leaving him in Regina’s clutches after he had saved them both, even after they captured her.

He remembered the hollow feeling that *could* have been anger when Regina reentered the palace after her imprisonment, the knot of *almost* emotion that spread through his stomach at the sight. That was the day that had solidified how expendable he was, no matter how hard he fought to be more.

But this was *Emma.*

Emma had made him feel like he mattered. Emma had cared, had comforted, had that shining look whenever their eyes met. Together with him, they had magic enough to break through curses. Emma just weeks ago had turned bright eyes to him, clutching Henry’s shoulder as he beamed, asking him to live with them as a family. Emma loved him, and had shown that time and time again through words and actions. Emma was his family, her along with Henry, and he couldn’t let them slip through his fingers over something like this.
If she wouldn’t fight, it meant that he had truly terrified her.

If she wouldn’t fight, he would.

He attempted to rise, the sting of the IV and the returning vertigo the only thing stopping him. He wanted to rip the tubing from his veins, to storm after her, to press his lips against hers and remind her what they had, to *are you really going to stop us over this*.

But she was gone before he could even manage to get his body to catch up with his mind. His jaw clenched as he thought firmly to himself, *she just needs some time*. He was nothing if not patient. If he had to chip those walls back down stone by stone, he was up to the task.

They were worth it.

**

Emma tried to slow her breathing once she had made it down the hallway. Her throat and eyes burned, and her heart was wrenching in the throes of what had just happened.

She didn’t need this in her life. She didn’t need people who hid things from her, leaving her raw and open to things she could have prepared for. She didn’t need the flashbacks of Graham collapsing in her arms, of her furious shaking, of him never waking up. She didn’t need the things she wanted, cared about, ripped out of her grip without any warning.

Not again.

She didn’t need Graham.

She leaned against the wall, trying to temper the quelling storm within her. Her chest heaved, a panicky feeling climbing up her as she tried to focus her thoughts. It would be better this way. She could determine when they ended, rather than fate taking the choice from her. *She* had the control. She could sever the ties.

Her fingers played with the literal ties along her wrist, the shoelace that still bore down against her skin. It felt hot and itchy, reminding her that she hadn’t been able to be rid of him even when he was dead. She stared at it a long moment. The smooth brown cord with its catches and grooves so carefully memorized had been a source of comfort for the six months after he died.

She played with the closure, toying with the idea of yanking the knot, letting the leather fall in a heap along the yellowed tile, letting it be swept up by some hospital janitor and tossed carelessly into the trash. She pictured it happening, and a tear slipped out from her careful mask. Could she do it? Could she remove every piece of him, knowing what they had? Knowing that he was breathing and real and alive mere rooms away?

“Mom!”

She looked up, forcing a smile on her face at the sight of her son. “There you are.”

He barreled into her, and she hugged him tight. She was stung with the idea that his eyes were filled with pained tears. “Is he okay?”

She felt her resolve harden at the sight. Henry had been *devastated* when Graham died. She couldn’t let him go through that again. It was for the best. “He’s fine. It wasn’t his … his —” She took a deep breath, steeling herself. “It wasn’t his heart. He’s just got a virus. You can say a quick hi, but you shouldn’t get too close, okay?”
Shouldn’t get too close had an unwitting double meaning, and she frowned as Henry raced to the room. She brushed her hands over her arms. Henry would understand, wouldn’t he? He’d lived without him the same length of time she did; he’d been fine. She remembered how he had shook in her arms, whispering his fears for Graham, his wishes to be together, and her heart physically aches.

“You look a little shook up. You okay?”

She glanced up, meeting Emilia’s concerned gaze. She forced a smile. “Yeah. Yeah, thank you, Emilia. I appreciate you taking Henry down here,” she said.

It was strange; of all her New York friends, she and Emilia were probably the least close. Ritu was her neighbor, Gia a friend of a friend of Maggie’s and her champion in terms of Anderson society, and Emma had been the one to bring Andie into the fold. But Emilia should have been a close confidant, being the closest in age and having also been a single teenage mother (until she had married her son’s surgeon, that was). Still, they had never managed to be much more than distant friends.

Emilia’s concern didn’t waver at Emma’s brush-off, however, and she clasped a hand against her shoulder. “You look like my dad when Michael was first in the hospital. Is Graham really okay?”

She nodded, tempering the flame of fear that ate through her gut as she pictured his fall once more. It was easily replaced with anger. “His own fault,” she bit out. “He’s sick, and dehydrated himself so much he collapsed.”

Emilia shook her head. “You don’t look like that’s all, though. Did they find … something?” she asked worriedly, her face masking with empathy.

“No, God, no,” she answered quickly. Emma stared up at her a long moment. Something about her concern, her warm presence, made her willing to speak up. “We broke up,” she said simply, though her body shook as it was finally voiced.

Her eyebrows shot to her hairline. “What? When?”

Emma sighed, feeling her soul crushed down at the thought. “Just now. I can’t be with someone like that.”

Her face twisted. “Someone who gets sick?”

Emma winced, knowing she likely hit a nerve. Michael had been in and out of the hospital since he was born. “No, not like that. Someone who …,” she trailed off, suddenly unable to speak past the sudden ball of nerves in her throat. She blinked rapidly. “I can’t—“

Her hand gently touched her shoulder once more, and she guided her to the cadre of empty chairs in the waiting area. Once Emma had half collapsed in the seat, Emilia pulled out a water bottle from her purse. Emma took it with a wry smile; something about her preparedness reminded her of Mary Margaret a little.

“Who did you lose?”

Emma looked up. The phrase was so calm, so sure. She knew she couldn’t go into explaining it to her. She couldn’t exactly explain about the time Graham had collapsed in her arms, his eyes shutting, and his chest no longer rising and sinking, his heart no longer echoing along her palm. Couldn’t explain the funeral that she had sat outside of, the misty grey morning
that Graham was buried in a small plot just along the tree line of a forest that didn’t exist on any map. It was difficult enough knowing about both lives; having to share the knowledge with people who didn’t believe in magic was unfathomable.

Instead, Emma blew out a breath. “Who haven’t I lost?” she said hollowly.

Emilia smiled tentatively. “Henry.”

Her eyes snapped to Emilia’s soft ones. “What?”

“You haven’t lost Henry,” she repeated. “And I know from experience that you can still have your child and fear every day that you will lose them. But that doesn’t stop you from loving them, not for one minute.”

“Of course not,” Emma murmured. She had tried, but she couldn’t tell Emilia that. When her face had tucked away into the hospital pillow, burying any sight of him … she had tried not to care.

“I tried,” Emilia whispered.

Emma looked up at her sharply. “What?”

She smiled, but this time it was a little broken. “Michael was born, and everyone in that room knew something was wrong. Ever since that day, I have had to watch him fight. Now, it’s fighting to physically be on the same level as everyone else. Then, it was fighting to live. I thought I could lose him at any moment in the beginning. So I tried. I tried not to love him.”

Emma watched her steadily, finding the truth in her words. There was strength even behind the vulnerability, one she couldn’t help admiring. “I know what that is,” she admitted.

Emilia nodded. “Doesn’t work, though. He fought his way into my heart, regardless. And if I had … if I had lost him, it wouldn’t have been any different to losing him now. It would be the end of my world, either way.”

Emma turned her face away, trying to fight the images the other woman was stirring. “What’s your point?”

She sighed. “Jason is not Michael. But when Jason had his accident, when I almost lost him, I realized that there was more than one person that could make me feel like that: make me feel like my world was collapsing. It wasn’t as strong as my fear for my baby, but it was strong enough to have me question everything. It made me realize how much I love him. And having him safe and healthy and with me is worth that fear.”

Emma swallowed. “What if I can’t get passed the fear?”

“You did for Henry,” she said with a shrug. “You realize later how much easier it is to let people in once you’ve done it once before.”

Emma bit down at her lip, realizing that she agreed. Once she had let Henry in, it was easier for others to squirm past her walls. Graham had been the first in that other life. In this life, it had been the social worker that took extra time with her case to the point that after her final visit, she showed up with groceries and her feet kicked up against the coffee table. Others had trickled in later, none so much as her boyfriend and family.

Suddenly, she had a thought. If she had another chance with her parents, would she be strong enough to take it?
A part of her screamed that it would be easy to take that leap, while the other half screamed in protest. Too hard. *Too hard.* Seeing Graham this evening on her tile had done that to her. She couldn’t help the absolute terror that seeing those memories replayed did to her soul.

“Hey.” Emma looked up, meeting blue eyes. “All I’m saying is don’t make your decision tonight. I’ve seen enough of you two to know that getting some sleep and some time is going to be necessary before you make any firm changes.”

“Maybe,” Emma murmured.

“Do you love him?” she asked firmly.

Emma pulled a hand through her hair, sharply nodding.

It may be easier to say to him in this life, but that didn’t make it any less hard to tell others. The heavy weight of their conversation required honesty at this moment, though. Her heart warmed and broke with the knowledge that she couldn’t deny it, *ever* deny it. It would be like denying a part of herself.

Her soul was heavy with the understanding that she was attached to him, in a way she had long ago promised herself she wouldn’t ever be attached to someone.

Her friend smiled. “Then you owe yourself that. If you decide to follow through, that’s one thing. Just … don’t let misery be your judge.”

Her brow furrowed at the choice in words. Hadn’t she read them somewhere before? She smoothed them out and cleared her throat. “You’re right. Sleep would do me good.”

Emilia patted her knee and rose. “Do you need me to take Henry for the rest of the night?”

She started to shake her head, then hesitated. “Maybe. He might be upset with me right now,” she said. She hadn’t thought of it before, but as close as Henry was to Graham, he might be upset with her for her rash action. “And I might need the time alone.”

“Whatever you need.”

**

Henry had looked at her strangely before leaving. She wasn’t sure how much Graham had told him, but apparently it was enough that she could identify a lingering hope in her son’s hazel gaze.

Going to bed in an empty apartment shouldn’t have been strange. Henry went on numerous sleepovers, and she encouraged them. She loved that he had such close friends. And Graham had only been living with them for a few short weeks.

But she found that she couldn’t sleep with the stretch of empty space next to her in bed. The sheets even smelled like him, that clean, open smell that twined with the barest hint of pine and spice.

She pulled his pillow to her chest and stared blankly at the wall for long stretches of time, until the sky turned orange and pink in the early light of dawn.
She didn’t have to guess where he would be. She knocked on the Simmons’ door before the sun had fully finished rising. It took a full five minutes before a bleary-looking Andie answered.

“Oh, you. Should have expected you this early,” she said. She grabbed her by the elbow, tugging her outside the door a little. Her dark eyes were serious. “You’re my friend, but he was my friend first. Don’t screw with his head.”

Emma wasn’t sure if she wanted to burst into laughter or tears. The fact that he had someone to stand up for him in the same way her friends would for her … when would either of them have this much support in that first life? She pressed her forehead into her hand. “I think I’ve got my own on straight, finally.”

Andie nodded. “Good. The apartment is small, so I’ll drag Leo out of bed and go to breakfast. Have at it. But if you get to making up, don’t have sex on my couch.”

Emma looked at her in bewilderment. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” she scoffed. “Please. I know you two. And if you look this miserable less than 24 hours later, I don’t have doubts about where this is going.”

She grimaced, pushing back the bit of ire that wouldn’t usually be the first reaction to her friend’s bluntness. Andie disappeared before she could say more, and quickly reappeared with a stumbling Leo, dragging him out the door muttering rapid Vietnamese that Leo wasn’t awake enough to respond to. Andie pushed her inside, the door clicking shut behind her back.

Emma lingered awkwardly in the foyer, before making the first couple steps into the apartment.

“You take enough time?”

She sighed, entering the living room completely. The coffee table was littered with tissues and meds and water. A deep green blanket was strewn across the dark grey couch that dominated the area, and he was right in its center. Graham’s eyes were red-rimmed, his voice still hoarse with sickness. “Graham, what I—“

“I know how you are, Em. You don’t have to explain it,” he said slowly. “You just need to tell me how hard I need to fight for us.”

She swallowed, her hands playing with the strap on her purse nervously. “I’m sorry I said there was no point.” She had played her own words over and over in her head the night before, and she truly realized how harsh it had been.

He nodded, but she could still see the flash of vulnerability in his cobalt eyes. She knew she had hit a weak spot, had seen how the phrase had sucker-punched him the night previous. “You wanted to give up. I think I know why, but I need to hear it.”

Emma felt her heart squeeze uncomfortably, her throat tightening in the threat of tears. “You didn’t prepare me for it,” she said.

His lashes flicked over his cheeks. “I know. I’m sorry. I really didn’t think I had let it go that far.” He looked up to meet her eye again. “But I can’t always prepare you, Emma.”

His honesty was cloying, sticking to those terrified parts of her. “I know,” she said numbly. It was the reason she feared his job, his absence, his every breath in the knowledge of how suddenly it stopped in that first life.
“What I need to know,” he reiterated. “Is how much that fear holds you back.”

“Enough,” she replied truthfully. “I’m trying not to let it. But I think it always will a little.”

He seemed to take that in, a deep breath expelled. “Okay,” he said, rolling the syllables into lengthening the word. “Does it stop us?”

She stepped forward, finally sitting next to him. She took his hand in hers, rolling it over to clasp their palms together. He was cautious, not curling his fingers inward to catch hers, but not stiffening either. “I’ve never been able to get rid of you from my mind. And I don’t think it would be any easier to lose you if we were apart than if we were together.” She raised her gaze, meeting his steadily. “I need you in my family.”

His mouth parted, and his head bowed. “You’re already that for me, Emma. You and Henry. Nothing would change that.”

She rubbed her temple with her free hand, unconsciously strengthening her grip with the other. “I know that,” she breathed. “I need what little is left of my family together. Will you stay?”

A smile quirked his lips. “Is that a real question?”

She chuckled, remembering his words from when they both received their memories. Just try and drag me from your side. “I’ll try to be better about …,” she waved her hand, trying to settle on the right word. “My issues. I don’t want to be afraid all the time.”

He leaned down, pressing a kiss to her knuckles. “I’ll try to help where I can. I’ll learn to tell people when I’m not feeling 100%,” he promised. “We both have our issues, Em. But I think we still work, even with them.”

She huffed a laugh. “Yeah. Guess so.” She shrugged. “I guess we just need to learn to … talk about it more. Not close ourselves off.”

“Not my strong point, but you’re right.” He sighed, his eyes bright as he considered her. “I love you.”

Emma smiled, finally relaxing somewhat. “I love you.”

He leaned back, his face finally reading somewhat mischievous. “I would have fought.”

She smirked. “I would have let you.”

She realized that she wasn’t kidding. She would have let him fight for her, for them, if she hadn’t been the one to give in first. Her resolve yesterday hadn’t been resolve at all.

She leaned forward, tucking her head under his chin, and let him surround her in his strong arms. “Andie won’t let us have make-up sex here,” she teased, even if the smell and heat of him was enough to comfort her in one simple move.

She felt more than saw him shrug. “Don’t want you getting sick, anyway,” he said. Then he feathered a kiss into her hairline. Then, softer, “I can’t lose you, either, you know.”

Her heart squeezed almost uncomfortably, and she nodded against his chest. His
heart beat steadily against her cheek. “Yeah,” she said. She looked up, studying his features. She blinked back a few tears and smiled. “But I’ve probably already caught your virus. So we’ll have to take care of each other.”

Graham brushed a thumb across her jaw, then dragged it over her bottom lip. “Teamwork,” he mumbled, then sealed their lips together.

When they parted, she rested her palm against his cheek. “Let’s go home.”

He grinned, a beaming smile stretched wide across his face. “Yeah. Home.” His fingers played along the lace at her wrist. “I think there’s some soup in the cabinets, we got the meds here to take. Even got some time off work. Time to heal.”

She bit her lip, then kissed him again. “Plenty of time to heal.” And it’s easier with you.
Rumplestiltskin's store was a cornucopia of lost relics.

From magical items to the most nostalgic of treasures, the entire room was definitely high on their list of searches due to the sheer volume alone.

After the disaster that had been that morning, Graham had convinced Emma that he could search without her, while keeping her firmly in the loop. So far, Graham had found several interesting things, but nothing that could give a single clue to whomever was behind this curse.

He sighed, digging through the most recent pile of papers. They were working backwards to get forward, but so far nothing yielded anything. Emma and Henry were back at Granny's organizing the far corner of the room into a collection of their leads. Henry was doing a marvelous job of distracting his mother after her confrontation with Snow, Graham knew.
Belle was splitting her time between the store and the library, and was currently at the latter. David would be meeting him at the store momentarily, and so he had been working in a sort of eerie silence that he tried to tune out.

He barely noticed the bell on the door ring as he waited for the steady pace of David's footfalls.

"It was years ago."

Graham swallowed, a coil of anger and pain tightening his spine as he raised his gaze to the familiar sound of the acidic bite of the voice.

Regina stood, her eyes blazing as her grip tightened along the top of Gold's counter.

It was different seeing her again this time. The first, he had been surrounded by family, worried about protecting the little circle he loved so much. Now that he was alone, with only himself to be concerned about, and his thoughts brewed in a darker tone.

His knuckles cracked as he made a fist, his temper flaring just beneath the surfaces. Decades under her thumb had strengthened the façade he'd never mastered in the forest, but his look was certainly not blank. His tone, however, was cool as he replied "seventeen months, if we're counting. What does that matter?"

She glowered at him for a long moment, her lips pursing. Carefully, she straightened, leveling him for a cold stare. "You were dead."

"As I am fully aware," he mumbled, making a show of returning to his search. He kept the corner of his gaze trained on her, but made clear he didn't wish to continue any conversation.

Regina, however, was never one to follow anyone else's request, silent or otherwise. "How?"

Graham's jaw tightened. "Why do you care? Need to know if any more of your victims are returning?"

She scoffed. "Your wit has never been sharp, Huntsman. Tell me," she demanded.

He glanced up again, feeling his every muscle tense as he reminded himself that he was still at the disadvantage here, heart or no. "I no longer go by that name," he replied stiffly.

She shook her head, teeth gleaming in her false smile. "Go by whatever name you care for, pet, just tell me what I want to know."

Had it been before, when he lived alone with his brother and away from all human society, his blade would be against her neck the second the slight escaped her lips. Instead, the weight of his memories burned tracks along the scars that still remained upon his skin, his patience tempered from his years of waiting, wanting, wishing for her violent demise. His nostrils flared as he worked to not advance on her. "I don't follow your orders anymore."

Her eyes narrowed before she flickered her cropped hair over her shoulder. "I have my concerns, you see. I thought you would have liked to protect the family you stole, dear."

His jaw tightened, a click sounding through the veneer. "I don't know if you are insulting or threatening, but either way you can take your concerns and –" He paused, pulling back the acidic burn of the threats he wanted to spew.

Her nails drummed down on the counter, too near his face. He refocused on the items in his hand, desperately trying to place a brave façade over his nervous energy. He imagined violent reactions,
of crushing those fingers in a sharp blow, of closing his hand over her throat before she could scream, of bones cracking and blood-red veins in the whites of her eyes as the pupils rolled back.

He blinked back the images nearly as quick as they formed.

It had been easy, with his family, to place that feral being he once was away. Love and trust had fostered a more temperate mind, steadied by a life of memories without the woman before him. He had even been able to forget, at times, with Henry's tired lean against him, of Emma's hand curling into his, of their baby stirring beneath skin. There was a sort of calm, a peace that he had never had even when he had been free. Emma and he had worked through much of his fears, and he had been able to reconcile his memories to the point where they didn't crop up as frequently.

This was the first true test to those feelings. Having Regina so close sent violent shivers through his soul, but he didn't feel near as damaged as he used to. Progress, he thought bitterly. But he still felt like a confined wild thing in her presence, not the functional, happy human he was in New York.

He pushed back the vicious thoughts, pulling forward memories from the days prior, pleasant memories to stir a more moral being. He was going to be a father twice over, and thus had a standard to uphold (no matter what the darker part of him was trying to reason; safer, safer if she were gone).

He was ashamed to admit that what had him finally release those impulses was the knowledge that he was no match to her magic, that he would fail before he could inflict the damage.

"I'm alive," he finally choked out, swallowing his anger. "It shouldn't matter to you how."

Her eyebrow arched. "And if you're not the only one?"

His smile was more a sneer, despite his efforts. "Then I guess you'll have to deal with that."

The door chimed again, David stopping short at the sight of the two. He shifted uncomfortably, his face straightening from its previous surprised and, if Graham wasn't mistaken, disgusted state. He nodded stiffly. "Regina," he said in greeting, hands fumbling with the umbrella in his hands. "Wasn't expecting you here."

The here was pointed, clearly a reference to being in Graham's specific presence. A silence stretched between all three, thick as steel.

Finally, she huffed, tossing a last glare in his direction. "Just you wait. You'll wish you had asked for my help from the beginning."

She stomped away, heels clicking mercilessly against the tile. David and Graham watched her, looks of confusion and contempt respectively on their faces.

"Sorry I'm late," David mumbled, then sighed. He threw his hand over his short hair before turning to Graham. "You shouldn't have to be dealing with her."

Graham shrugged in response. His pulse was better controlled, now that Regina was fading into the distance. "Better than Henry, at any rate."

David looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. "He's … he's really uncomfortable with the idea of seeing her, isn't he?"

"More than you know," Graham muttered. He blew out a low breath and finally stood. "It's not just the two lives, you see. Regina's threatened everyone before, and tried to make him forget. He
David's brow furrowed, his expression darkened for a moment. "Snow's … she can see …," he trailed off with a heavy sigh.

Graham stared at the other man for a long moment before nodding. "I know she has other ideas. But you can't expect Emma or Henry to feel the same."

"Or you," David added. His blue eyes were trained on him in concern. "I honestly don't know how you are able to handle being around her. Takes a lot of strength, I'd say."

Graham grimaced. "Not so much that," he said as his hand finally relaxed, skin coloring as the he released the tension.

David shook his head. "No, really. I know some days, I look at her and just—Well, I'll just say I don't always feel as diplomatic. But Snow is convinced, and she does seem to be trying … I don't know."

Graham offered a small smile, appreciating the fact that the other man was willing to share his feelings. "You don't have to explain yourself. I know you're having a hard time in the middle of all this."

"My plan was to be the buffer, to keep Regina away. Sorry that didn't work out," he said, fingering the butt of his holstered gun.

Graham shut his eyes for a moment. "I appreciate it. I don't know how much longer I could have been in her presence without doing something," he admitted.

David opened his mouth to respond, but before he could Graham's phone buzzed on the counter nearest the blond, then a few more times in quick succession. David turned instinctively, and he looked a little stunned.

"Sorry," Graham said, grabbing his phone. He looked down at the screen and he chuckled a little at what the other man saw. *Are you guys home yet?* flashed across the screen, along with five other texts saying simply *how about now?*. He was unsurprised to see Andie's name attached to it. He breathed a low sigh of relief, of his present filling him with a blessed pause from the ghost of his past being stirred up. He typed a quick response back, before turning back to David.

David looked like he was trying hard not to be curious, fumbling absentely with a small figure in tin on the counter. "Was there anything you found before she came in?" he asked.

Graham chuckled under his breath and rose, finally, to a standing position. "Nothing, really." He unlocked his phone and scrolled through pictures, finally landing on one of he and Emma at Chief Irving's retirement, Andie and Leo hanging off them drunkenly, and Maggie holding the camera out awkwardly enough to capture them all. "This is Andie, the one who texted. Simmons, her husband, works with me. Maggie used to be Emma's social worker when she first had Henry, and is her best friend."

David's eyes had widened, taking in the image almost reverently. Graham scrolled past a few more pictures, noting David's eyes flickering actively to try and catch the fast-moving images. Finally, he settled on one of Henry at the school, his head leaning over his work, Michael and Avery by his side. "That's Henry at the Young Writers' Workshop with a couple of his friends."

"Can I?" David asked softly as he gently cradled the device.

Graham smiled and nodded. He watched as David collapsed against the counter, his thumb gently
swiping to view the myriad of pictures they had gathered in the last year. Finally, David seemed to linger on one, his face soft.

"It's good for you guys there, isn't it?" he murmured.

"Not perfect, but yeah. Damn good," Graham replied. His heart tugged faintly, a reminder of just how close to perfect it all actually felt.

David nodded. "Can we … can you send some of these to us? I'm sure Snow would like to see them."

And there it was. There was the thing that held them all back: the fact that their whole family wasn't actually together. In New York, there would be no Nolans. In Storybrooke, there would be another chunk of non-blood-related family missing.

"It's moving quick, here," Graham said slowly. "I don't think any of us have had much time to process what's going on … and what will happen later."

Emma had been in tears earlier after speaking with her mother. It had taken a good hour before he convinced her to stay at the B&B with Henry while he worked on the case. The rock-in-a-hard-place situation was one that couldn't be remedied through one conversation, but he definitely understood Emma being so upset with Snow so stubbornly accusing.

David's face broke into a brief flash of sadness before melting back into placidity. "I know. Snow needs to ease into it," he said. He looked up. "I understand why you'd all want to go back, though."

Graham pressed his lips together, sympathy biting through him. "It's easier, in some ways. We don't have to deal with … the people we don't want to. But she misses you two so much. We do feel your absence, David. Every day."

David was quiet a beat. "I'm ashamed to say I'm glad to hear it." He took the phone again, gingerly placing it on the glass between them. "But I'm also glad you four are happy."

Graham looked down, finally seeing the picture David had been enthralled with, and his heart twisted in fondness.

It was at their reception. Emma's face was stretched wide in her smile, eyes twinkling as Graham leaned his forehead against her temple, looking every bit enamored as his hand reached to clasp Henry's shoulder. Henry was wrapped around Emma's waist, grinning as he pointed to where his sibling was growing. They were surrounded in an iridescent glow of bubbles being blown by their friends and coworkers celebrating their marriage. They looked like they had never known an ounce of trouble in their entire lives, if only in that one brief moment that the camera captured.

They had known so much pain in their respective lives. Having a chance to heal together was the greatest possible thing that could have happened to them. Coming back hadn't broken them, and couldn't as long as they were together. Things wouldn't be wrapped into a neat little bow at the end of this, and Graham did want to return home … but there could be another solution.

He swallowed, looking up at the man who had lost so much in Regina's quest for vengeance. "We'll find a way." He didn't know how, but that wasn't the issue. The feats he had overcome in the past year proved to him that having faith in that was well-founded, and Emma and Henry deserved to have the people who loved them this much in their lives.

David gave a smile that almost looked like a secret before he nodded. "I'll always find them," he replied.
Chloroform at 2AM

Chapter Summary

Graham receives a very familiar early morning visitor, with a strange request.

Chapter Notes

Prompted by afirewiel on tumblr for the Ridiculous Sentence Prompts meme (the first sentence). Also for BossLady, who wondered: "did Andie join in on the teasing or try to play match maker with those two." Set after Still Didn't Send it.

"Why exactly do you need chloroform at 2AM?"

Andie huffed, her hand still outstretched. "Now I've got to explain myself? Just hand it over, Humbert."

Graham rubbed his eyes tiredly and leaned heavily against the doorway. "Andie, chemical substances –"

"Are exactly what I need to deal with this situation." Andie's whole demeanor changed next, from hard and demanding, to big eyes and pouting lip. "Please, Humbert? I really, really need it."

He couldn't help laughing at the pathetic picture she made. "Andie, I swear to … look, I don't keep chloroform just around. In fact, I don't keep chloroform at all."

Andie's eyebrow arched. "I thought all officers had it?"


"Oh," she replied, the word long and drawn out. She rolled her shoulders, her coat coming off with it as she pushed past him. "I guess I'll just take a drink, then."

Graham watched her take over his kitchen table with a sigh. "Andie, you work in a bar that your parents own. Why are you stealing liquor from me?"

She leaned across the table to grab the whiskey from beside the toaster. She twisted off the cap and took a sniff, her body shuddering. "Well, it's not because you keep the good stuff around."

He finally relented, letting the door fall shut. He rubbed his palms over his eyes for a moment, stifling the yawn that threatened. He pulled a mug off the dishrack and handed it to her before taking a seat. "Best my city job can afford."

"Also known as crap," Andie said, slamming back a quick pour. She winced and poured another. "Still gets the job done, I guess."

He made a hum of agreement and crossed his arms over his chest. He watched her silently as she...
fiddled with the mug.

Andie pulled a hand through her dark hair. "Nothing big, I swear. Just issues with Jess. I just need to knock her out for a bit, tie her to a chair, you know, make her see reason."

"Because that's always seen to be effective," Graham replied dryly. Simmons' ex could be a pain, he knew, and Andie always seemed to get right in the middle of it, if only so Daisy wouldn't. "What's the problem this time?"

She scratched along the underside of her arm, her head shaking in frustration. "Leo couldn't make one of Daisy's games. You know, with the Elliot case ending? Now Jess is taking it as a reason to try and cut his hours."

"Which won't work. You know this, Andie," he said. "Legally, she can't do it."

"But she'll try! And that's just as bad! Daisy will be dragged through all the court crap again, and Leo will be upset, and it's just—just—"

"Not fair," he finished. "I'm not saying it is. Maybe Simmons can convince her not to go through it, though."

She sniffed, her lips turned into a sharp frown. "You know, in another life, she could have been my friend, you know? All the stories Leo's told me, about how she was when they first got together? She was a pretty cool person. I just don't know how you can go from that, to this. This person who manipulates everything and uses their child in these petty fights … it's so damn confusing."

He leaned across the table to give her shoulder a comforting squeeze. "You just need to keep doing what you're doing. Keep supporting him, keeping being good to Daisy, and don't try to chloroform people."

The corner of her mouth tweaked into a smile. "And continue coming to my buddy's apartment at two in the morning?"

"If we could avoid that …," Graham said with a chuckle.

Andie's smile turned more into a Cheshire grin before his eyes. "How else am I going to ask about the drinks you and my other favorite patron shared?"

Graham groaned. "I should have known this was coming."

Andie clapped her hands in delight. "Yes, you should have! It's the perfect distraction, Humbert, and I want to be sure you're doing right by my girl."

"It was just a couple drinks," Graham tried weakly. A flush of warmth hit him, though, as he thought of Emma. Just a couple glances, and he was self-aware enough to admit he was hooked. Now, talking with her … it felt like something else. Something more.

Andie raised her mug to her lips, and he could practically read the gloating in her dark eyes. "So, you would be all right if I tried to set her up with Jake in Robbery, then? He always comes into the bar, he seems like he'd be a good match."

Graham tried to keep his face impassive, even as a sharp pain coiled within him at the thought. "If that's what she wants, I won't stop it from happening."

Andie let the mug clatter to the table, her eyes widening. A couple phrases in Vietnamese were
said under her breath before, "oh, hon, you've got it bad, don't you?"

Heat filled his face, and his nose scrunched as he looked away. "What can you tell from one night, anyway? And I didn't even – we're not going out or anything."

She shook her head and leaned back, a smug look crossing her face. "No worries. She's just as smitten."

He hoped his eyes didn't let down how eager he felt at the statement. "Really?" he couldn't help asking.

She laughed. "Oh, sweets, yes. I know miss bounty-hunter, and if she didn't feel anything she would have left you in the dust, much like Pickett. The fact that she not only talked with you, but stayed at your table for three hours?"

He pressed his lips together, shaking his head. "It was just us talking about how we might know each other. And then we just got onto other topics."

Andie nodded, then leaned forward to rest her chin on her hand.

"No, seriously, we might have known each other as kids, when we were in the foster system. But we couldn't pinpoint it. Then we started talking about Maine, and then about our jobs, and then we just got onto other things. You know, like the installation at the Park, and the best pizza between 101st and 89th, then about what music we liked and the last movie we saw and her kid and ….

Andie only grinned from her seat.

He watched her for a moment, letting a cautious smile spread across his face. "So, you're saying this is a good thing?"

She giggled and rose, leaning over to press a kiss to the crown of his head. "I think you need to sleep on this, Clueless Humbert."

"Andie ….

"She's usually there on Fridays!" she called, then the door slammed shut.

Graham let out a low breath, his mind tracing again over the conversation with Emma. The familiarity struck again, along with the comforting heat of something that carved along the deepest recesses of him, stirring his heart in a way he's certain he's never felt.

Hasn't he? The recognition and the pull had him reeling in a way that felt like his stomach was dropping out and his mind was floating, then there was something … a roadblock before it spiraled into realization.

He swallowed thickly, then knocked back the last of Andie's drink. He could think about it later.
"Help me zip up?" she asked, walking into the room with her arms tight across her chest to hold the dress to her body.

She caught his appreciative look as she turned, before meeting his eyes in the mirror. He rose and carefully touched her, letting his fingers track across naked skin before the zipper made its way to the top. His opposite hand still flitted across the edges of the dress, lightly tracing the hems. "Might need to pull it down a bit," he murmured before drifting back.

He sat on the edge of the bed, his work clothes rumpled after the long day, vest unbuttoned and tie loosened, his sleeves rolled up to the elbow.

She, on the other hand, was in front of the mirror on the back of the door, makeup and hair freshly done, twisting to view the tiny red dress at a different angle. Her hands fell to her hips as she considered the length.

"The skirt is short on purpose," she finally said.

Graham leaned his head to the side, studying the outfit. "Oh," he said simply, and blinked.

She looked back at him, her eyebrow raised. "Is that a problem?"

"Uh," he started, his eyes trailing up a down her form. A beat passed. "No?"

She smirked and turned back to the mirror. She brushed her hair back from her temple, letting the curl fall a little more naturally. "Tell me you aren't getting territorial."

"What? No," he said, his flickering to the floor in a telling manner. "It's not that it's too short or … I just mean if you're trying to get the guy, maybe it's not the best to run in and … and I'm not making this any easier on myself, am I?"

She chuckled as she hooked her earring. "Not even a little."

He finally looked up sheepishly. "Why do you think it'll work again?"

Emma shrugged, gliding her hands over the sides of the garment. "Only because it's worked the last eighty times I've done this?"
He sighed and set his hands on her hips, bringing her close. He pressed his face into her stomach, and her arms surrounded him almost unconsciously. "And am I doomed to watch you get ready like this each time and not have a chance to get you to myself?"

"Hmm," she mused. "Maybe if you ever skip out on bail."

"Curse my law-abiding nature," he said drolly. His hands drifted up her back, making her bend so her face was level with his. "Sure you have to go out?"

"Sure you want the bills paid this month?" she countered.

He sighed, but a smile crept over his face. "If only putting away criminals initially warranted the same pay as getting them back."

Uncomfortable, she changed positions to collapse on his lap, her arms twisting around his neck. He pushed his forehead into hers before simply allowing his forearms to curl at the small of her back. She watched him for a long moment, the worry that was still there, before finally sighing. "You're not really worried about it, are you?"

He nodded but a "no" left his lips anyway, a grin forming.

She sighed and ducked her head onto his shoulder in mock defeat, feeling his chest rumble in laughter. "You're no John Bender, Graham."

He nudged her slightly, bring her head back to center. "Em, I know you are more than capable enough to handle what could come your way. I've seen it, I've experienced it. But these guys you chase … they tend to be both sleazy and dangerous. It's not a great combination to consider when I know I'm here, and what happened when you went after Herrod." He frowned briefly before shrugging. "And, of course, there is a part of me that wants to keep you all to myself. But that has nothing to do with how short your skirt is. Mostly."

She rolled her eyes, but kissed him anyway, long and slow. "Thanks for the concern," she murmured across his lips as they parted. Her eyes flicked up to his, noses still touching. "Maybe when I come back I'll let you help me get out of it."

"Now that," he said, his voice gravelly. "Sounds like a plan."
"I'm going to need you to put on some underwear before you say anything else."

Emma swiped across the photos Gia sent for the next Anderson meeting, absently chewing her lip as her mind wandered. She was stretched across the bed, stripped down against the balminess that permeated the room. The AC had broken down earlier that day, and still there was no word on when it would be fixed. Luckily, the weather was finally being a little forgiving, and the late evening was allowing a cool breeze from the open window.

Still, she didn't feel right. She barely registered the designs she was flipping past. Her skin was feeling tight and uncomfortable even as she consistently readjusted.

She was so out of it that she didn't even realize Graham was in the room until the bed sunk next to her. He smelled like soap and pine, and his body emanated with a coolness even though they didn't touch. With his presence came the sudden click of realization of what her hormones were trying to tell her.

Her body hummed, and she swallowed thickly, hand coming to pat across her stomach almost in accusation. She felt her eyelids droop heavily, eyes dilating, but she tried to focus on finishing up the task at hand. Gia would never stop bugging her if she didn't give a response tonight.

"Why the ferry pass?"

Emma blinked, then looked up from her phone to find Graham staring intensely at the ceiling from next to her. She wondered briefly at his train of thought, before her lust-addled mind caught up with her. "Linetti?"

He nodded, his brow furrowing. "Everything else falls into place but that. He never even used it, no record of him ever purchasing one before."

Emma sighed, watching as Graham sat up next to her, the lamp clicking on from the bedside table. He pulled the notebook from the drawer, a pencil already available and poised in his hand. She flopped against her pillow almost in defeat.

"No, but it doesn't make sense. Linetti was never seen near Staten Island before; no family, no friends. Why would he have even gotten the ticket?"

She pressed a hand against her abdomen again as if it could stave off where her mind was lingering. Carefully, she settled against the mattress in a position that allowed her to watch him, an
even easier feat in the soft light.

He scribbled furiously as worked out the kernel of the case that had swarmed into his head. She was used to this: late night epiphanies or questions that he felt the need to attack immediately. She tried to help where she could; she wasn't typically by-the-letter when it came to police work, but she had enough instinct to help him better understand behavior patterns of criminals and victims.

Right now, she was finding that difficult, though.

Emma tried to keep herself focused on his speech, her head slowly rising and falling with the cadence of his words. She propped her head up on her palm, and felt her gaze start its descent downwards, heat coiling in her belly as she did.

"So, what do you think?" he asked.

Her eyes snapped back up. She blinked away the fantasies that had been weaving through her mind, and she tried not to be aware of how hot she felt. She swallowed again, and her eyes fell down the same path inadvertently. "I … I'm going to need you to put on some underwear before you say anything else."

He looked up, startled. His eyebrow rose slowly. "Are—are you serious?"

She nodded with a long groan of frustration. She pushed back her sweaty hair, throwing a glare his direction. "It's your fault, anyway."

"December frolicking was your idea, remember?" he said with a grin, but leaned over to kiss her anyway.

Her nose wrinkled as they parted. "Don't use that term again," she insisted. She couldn't help bringing their lips together once more, lingering against them as she realized how much she really did need even the small touch. "Seriously, though. You want my input but I can't concentrate, and it's all the mango's fault."

"Already changing your tune, I see," he murmured, then pressed another kiss along her jaw. "And blaming the twins."

She couldn't even manage to roll her eyes at his teasing, and didn't bother to correct him. Her skin was tingling in the wake of his lips and she sighed pleasantly. Her eyes closed, nails digging into his skin just enough to indent his skin. "So you need to decide if you want to put on some clothes, or let me shower for an inordinately long time before helping, or … find something else to help those neurons firing."

He chuckled. "I don't know how well that helps the thought process, exactly."

Emma grinned and slid her nails lightly up his side. "Clears the head."

"I suppose," he began, amusement in his tone. "I shouldn't argue with my pregnant wife's logic, huh?"

"You never questioned it when I was just Miss Swan. Why start now?" she countered.

"Excellent," he said, kissing her again. "Point."

If she woke to 38 texts the next morning and only a half-thought-out lead for his case, it didn't matter. They had their priorities, after all.
Chapter Summary

Graham can't sleep, and Killian has nothing better to do than listen.

Chapter Notes

Set after It Was For Us and Chiaroscuro, that evening. Prompted by lessawildmoon, "I would love to see some interaction between Graham and Hook in RH, them coming to an understanding and possible pre-friendship."
He looked into the shallow glass, the amber liquid sloshing back and forth as he swayed his hand thoughtfully. The warm, sharp smell of the whiskey traveled upwards, and he inhaled lowly, blowing out a hissing breath through his teeth.

He didn’t want the drink.

He had assumed the liquor would mellow him out, calm his nerves. He was still on edge, his every muscle tensed and poised to fight, even with the desired targets outside of his reach.

He hadn’t had a drink since before his wedding day, a promised deal to Emma for the duration of her pregnancy. She had simply rolled her eyes at it. She had gone along with the deal regardless, though, until he had returned from his search with David that afternoon. She had all but pushed him out of their room, insisting that he take a moment to unwind.

She had looked completely separate from how she had been after speaking with her mother, more at ease and comfortable as she peered at him sleepily beside Henry. He, on the other hand, had been restless, and that was the main reason he had left his wife and son in peace. He didn’t want to disturb them.

But as soon as the whiskey was set in front of him, he felt a resounding ‘no’ shoot through his head.

It would be easier if he had the guys to drink with. There had been an easy camaraderie among the 20th, even amongst the separate departments. He had collected a good amount of drinking buddies in his career, even more when he finally met Simmons’ wife and Andie had taken him under her insistent wing. It had been simple to forget all that he had been before around his coworkers; in New York, he had simply been Detective Humbert, a personable man with an Irish brogue and a tolerance to match.

Here, with a werewolf behind the counter and a dwarf two booths over, the realities of his situation crept back in. He wasn’t a detective; he’d never even had any formal schooling in the other world. He had never known Ireland; his accent instead spoke of the edge of the Northern reach of the Enchanted Forest. He had never been personable; his only family had been his brothers, and he had been scorned and mocked because of his allegiance to them. And while his tolerance was just as high, he couldn’t begin to think of dulling his senses with Regina so close by, even tucked away in her ill-gotten mansion.

He already felt weak enough after realizing how badly he would fail if he tried to go after her. He didn’t want to add inebriation on top of it.
He was contemplating leaving the diner and trying fruitlessly to sleep when Killian slid into the booth across from him.

The other man’s kohl-lined gaze was knowing, his good hand coming to rest on the table between them. “Pleasant returns, I assume?” he asked wryly, pulling his flask from the inside of his leather coat.

“Peachy,” Graham replied with a sigh. “You getting along well?”

“Do you remember me?”

Graham turned to the second interruption, and was met with dark eyes. He traced features for a moment, memories clicking into place. He opened his mouth to respond, but before he could her palm connected with his face with a sharp crack.

“Why couldn’t you just stay dead,” she hissed, then spat at him before turning and leaving just as quickly as she entered, almost skittish despite her previous bravado.

Killian’s eyes were wide as he watched her exit. “Making friends, Huntsman?”

The name coiled within him, his stomach clenching with pain. He grimaced and pushed away his drink, feeling even sicker than he had before.

Just like every victim he had accumulated in the Enchanted Forest, her face was imprinted within his soul. Yes, he remembered her. He vividly remembered Regina’s orders against his heart to execute the deserter and “anyone else in his home.” He remembered giving the man the quickest death he could procure, and then training his arrow on the widow, holding himself back for as long as he could, until she had run past the property line and the command stopped echoing in his mind.

How he could have ever expected that he could move on from those feelings of guilt, he didn’t know anymore. At least not with the full force of those memories in action all around him again.

This was exactly what he was afraid of in returning to this town of fairytale characters.

“Here,” a voice spoke, and he turned to find Granny’s sympathetic look.

He took the offered towel and wiped his shirt solemnly. She offered no words of apology, but the gesture in itself spoke volumes.

Her eyebrows rose as she took in Killian next. “You can’t drink that in here, bucko,” she warned, spying his conspicuous flask.

Graham watched as Killian’s entire face transformed, a flash of teeth in a disarming smile. “Of course not, love. I’ll just finish his. He wasn’t going to have it, am I right, mate?”

Graham blew out a breath, resisting the urge to scoff. He pushed the glass with a clatter across the table. “Go ahead.”

The older woman narrowed her eyes at the pirate as he pulled back a quick swallow, then turned back to Graham with a soft expression. “You need something else, hon? I can get a pastrami heated for you.”

Graham looked up, a strange sort of warm surprise overcoming him that she remembered his usual lunch order from a lifetime ago. He swallowed, and gave a grateful smile.
“Thanks, but I’m fine.”

“Fries, then,” she insisted. “I’ll get you some, and a coffee, too.”

He began to protest, but she left before he could get a word out, leaving him stuttering. He sighed. Coffee had been nixed, too.

Maybe he could make an exception tonight. There was certainly no way sleep was in order.

“You looked stunning even before that display. Things not working out yet?”

He pulled a hand across his jaw and shook his head. “No leads,” he confirmed, even if that wasn’t the worst part of the day. Still, he took the opportunity to change subject. “Think you can point us all in the right direction?”

“I’d like to, mate, but I wasn’t privy to the curse-casting ins and outs this time. I’ll help where I can, though.”

His eyes were shadowed, and barely held his own as he spoke. Instead, they lingered on his ring finger, the symbolic piece of metal that fit across there. Graham set the towel down and then self-consciously spun the ring. Finally, Graham nodded. “I’m sure it’ll be needed.”

Killian let the glass scrape along the table and gestured to him with his hooked hand. “If there’s nothing to be done now, Huntsman, why aren’t you with your … your family.”

He tensed slightly at the choice in name once more before finally focusing. “They’re asleep. I couldn’t.”

“Aye, insomnia is one of the stronger symptoms of this place, I’d wager.” He swallowed what was left in the tumbler. “Surprised I’m getting away so lightly with dragging the lot of you back to it.”

Graham rolled his shoulders, eyebrows knitting as he considered it. A headache loomed behind his temples, but he couldn’t exactly blame this man for it. Emma was, perhaps, a little more resentful, but only because she couldn’t place her blame anywhere else. “Being that you had nothing to do with the curse, I don’t see how we could have rightfully been worse to you. Emma deserved this chance, anyway … to see her parents.” To protect her parents.

“A lot of good that’s doing her right now, from what I hear,” he replied. “Word travels fast around here, especially word of the royal family arguing with one another.”

He raised his gaze, settling on cool blue. “Them arguing doesn’t negate their love for one another.”

Killian bobbed his head, using a finger to signal Red to his empty glass. “Not my place to question it, anyway,” he grumbled.

Granny set the promised plate and mug in front of him, studying him carefully from behind her wire-rimmed glasses. Dutifully, he lifted the mug to his mouth in placation, taking a small sip. The bitter liquid was familiar and soothing, despite the flare of guilt that rose within him. She gave his shoulder a gentle squeeze before moving away.

Once Killian’s drink was refilled, he used his hook to gesture to him. “It’s pure luck we never ran into each other back then, you know. I’ve bartered deals with, and even killed, many a Black Guard.”
“Lucky for me, then,” he replied darkly.

He remembered hearing of Claude’s death, the pirate that had killed him. He recalled the resentful feeling that rose within him once he heard, the post only having been changed a day before due to Regina sending him off on another mission. He lived with the morbid knowledge that in that other world, he would have been grateful for the reprieve from that miserable life.

Hindsight put things into perspective, though, and he indeed felt thankful fate had only made them cross paths now.

“So I know, then, how to distinguish between her guards. Those differences in the men who were loyal to her, to those with … higher stakes, let’s say?”

“What’s your point?” he asked flatly.

“My point,” he said sternly. “Is that her Heartless Ones shouldn’t feel responsible for things they didn’t wish to do.”

He swallowed, his grip on the mug strengthening. “I don’t—“ he paused, fighting back another swing of nausea. “Please, just don’t.”

Killian sighed. “Just trying to put things in perspective, mate. You aren’t that person anymore.”

“Aren’t I?” he murmured. He shook his head. “Just because it’s in the past, doesn’t mean that it’s forgotten. Obviously.” He rubbed his reddened cheek thoughtfully.

“You can dwell on what you were made to do, or you can focus on what you’re doing now.”

He felt something tight flit across him. “I have three lives in my head right now, and they all play their part. It’s not as easy as you’re trying to make it.”

He nodded. “Aye, I agree with you there. But sometimes a reminder helps, now and again. Fortunately for me, I never had other lives shoved into my head. I would suppose that would mess with the mind a bit, though there are definite advantages to your situation.”

“Are you talking about my memories right now?” he asked wearily. “That because I have them, I could just forget or something?”

“No, but it helped other things along. Being the hero of the piece certainly helped your favor.”

*Hero.* That didn’t sit well with him, and he shifted uncomfortably. Before sparing Snow, he had been convinced he would follow through with the order. He had never killed anyone unprovoked before, but he saw her just the same as he did the stag – a way to keep his brother alive another day. If he hadn’t read that letter, he would have done it, wouldn’t he have? “I was no hero,” he finally said, feeling that fact as clear as any other truth he’s given.

The other man rolled his eyes. “Whatever you say, mate. The book says Snow White wouldn’t have lived another day had it not been for you. That choice brought about your reward.”

“Reward?” he asked, recoiling at the term, unconsciously covering his heart.

“Your family, Huntsman,” he said, but wasn’t completely able to diminish the bitterness in his tone.
He raised a hand with a wince. “It’s Graham. Please. They’re not a reward for services rendered, Killian.” He bit back the bile at simply the thought.

“Aye, well, I’ve made my peace with the fact that villains such as myself aren’t fit for happy endings,” he replied tersely.

“From what I hear, you were more anti-villain at your worst.” He shook his head and rubbed his temples. “I don’t want you holding onto any resentment if you’re going to be working with us. And I mean all of us, even the town. Divided allegiances can’t be—”

“Divided?” he asked incredulously. “I have my allegiances, and they include about one other person in this whole mess besides your wife, and he trusts me about as far as he can throw me. But even he’d be on your family’s side before anyone else, present company included,” he muttered.

He looked at him blankly for a moment before blinking. “Neal. You’re talking about—you know where he is?”

Killian shook his head, a grimace set across his features. “No. And it worries me.”

Graham tried to hide his shock at the easy admission, but wasn’t quite sure he managed. “You’re right. He should have shown as soon as everyone knew Henry was back.”

Killian nodded, looking grim. “Even her return should have warranted his reappearance.”

“You can say her name, still, you know.”

He shook his head. “Best to keep the distance, even in my mind.”

Graham clenched his jaw before pulling the mug close. “If you want to help, I just think we should get it out in the open.”

He huffed, the fingers of his good hand scrunching open and closed. “What’s to get out there? The fact that I thought I had found a connection and lost it before it could ever be anything else?”

He nodded. “That’d be a start. A connection doesn’t have to mean one thing. What’s to say that couldn’t translate to friendship just as well as something else?”

He was silent a moment, fiddling with the glass. “The first time I had started to feel anything for someone other than my Milah, the first time in 200 years. And then when I claw back to this land, I return to find she is wearing your ring and carrying your child. It was a shock, and it likely shouldn’t have been. I’m trying to bow out gracefully, here.”

He swallowed down the corrections he wanted to make. Our ring, our child. The possessive pronouns didn’t settle well within him as it still felt too close to his earlier assumption. However, he knew it wasn’t what he should be concentrating on. “By ignoring her?”

“By not getting close again. I’m trying to reconcile it, the living without hope again.”

“Without hope,” he echoed in a murmur. “You were able to let yourself feel again, and now you’re closing yourself off to it? Take it from someone whose desensitization wasn’t a choice: feeling again isn’t a burden. It’s a relief, even when it’s painful. It means you can feel for other things, at least eventually.”
“From what I find, you feel for the *same* thing,” he grumbled.

“Yes,” he admitted. “But it also opened it up for others. In the first life, I didn’t have any human that I could care for in the way that I do even my friends in this one.”

And there it was. He let his own realization wash over him, let his present extinguish the flames of self-revulsion of his past. He knew he’d never be able to escape it, but while Killian’s advice was simplistic, it wasn’t wrong. More than anything, he wanted to pull Emma and Henry into his arms at that moment, to have the solidness of his current reality to ground him.

Killian peered at him warily, and then a small smirk crossed his features. “You are something else. You’re trying to push a friendship between your wife and the man obsessed with her?”

“I wouldn’t have guessed that ‘obsessed’ was the right word,” he replied, and knew that to be closer to the truth than what the pirate was trying to allow. He didn’t doubt he cared for her, not for a second. But obsession was laced with darker emotion, possession and jealousy. While there may be envy marked within this man, there was also the resolute decision to let Emma make her own choices, without a fight. “If distance is what you really need, then take it. But half-assing it won’t make things easier on you or her.”

He gave a dark look before peering into his drink. “I’m trying to be of use.”

“Exactly,” he replied. “You’re of better use when you’re not trying to ignore Emma. I’m not her keeper, Killian, and I’m not your go-between. You need to settle things, in whatever way you can.”

“And here I thought I’d be the one doling out advice,” he said wryly. He gave an assenting nod, however. “Your point is well noted. I will try to be better, as long as you don’t bury yourself into a hole of self-pity. *Emma* doesn’t deserve that, either.”

Graham felt a stab of regret, nodding mutely. He was right, of course. Emma didn’t deserve a lot of the things his past and memories tied him to, the things he couldn’t get over, the flashbacks that still occasionally plagued him. She already had the weight of the world settled on her shoulders, the title of *Savior* attached to her back like a scarlet letter. He had to bury those feelings. He needed to be better about—

No. He abruptly stopped his chain of thought, remembering that promise he made to Emma that she had actually cared about. *Don’t close yourself off.* Together. They had to work through everything together, or else there was no point.

“I’ll talk with her about it,” he finally said resolutely.

Killian nodded. “Deal, then.”

He took the offered hand, a promise made easily. At the very least, he knew they both would support Emma. Emma needed all the support she could manage to navigate through the mess that was this situation, so it was the best he could have hoped for.

An ally that helped keep things in perspective … well, that was just a bonus.

Later, as the clock tower inched closer to three, Graham finally slipped into bed beside Emma. He was unsurprised to feel her turn, clear eyes opening to meet him. Insomnia indeed was prevalent. “Better?” she asked.
He entwined their fingers together, watching as their palms connected. He was surprised to find himself nodding. “Not great, but better. We’ll talk later.”

She sighed, and laid her head over his heart. He automatically pulled her in close, their hands resting over her stomach. She took in a deep breath, then cocked her head to the side. “I miss the coffee more, you know.”

“Granny’s orders. And Killian took my Jameson.”

She looked up at him curiously. “Seriously? Hook took a whiskey over rum?”

He was silent a moment. He pulled his free hand through her curls, watching them smooth down with a small smile. “He was being a friend.”
Public

Chapter Summary

After recovering from illness, they get to making up for lost time.

Chapter Notes

After Everything Repeats, Doesn't It? Second Ridiculous Sentence Prompt "I’m going to need you to put on some underwear before you say anything else," and Dreamingdreams on FF wondering "Makes me curious who else might have caught them."

Emma panted, leaning her head against Graham’s chest. Her head was still buzzing nicely, her body trembling as she came down from her high. His eyes were closed tight, and he was pressing her nearly uncomfortably into the door, boneless after the adrenaline had worn off.

She started giggling, almost uncontrollably. Soon after, she felt the answering rumble from inside his chest.

“Well, that’s a new one,” she mumbled.

“Better or worse than the station break room?” he murmured back.

She ran one hand through his hair, the other tightening around his neck. “Better locks, and no cameras to wipe.”

“Mm,” he agreed, and finally released her thighs, letting her feet find purchase on the floor. She leaned even heavier against the door, her legs jellied and shaking. “Inspired idea. Really.”

She swallowed, and let her head drift back, the noise echoing across the bathroom. The skin at her hips was throbbing dully, and she realized with some amusement that she’d have bruises there tomorrow. Not for the first time, she thanked whatever deity she could think of that Graham was comfortable enough with her now to allow for these little excursions.

Her fingers tangled in the curls at the nape of his neck, unconsciously scraping against his scalp in a soothing manner. She took a deep breath inward and released it lowly. She let her body center, and allowed one hand to shakenly brush her own hair back. “Was it my idea?”

He shook his head, a smile tweaking his lips even as his eyes remained closed. “I don’t really remember,” he admitted.

“You were dragging him across the floor by his tie, Bounty Hunter! Your fault!”

Graham’s eyes popped wide open, meeting Emma’s guiltily. “Uh, Andie?”
“Oh, good, you remember that you’re in a public place! My public place, if you want to get specific.”

Emma winced, looking over her shoulder to the locked door and symbolically to the friend that was yelling at them on the other side. “I’m sorry, Andie, we didn’t—”

“Okay, I’m going to need you to put on some underwear before you say anything else.”

Emma blushed deeply, finding Graham just as red. She almost groaned in defeat when she saw the remains of the item in question. She gave her boyfriend what she hoped was a glare. To her exasperation, his look was slightly smug as he found the strips strewn along the floor. He grinned and knelt down.

“Retrieving them now,” he promised, his face almost boyishly innocent as he began to smooth her skirt down. She watched him curiously, trying to not allow the shiver of desire to course through her again. He pressed a kiss to her thigh before the material rested at its natural place. Carelessly, he tossed the scraps of fabric in the trash with one hand while the other traced along her calf.

“Not helping,” she scolded in a low whisper. He shrugged.

She used her fingers to comb her hair until it was what she hoped was mostly-decent and, cautiously, she unlatched the door and cracked it open. She was met immediately with Andie who, despite crossed arms and raised eyebrow, was grinning. “At least you didn’t see anything?” Emma offered sheepishly.

Andie rolled her eyes. “You mean after the twenty minute make-out at the bar? Yeah, I’m glad our friendship wasn’t ruined by having to see what me and Eddie had to hear.”

Emma sputtered for a moment, then pushed the door wider to look at the bar. Eddie, the drunk who made it his business to set up the stool at the end as his camp, raised a glass with a grin. Emma immediately pulled the door closed again and groaned. “No, not Eddie, too!”

Andie snorted and gripped the handle to make sure the lock wasn’t reengaged. “You’re lucky your tipsy butt waited for last call. For a couple that are usually not big on PDA, you two sure weren’t shy. Must be a full moon,” she said.

Emma worried her bottom lip, but even as she sought the words to try and explain, Graham’s hand curled around her waist. “At least your couch remains untainted,” he asserted with a quick flash of teeth, then he pressed a kiss to her shoulder. He seemed very unperturbed by his friend’s ire, and Emma’s mind reiterated her earlier statement – no help at all.

“And you two, maybe,” Andie replied with a smirk.

Graham’s head popped up, and his face twisted. “Are you serious? I’ve slept on that couch!”

“Several times, in fact,” Andie teased, making no attempts at comfort. After a beat, she sighed and tossed back her dark hair. “I know you two have a thing for the in-public adrenaline or something, but could you not in my bar?”

“Of course,” Emma replied quickly, just as Graham let out a cheeky, “no promises.” She glared at him, elbowing his side.

Andie tossed a bar towel at him. “Go home, Humbert. Christen your own place.”
He chuckled, his palm moving to cover her stomach. He leaned down to her ear, waiting until Andie had disappeared behind the swinging door before he spoke. “Not a bad idea.”

She had mostly sobered through the whole exchange, but her head swam pleasantly as his warm breath tickled her ear. “There’s probably a few more surfaces left to go.”

“And Henry’s gone until Monday …,” Graham pressed.

She fisted her hand around his tie once more, the material crumpling softly in her hand. “We should get out of Andie’s hair, then.”

“You know, I ne’er knew how good the acoustics in this dump’s bathrooms were.”

Emma and Graham pulled faces of equal distaste, before turning to face the drunk. “Shut up, Eddie,” they said in unison.

Graham pulled a couple bills out of his pocket and dropped them in the jar before grabbing her hand again. This way, Andie wouldn’t complain … as much.
The Good With the Bad

Chapter Summary

Graham and Henry talk about the past.

Chapter Notes

A few weeks after they regain their memories, pre Storm. The other half of Gremma Shoelace’s prompt “Graham, Emma and Henry discuss the curse and Regina etc. after getting their memories back.” Also a fulfills a few requests for Hunted-Believer-daddy!Graham interaction. There is some anti-regal believer stuff going on here, too.

Graham walked over to the open door and rapped on the frame a couple times. “Hey, kid,” he said hesitantly. “Sure you don’t want something?”

Henry barely looked up from the book in his hand, giving a despondent half-shrug. Graham’s furrow deepened, worried at the usually upbeat kid’s low mood.

“Well, if you need anything, let me know. I’ll be in the kitchen, and your mom will be home in a couple hours,” he offered.

It wasn’t an unusual day. In the few short weeks since their memories returned, they had all latched on to each other both intangibly and concretely. Graham was already on Henry’s fancy school’s paperwork, allowing him to pick him up as summer school let out. His coworkers already knew and doted on the sweet, polite kid that was attached to his hip. He already knew the routines Emma and Henry had made for each other, and they had helped him integrate right into them.

This had become a normal thing: he and Emma taking turns picking up Henry from school, making dinners together, hanging out as a … as a family. The boy had been open and even affectionate with him, short embraces and playful nudges given freely.

Something within him, that fairytale character whose only family had ever been the wolves, was still surprised that he was able to fit so well into these human routines. The other two lives helped bridge part of the gap, and the two people completed it. It was easy when Emma and Henry were involved.

Easy, that is, except for today.

Ever since he had picked Henry up, the boy had been silent. He could barely cajole two words strung together from him. This was not at all what he’d come to expect.

“Graham?”

It was almost pathetic how quickly he turned to the tiny voice. Henry picked at the edge of his book nervously, still not meeting his eye. “Yeah?”
“Do you know how you came back?” he asked.

Graham grimaced and he rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably. The past weeks Emma and he had come up with theories regarding his unexpected resurrection, but there was no proof to any of them. They were all educated guesses, wonderings … he knew it made Emma anxious. “I wish I did, Henry.”

Henry swallowed visibly, and his head drooped further. “Then … then how do we know you get to stay?”

His heart, the one he still couldn’t believe lived in his chest, plummeted. Cautiously, he entered the room, approaching the boy in a wide arc. “Henry … Henry, look at me.”

Slowly, his gaze lifted. Hazel eyes swam with a sheen on unshed tears, building and receding as he attempted to tamp his emotions. Graham’s stomach twisted to see it.

He felt a little frozen, unsure how to comfort him this time. The fear was real and palpable, and he would be a liar if he said he didn’t share it on some level. “Henry, nothing is ever going to be certain. People can leave at any time, for any number of reasons. We just … have to be open to what we have now,” he said, stumbling a little. He did believe his words, though, and he hoped Henry could see that.

“My mom … my other mom killed you,” he said flatly.

Henry knowing was a punch to the gut, winding him as he stared with wide eyes. There was no question in that statement. None at all. It was pure, concrete fact. It sounded like something that Henry had been holding onto for a long time. Just after the curse broke, he’d had to explain to Emma what happened. But this … this wasn’t that. This was Henry seeking confirmation for what he already knew.

He gave up on being cautious and sat next to him, falling heavily on the bed. He stared at the wall, trying to collect his thoughts. Finally, he looked over at the boy. “Did your mom … Emma … did she tell you?”

He shook his head and flicked the book to the ground carelessly. “No. I knew back then,” he said.

The sour tone was unnatural coming from Henry’s mouth. Graham ran a hand across his jaw as he considered how to broach the topic. “I won’t lie to you,” he started slowly. But I don’t want to burden you, either. He reached out and placed his hand on his shoulder. “Yes, she —she did do that. But I’m here now, and my heart’s back.”

Henry looked at him curiously. “You do have it back?”

Graham gave a small smile. “Yeah, it’s there. It’s real. I can tell because I can feel for more than just you and your mom.”

His brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

Graham let out a breath and considered it. “Well, I mean I can feel angry at the criminals I’m investigating, sad for the people—“

“No, no, I get that,” Henry cut in. “And I get why you could feel with Emma: she’s your true love. But you could … you could feel around me?”

Graham’s eyes softened, and then bounced across the boy’s face. He used the hand on
his shoulder to squeeze gently. “Yeah, I could. Not much, but … but first it was just that I could worry about you. It wasn’t until later that I noticed all the things, the little bubbles of emotion that would come up for you.”

Henry’s look was indiscernible before he took a shaky breath. “You cared about me?”

“Oh, Henry,” Graham said, and couldn’t stop himself from tugging him into a tight hug. “Of course I did. I still do,” he finished hoarsely.

“She knew,” Henry said into his shoulder, his voice thick with tears. “She knew that I knew, and she didn’t care. She acted like nothing happened.”

His lashes fluttered shut and he held him tighter, his hand instinctively making soothing circles across his back. He didn’t know what to say to that. He remembered what she was like, and it wasn’t altogether surprising that she would have pretended he didn’t exist after she murdered him.

“She always did that. She always pretended like nothing happened. Even after the curse broke.” He pushed back and away from the hug, his eyes red and wet. “She erased memories, whenever she did something I didn’t like. She was going to kill everyone and take me away, and she wiped my memories. I don’t understand; she said she loved me. Why did she do that? I don’t understand!”

Graham pulled him back, letting him sob into his shirt once more. He didn’t let on that half the reason he did was so Henry wouldn’t see the disgust and fury that would be clear on his face. It was only half a story, though; pieces. He shook his head. “What do you mean?” he finally asked.

Henry gripped his shirt in fists, clinging hard to him. “There was a trigger, and she was going to let it kill everyone in town. She told me, and told me she was going to take me away. She said she wanted me to herself, that I wouldn’t ever be hers if there were other people around. I told her how horrible it was. Then she took my memories away. I—I don’t understand. I just don’t understand.”

He dissolved into hard, hiccupping sobs once more.

Graham rested his chin on top of his head. “Hey, you’re safe now. You’re okay, and everyone else is, too. Take a breath, Henry, with me,” he said soothingly, and then began to take slow, steady breaths as Henry attempted to match them.

This was familiar; this was something he could do. Touch and mirrored action was how he’d learned most things with no language between he and his family, and it was simple to use it here. He felt as Henry’s wobbly inhales evened, but didn’t stop the rhythmic pattern until he felt the boy relax.

“I know how things were back then. I know how it was for you even before Emma came. But now you have the other memories, too, the ones with your mom. They won’t make the bad times disappear, Henry, but let yourself focus on the good ones. Tell me about your favorite memory growing up this time around.”

“It’s not real,” Henry muttered.

“Of course it is, kid. You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to, but just picture it, okay?” Graham replied, trying not to let the frown settle on his features.

He was silent a moment, his knuckles coloring as his hands loosened from the material of Graham’s shirt. “Christmas Eve, with mom and Maggie. Maggie almost burned the whole
kitchen trying to make stuffing, and the windows were open to let out the smoke.”

“Maggie used to live with you guys, right?” he asked, gently steering him deeper into the memory.

Henry’s nose curled. “Kinda. She had her own place, but she came to ours more often. She’d bring groceries and help out with mom.”

“But not too good with cooking?”

Henry finally smiled. “No. She sucked. And it was snowing pretty hard outside, but there was a space heater next to the presents and mom had a really soft sweater. It was the first Christmas we could afford a tree, and we had decorated it in popcorn and paper stars. The whole house smelled like pine and burnt bread. And mom … she let me nap in her lap as we watched some old movie. And I didn’t even care that I couldn’t open anything yet, because mom felt … safe? I don’t know,” he mumbled.

Graham nodded, and began to resume slow loops on his back. “Loved?” he offered.

Henry nodded. “By her, and by Maggie. And Beth was coming later, and Ryan, too. And I knew they were bringing food, and more gifts, and that Beth would sneak me a candy cane before bed and Ryan would try to teach me how to wrap the gift he got Mags but only because he didn’t know how either. But I liked that best, when it was quiet, and we were just … together.”

Graham smiled, feeling his heart swell as he pictured the scene. His own memories were not half as well-adjusted at that, but something about the idea of curling into a parent and having that feeling of belonging inside you … he was infinitely glad Henry had such memories. “I’m glad you got that.”

He sat up, looking into the distance as a slow smile crossed his face. “I don’t even know if that’s my favorite memory.” He glanced shyly at Graham. “I guess I do have a lot of good memories now.”

“Told you,” he said, then knocked their shoulders together. “You’ve got a lot of people who love you, kid, and want to see you happy.”

He wiped his nose with his sleeve. “She didn’t want to see me happy, did she?”

Graham winced. “Henry ….”

“No, it’s okay. You don’t have to make excuses for her,” he said solemnly.

“Look,” he said with a sigh. “I am not going to defend her on this. She should have been better for you. She wasn’t looking to give you your best chance, not when she made you come to Storybrooke. She was so focused on her happy ending that she didn’t see yours. So go ahead: be angry at her. That is well within your right. But remember that you’re here now. She wasn’t so spiteful as to take this life, this good life with Emma, from you.”

“She didn’t have much of a choice,” he said.

He nodded. “From what I heard, I agree. This was her best option, and I know she wasn’t counting on a lot of the things that we got from it. You don’t have to be grateful for her. Be grateful for Emma, and the good life she provided for you. Your mom loves you so much, and now it’s like you two were always together.”

Henry’s head bobbed in agreement, though he seemed to be lingering on some dark
thought despite it. “Yeah,” he said softly.

“You should talk about it with your mom,” Graham gently advised.

“You’re right,” he said. He leaned against his shoulder heavily. “Sorry I got so upset.”

“No,” he said firmly. “Don’t apologize for that. This is hard, Henry, and neither of us expect you to just get over this. Especially not on your own. Please: talk to us whenever you feel like this. Or to anyone.”

He cocked his head to the side and studied him with a strange, soft expression. “Okay. Promise.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Graham swore with what he hoped was a sterner expression than the beaming one he wanted to give the kid. “Come on, wash up and then help me with dinner. You know your mom will be hungry.”

“We could always have Ritu cook,” Henry said, trailing behind him.

Graham turned back. “I think we need a dinner just us three today, don’t you think?”

He ducked his head and then peered up with a smile. “Yeah. That sounds good.” He rushed to the bathroom.

When Henry returned, his face was clean and he looked a little brighter. They worked in mostly silence for a few minutes as Graham handed him a few tasks for their meal.

Henry took a few quick peeks up at Graham as he worked, and Graham diligently pretended not to notice as the kid gained his nerve. Finally, he set down a colander. “I’m really glad you’re here with us, Graham.”

Graham stopped chopping only briefly, using a free hand to tug the kid close. “Thanks for letting me in.”

Henry gave a small grin. “And thanks for caring.”

“That,” Graham said. “was not difficult. You’re a pretty great kid, Henry.”

He beamed at that. “I think you’re pretty great, too.”

Graham swallowed, trying not to let the words bleed into another emotional moment. The fact that Henry cared was a wholly humbling thing. Instead, he decided to lighten the mood. “Well, I guess I’ll stick around, then.”

“You better. Otherwise, me and mom’d find you.”

He grinned. “Your family’s pretty good at that, I hear. I guess it’ll be safer to stay put.”

Henry hugged him, and Graham held him for as long as he’d allow. By the time Emma came home to a full dinner, there was no more of the heaviness that started the afternoon.

At least for now, everything was right in their world again.
Carnival Games

Chapter Summary

Henry's school is throwing a carnival.

Chapter Notes

Tina0609's prompt "Emma beats Graham at darts. Maybe by distracting him? Something funny ;)") with a little more NY friends in there for fun. If the Vietnamese is off, blame the guy who was busy being distracted by proposing to my bff. Gosh, some people.

“So, where do you wanna start, kid?” Emma asked. She placed one hand over her stomach while the other pressed a ticket into her son’s palm.

“Darts!”

Graham and Emma shared a look before watching Henry run to the stand in the middle of the carnival. The Anderson School had set up the entire field with games and rides and treats, and the chasm of color and sound was stretched out as far as they could see. When Gia wanted a fundraiser, she left no holds barred.

Said woman watched him bounce in and out of the weave of the crowd with an amused expression. “Here,” she said, pushing a few tickets into Emma’s hand. “Georg bought too many.”

Emma frowned and held them out. “Gia, I can pay for my kid’s own tickets.”

“Who said they were for that kid? Let your big kid play,” she said with a grin. The stack of crystalled bracelets jangled as she elbowed Graham in the side before she waved them both off. “I’ve got lots more to attend to. Have fun.”

She disappeared into the crowd before she could protest further. Emma sighed and counted the tickets in her hand. “At least she didn’t give us more than a few games worth.”

“Could have been worse,” Graham agreed as he wrapped his arms around her. He leaned down to rest his chin into the crook of her shoulder, and cupped her stomach gently. He cocked his head to the side to meet her eye. “But I’m the big kid?”

“Well, we can take turns, then,” she said with a roll of her eyes. “C’mon, I actually do want to play.”

Emma didn’t look to see if Graham was following as she approached Henry at the game stand. He and Michael were giggling as they mostly missed their shots, the darts landing harmlessly on the grass before the brightly colored balloons. “Mom! Can I get another, please?”
She gave three tickets to the teacher manning the booth, and he handed the packs of darts to her. “We’ll all get a turn,” she said, her eyes twinkling.

“I don’t like that look,” Henry said suspiciously.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Emma said, her eyes widening guilelessly.

“I do,” Graham muttered as he placed the darts on the table in front of him.

Henry took a step back. “I think I’m just going to watch this round. Mom, go before Dad. We know how he’ll do.”

“We’ll see about that,” she murmured. She snuck a glance at her husband, who was busy talking to Michael about his hand positioning. She quickly tossed the dart at the board, grinning as a green balloon was hit.

Graham turned at the sound of the distinct pop, and eyed her suspiciously as he handed her the next one. “Definitely improving,” he said, though there was a question in his words.

“Oh? Must be the genetic thing,” she said, and flung the next one. It landed in a way that popped two at once, and she grinned.

He leaned closer, out of earshot of the boys. “I felt that,” he whispered in her ear, his hand gliding along her scapulae. “Cheater.”

Other than a charge of electricity that made the hair on her arm stand on end, there was no indication that her magic was used. Not like in Storybrooke. There was no flashes of light, no fog of color.

A part of her felt a flare of nerves. She still remembered the first time she noticed that she was using it, and the pallor her then-boyfriend had been taken with as he realized what happened. And that had been a subconscious use.

She studied him closely to see his reaction to the active use. He didn’t seem to hold onto any fear; only playfulness was alight in his eyes. She gave a cautious smile and hurled another bounce of power into her aim, popping three balloons in its downwards arc. “Only using my every advantage.” She felt flushed, a little breathless at the realization that she didn’t have to hide how childlike and free she felt in its use. “Your fault, anyway.”

“Hey, the mango only helps. Don’t blame him,” he replied warmly. He continued a slow massage along her back as the teacher handed over her prize: a stuffed animal about the size of Henry’s torso. Graham kissed the crown of her head and her lashes fluttered shut, warmth spreading out from the touch to imbue her entire body.

Henry was watching with narrowed eyes, a smile tweaking the edge of his lips. “Good job, mom. A surprisingly good job. Dad, beat her.”

Graham laughed and picked up his cache of red and blue darts. He took aim with a false seriousness for Henry’s benefit.

With care not to actually hit him with any of her magic, she bent the trajectory of his first throw to land in the dirt in a way that would make physics weep. “Gee, Mr. I-never-miss, what’s wrong with your aim?”

“Playing dirty, I see,” Graham said and tossed one before she could build the next
tremor of power. He sliced through two blues and a yellow. “One more like that, and I win.”

She aimed just as he did, until his other hand shot out to catch hers. She couldn’t help giggling as she squirmed, bumping her hip into his as he threw with a sharp exclamation.

He glared at her in light-hearted exasperation then turned to see that he’d only popped one extra balloon. “Such a cheat.”

“Foul!” Henry cried. “Rematch!”

“Oh, look, Andie’s here!” Emma said, pulling away conspicuously from the challenge. “Andie!”

Andie looked over and raised her popcorn in greeting. “Emma! Hold up!” She turned and straightened one of Daisy’s pigtails before leaving her with Simmons.

“Save me,” Emma pleaded, linking arms with her.

“What did you do, Bounty Hunter?” she asked knowingly.

“I have no clue what you’re talking about,” she replied.

“Uh huh, sure.” She leaned over and kissed Graham on his cheek, then ruffled Henry’s hair. “She’s up to no good, then?”

“Duh,” Henry shot back. He reached forward and grabbed a handful of popcorn from Andie’s bag.

Graham was distracted, though, as he searched the crowd. “Jess here, too? I need to talk to Simmons about—“

“The case? Humbert, it’s a carnival,” Andie said in exasperation.

Graham glanced back sheepishly. “I know.”

She rolled her eyes. “Workaholics, both of you. Go. He’s got the file on his phone.”

Emma felt him grasp her hand, and turned to meet him as his forehead rested against hers. He bumped her nose with his affectionately. “Be right back.”

She watched him go with a small smile, her heart swelling once more. When turned back to her friend, Andie had crossed her arms. “What?”

Andie shook her head and muttered something in Vietnamese. “Seriously, though, you two.”

“That sounded judgmental,” Emma said pointedly.

Andie shrugged. “Maybe you should learn a few phrases, then you’d know.”

“I know some!” Henry exclaimed proudly.

Andie looked at him, bewildered. “Oh, you, little spy? You think you know? Tell me.”

He grinned mischievously, eyes twinkling. “Anh yêu em.”

It sounded familiar to Emma’s ear, but for the life of her she could place it. “What’s
that?” she asked, turning back to her friend.

Andie’s dark eyes were wide with surprise. “Where’d you learn that?”

Henry shrugged. “You guys thought you were being sneaky, saying it all angry to each other, but I caught on. Simmons always says it to you.”

A small smile crossed her face. “Ah, is that so? You think you know what it means?”

Emma turned back to her son. “What does it mean, Henry?”

Henry shrugged, popping another piece of popcorn in his mouth. “‘I love you.’ Duh.”

Emma looked down at her son proudly. “You are so observant, kid.”

“Em thọt lòng anh, Henry,” Andie said fondly, kissing his brow. “Smart kid, this one. You should keep him.”

Emma stared down at him a moment, pretending to consider it. “Well, I think the warranty expired, so ….”

Henry rolled his eyes. “You’ve been with Graham too long. His humor’s rubbing off on you.”

Her nose wrinkled but she conceded with a sigh. “Yeah, probably. We can blame it on the fact that he planted his DNA in me.”

“Ew, gross, Mom,” he said, his face screwed up. “I’m going on the bumper cars.”

“You wanna scar the kid for life, huh?”

“One of the perks of parenthood, Andie. You’re saying that you, of all people, don’t tease Daisy?”

She muttered something sharp.

Emma grinned. That one she knew. Between Andie and Ritu, she had learned many of the coarser words in Vietnamese, French, and Tamil.

“Speaking of parenthood, how’s Little?”

She patted her stomach with a small smile. “Super active this week. Especially around Henry. He’s too used to Graham’s voice now and only moves about half as much for him,” she said with a grin. She was only partially teasing. The baby seemed comforted by Graham’s voice, and only stirred for a few moments before settling to sleep. Henry’s voice was a surprise, and he remained active throughout their conversations.

“Ah, it’s a boy day. I was wondering,” Andie said, then squinted to find the guys in the crowd. They were huddled next to the bumper car rink, the two looking every bit the cops they were as they went over evidence on Simmons’ phone. “It’s harder to keep tabs without you and Humbert in my bar all the time.”

“We weren’t there all the time,” Emma scoffed.

“You know what I mean,” Andie said. She squeezed her close by her shoulders. “I miss you two. The shifts have been getting longer with Má cutting back her hours and my favorite patrons not there to break up the time.”
“Are you trying to make me feel guilty about not hanging out in a bar while I’m pregnant?” Emma teased. At Andie’s frown, she nuded her. “Hey, I know. I miss you, too. You gotta show up at all hours, like you used to.”

She snorted. “I already had to hear you two once, and Maggie said you’re even worse when you’re in your own space. No, I think I will be announced for all future visits, thank you.”

Emma snickered. “Or you can show up at more of Gia’s functions.”

She shrugged a shoulder and pouted. “Yeah, maybe.”

She sighed as she conceded. “I’ll come by next week, as long as you sneak me some iced tea and a box of sugar cookies. Deal?”

“Deal. I’ll hold you to it,” she said, shaking her hand firmly.

“Fair notice: Ritu’s still on me like a hawk, so she might join,” she warned.

Emma had only lucked out on this weekend because the Wilsons were visiting Aamer’s grandparents back in Quebec. It didn’t stop Ritu from cooking full, balanced meals that currently sat half-eaten in their fridge; the boys and her scarfed down much of it the night she dropped it off.

She didn’t mind the hovering anymore, not really. It got a little stifling now that she was well, and she had certainly fought it tooth and nail in the very beginning. Looking back, she really didn’t know what she would have done without her, when she had been so sick that she couldn’t get up from her tiled bathroom. In the end, she suspects that half the reason it didn’t bother her was because of how familiar it felt.

Sometimes, as Ritu fluttered around, fussing over them all, she saw a little of Mary Margaret peeking through.

“By all means, bring the over-protective one. Maybe a little drink will do her good,” she said mischievously.

She couldn’t help the laugh that escaped her. She hadn’t seen the other woman tipsy in a fair amount of time. “Sounds like a plan. Now,” she said, and dug through her pockets. “Let’s get some ridiculously greasy and sugary food. We need to support the kids, after all.”

“It’s the charitable thing to do,” Andie agreed, swiping one of the tickets.

Emma nodded in agreement. She’d buy a couple extra bright pink confections for her men, too. It’d soften the blow of her totally legitimate win.
Comparing Scars

Chapter Summary

He feels her watching him.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is really for those that couldn’t read the M-rated piece Past, Present, and Future. I went through some big plot points in that piece (the first ILY and the discussion of Graham’s issues), and didn’t want to completely alienate those that can’t read it. So, this is later that same night, with a little more angst than I first anticipated.

Mentions of past sexual and physical abuse, as well as child abuse.

He stirred at the first touch, though that wasn’t what roused him. He could feel eyes on him, studying carefully.

Fingers trailed across his shoulder, feather-light as they traced along the raised lines and slight depressions. As he blinked, he saw her blue-green eyes were following the path, her brow furrowed ever so slightly. He came into a lazy sort of consciousness, though the sky was still a deep blue-black.

“You’re staring again,” he murmured. He reached out with one arm, grabbing her around the dip of her waist where cool sheet met warm skin, and he brought her firmly closer.

Her fingers paused and she looked up. A circle rolled instead, comforting instead of exploring. “Who said I’m not just appreciating the view?”

He nudged her nose, inviting seriousness instead of the playful teasing she was trying to incite. “I do.”

She winced and her fingers tensed above his skin. “Just—I—I’m … not going to ask,” she said, her voice hushed.

He shook his head and brought his hand to flatten hers to his heart. “It’s fine, Em. Whatever you need.”

Her eyes snapped up, and a slow smile crossed her face. “Em?”

He chuckled and rubbed his eyes. “I’m tired.”

She looked a little pleased at that and curled closer. “Good,” she pronounced simply. She leaned up and connected their lips languidly, slowly deepening. It was not a start to something more, but an echo of what was. She ducked lower and pressed a soft kiss to his pectoral, just above his heart. Her look was serious once again, a frown tugging downward. “I just … are they
all from … from her?”

He swallowed, realizing where her hesitance stemmed from. He closed his eyes, thinking about the origins of the marks on his skin. He brushed his hand up her forearm and curled around her wrist, then he led their joined hands to the side of his neck. He splayed her fingers across the scarred bite that barely was anymore, the one that just missed tearing out his jugular. “No, not all. This one was from when I was a kid. Rival pack.”

Her touch left a shiver as she scrapped up to his hair, soothingly tangling in the longer ends. “Wolves,” she murmured.

He nodded, then tapped his nose next with a wry grin. “Broke this a couple times, from different things.” He didn’t linger on what those things were, though he remembered being pushed into a wall by a shopkeep, and of a steer knocking him to the forest floor. Then possibly once more in adulthood, when some drunk patron head-butted him.

She returned his smile. “Explains why it bends just a little to the right. I kind of like that.”

He raised an eyebrow in surprise, but didn’t linger on the fact. He moved lower, to the end of his ribs. “This is from a fight, maybe a couple years before she found me. I was maybe … fourteen? Fifteen? I can’t say for sure. I couldn’t really keep track, and I couldn’t exactly ask my parents.”

She focused on the mark, her thumb brushing back and forth over the long white line where the hunting knife had nicked him so long ago. “Not the safest life, huh?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I survived, and that was basically it for a long time. I have a couple more of less interesting scars from that time. Then, I was commanded to the castle.”

She looked like she was going to be sick, her face pale and lips twisted more firmly downward. “She hurt you so much,” she whispered, and her hands began their journey across his scars once more.

He didn’t want to lie to her, not now. “Much of them aren’t from her, actually. She’d heal those,” he admitted.

She rested her head against his chest, covering her face from his view. Warm wetness hit his skin and his head bowed. He didn’t want pity, but something in his soul ached to know that her reaction wasn’t that. She was pained, even felt guilt of all things, over what had happened.

“Emma,” he said, his tone almost forceful even as it never reached above a whisper. “Stop. I’m okay.”

Her eyes were red as they raised to meet his. “I worked with her, side-by-side. I trusted her, with my life, with my family’s … with Henry’s.”

“And you didn’t know. You couldn’t. She’s manipulative, and what’s worse is that she actually does believe that she’s the victim in all this.” He pet her hair back in long strokes. As he did, he noticed a small shiny spot inside the curved edge of her jaw, standing out amidst the small bloom of the forming bruise he’d made with tongue and teeth. Finding his out, he questioned, “where’d that come from?”

She glanced up with a plain look that said she knew what he was doing. Instead of fighting it, she sighed. “Burn. From dragon fire.”
“When you were breaking the curse,” he surmised with a smile. “See? You’re the hero, Emma. You were able to save us, and that’s why we’re able to have this life right now.”

She looked away sharply. He knew he was on uneven ground as he danced around the title she knew still troubled her. “I didn’t save you.”

“Of course you did,” he said, then pressed kisses into the nape of her neck, nuzzling her affectionately. “You helped me break free. You make me feel safe. And I’ll say it again, as many times as you need: I love you. I always have.”

She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him soundly. She stayed close to his lips when they parted. “I don’t need to hear it always. It used to … well, I didn’t used to be okay with those words,” she admitted softly. “I can feel it, and that feels more real. But … I guess it’s nice, now and again.”

“Good,” he said, and managed a grin down at her. He was still in awe of it, this, her. Being this vulnerable should have been scarier. Despite the flashes of memory he’d had in the beginning of the evening, he felt at peace at that moment. “Because I plan on saying it now and again.”

She smiled and buried her nose into his chest. “I love you,” she said softly.

The second time those words escaped her that night, and it didn’t feel any less extraordinary than the first. He picked up her hand and held it loosely in his grip, twining and untwining their fingers. Finally, his thumb caught into the webbing between hers and her forefinger. “Another dragon breath burn?” he asked. He pulled her hand closer, inspecting the small circular mark. It was too exact, too polished.

He watched as she swallowed, the lightness draining out of her eyes. All at once, her expression fell. “No. Third grade, ninth foster home. My punishment for reaching for the remote.”

His own face hardened as the words dawned on him. “Emma,” he said, his voice cracking. Rage built in his chest, and his lungs tightened with filling emotion. “What the hell?”

She shrugged one shoulder and avoided his eye. “Things I had to deal with growing up. Nothing as bad as someone stabbing me at fourteen,” she said, then gave him a pointed look.

“No, you were eight and someone that was supposed to protect you did this,” Graham replied, his words rumbling in a low growl.

She crooked her arm and rested her head on her hand. “There’s nothing to protect me from anymore, Graham,” she said, using her other hand to tug through his curls.

He turned and caught her wrist with his lips, feeling a tear slip down his face as he did so. He let out a sharp breath. “I wish—“

“Ah, so you see how I feel,” she said, a teasing note in her tone that hid the seriousness under it.

He ducked his head and rolled a thumb under the shoelace. “Yeah, I see.” He sighed, kissing the mark before his hands sought any others that may have marred her skin.

“Only other lasting one is here,” she murmured, leading his hands to her leg. “Bone poked through. That home, at least, they took me from right away.”

His eyes snapped up. “You mean you stayed with the other after it happened?”
She shrugged. “It wasn’t easy to speak up. But when your strongest bone snaps through your skin for no good reason? It’s an easier tip off.”

His throat tightened, and the rage piqued in him again. His jaw clenched down as he struggled to pull back from the violent energy that flitted across him. The fierce protectiveness that he hadn’t *fully* felt since he’d had a brother to protect ignited in the pit of his belly. “I don’t think you realize how much I want to tear them apart,” he said in a low, dangerous rumble.

She was quiet a moment, still but oddly relaxed as she remained in his embrace. There was something other than soothing in mind as she finally leaned forward and set deep kisses along the left side of his chest. “Yeah, Graham, I do,” she murmured. “I want to hurt her. For you, for Henry, for me. Sometimes I feel like … I don’t know, like it wants to *swallow me up*, just how much I want to.”

He sighed heavily, and nodded. “I can’t say that I don’t, too.”

“You were so nonchalant about it earlier,” she whispered, her gaze questioning. She looked nauseated. “I know you said you’re okay, but—“

“I am,” he reassured. He grabbed her thigh and pulled it over his hip, bringing her even tighter against him. He rested his palms against her cheeks, making sure she could see the seriousness of what he was saying. “I told you: I feel safe with you.”

The corner of her lip pulled up in time with her shoulder. “I feel safe with you, too.” Her eyes flicked conspicuously toward the night stand. “But I’m not the one who was …. Did she … how much time passed before she said that you were the reason she couldn’t—“

“Conceive?” he finished for her, somewhat bitterly. His eyes shaded, pushing past the memory as he stared down at her. Keeping steady focus on her green-blue eyes helped him from remembering the wrath in dark ones. He shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. And it’s not like it— not like it … stopped her.”

“*God,* Graham,” she choked out, and she buried her face again as her shoulders shook.

He shook his head and brought her face back, connecting their lips in a kiss that was just as bruising as it was consoling. He wasn’t sure anymore which of their tears he tasted more prominently. He only released when he felt his lungs burn for air, and even then he remained close. “We were both hurt, Emma, and then hurting for each other is just in our nature,” he stated through sharp breaths. “I know it will always live with me, just as it probably does for you. But we were given *this.* I don’t want to waste it.”

“I know how to bury the stuff I went through. I have decades of that. But I don’t know how to let it go,” she admitted. “Not the stuff that happened to you.”

He took a long inhale, trying not to picture Emma, three years younger than Henry, icing a wound she wouldn’t admit to. “Then we don’t bury it. We just don’t let it consume us,” he offered.

“Easier said than done?”

“Yeah,” he admitted. He kissed her one more time, gentler than the last. “But good thing our job gives us bad guys to take it out on.”

Her eyes fluttered shut, a small smile crossing her face. “Yeah, okay.” She tightened her arm around him.
“You help, you know. With my old stuff.”

She opened her eyes, and gave a half smile in return. “I hope that’s true. But you definitely help with my old stuff.”

“It’s true. I wouldn’t have said it otherwise,” he swore.

She peered at him, and the smile changed. Her eyes darkened as she leaned up. “All that extra energy you were talking about … there are other places we could put that to, you know.”

“Hmm, you think?” he asked. He brushed her cheek with the back of his hand. It was strange, the mix of tears and seduction on her face.

She licked her lips and nodded. “I’ve read that sublimating helps.” Then there was a bit of hesitation, an uncertainty to her expression. “As long as you’re still in that ‘great, fantastic, verging on utopic’ sort of mood.”

He stared down at her, feeling his entire body unfurl as he realized how important his “yes” was to her. Instead of answering immediately, he paused to study her. Every part of him felt awed that she was with him, and taking a moment to appreciate the fact only seemed appropriate. “I think I want to say it now.”

She laughed, the sound a bright crash into what had been an overly tense moment. “No, don’t say it now. Save it for ‘again,’” she said, her eyes twinkling. She met his gaze and held it as she made her way closer, drifting slowly into his space. “Better if you show it for now.”

“Yeah, I can do that.” He pressed her onto her back, dipping low to breathe over the scar on her thigh. He remembered the way his family would heal wounds through licks, how stories of mothers kissing injuries better had seeped into his memories. He wished there could be nothing more to erase the wound from her memory than that simple gesture.

“This is real,” she whispered softly, breaking his thoughts.

The familiar question made him drift back up to be level with her. He was suddenly sure she didn’t just mean their life, as was usual, but also his state of mind. He nodded. “Promise, Emma.”

She nodded back, somewhat jerkily. “Okay. Okay,” she said, and reached to brush over his jaw. She blinked hard before nodding once more. “I believe you.”

He curled their hands and pressed them into the bed aside her head “Together, Em,” he said, then kissed her.

The Way to Go Home

Chapter Summary

It had been shaping up to be a quiet night ….

Chapter Notes

After they’ve moved in together, before that first fight. Just a bit of fluff. Tina0609’s request of "In the chapter where Graham is in the hospital you wrote about him having a headache like his colleagues challenged him to a drinking contest. I actually would really love to read that if you wrote it. Or more like him coming home to Emma afterwards. Mostly because I think a slightly drunk or tipsy Graham would be all cuddly and Emma would act annoyed but secretly loving it to take care of him and teasing him in the mornings.” and an anon’s request of "Since you're ”a little tipsy”: slightly more tipsy Emma or slightly more tipsy Graham, please?"

Emma rubbed the back of her neck and rolled her shoulders. Her legs were curled up underneath her, a half-full wine glass at her side. Her laptop screen scrolled past the last of the paperwork that needed to be filled out for the jumper, nearly completed now.

It was getting late, or rather early. Two had come and gone, and the city that never slept was somehow more silent than she’d heard it in a long while. Henry was at Michael’s for the night, and later today the boys would show up and Emma would take over the sleepover festivities. But that wasn’t for another ten hours or so. Graham had been working late at the office, and had checked up a couple hours ago to say that he’d be home even later than expected. The case was a hard one, she knew, and it had made the entire department on edge whenever she’d visited in the last week.

So, she was not expecting the distant sound of singing.

Her eyebrow quirked up, and she leaned back. She pushed the lid of the computer down. It was getting louder, and she chuckled inwardly as she realized why.

She rose to the door as the chorus of slurred sound increased in volume, and she slid the deadbolt off. She poked her head out the door and looked in the direction of the elevators.

Leo was the first one she saw, stumbling into the corridor with a grand sweep of his arms. He looked disheveled but was also beaming. He grinned as he saw her and held out a hand.

“Everybody!”

The song began again, one she vaguely recognized from Jaws. It was near indiscernible in the tuneless, drunken hands of the 20th precinct. Surprisingly, she couldn’t make out an Irish-lilted voice amidst the crowd and part of her felt a slash of insecurity.

Before it could fully establish, they rounded the corner, and her boyfriend’s eyes lit up
clearly at the sight of her. He grinned up at her from the middle of McNab and Garcia, with Strode and Lightly on either side of them. In the back, looking as sullen as ever, Lazo glared silently. Her hands were gripped on two of the men’s shoulders, bracing them upwards. “Get your keys, Humbert,” she grumbled, and gestured to her bag with a purse of her lips.

He leaned back and scooped them out, then pitched forward towards Emma. He caught her around the neck, and Emma stumbled to catch him. “Missed you,” he murmured. His voice was thick and warm, a sour note hanging on his clothing from the liquor.

She rounded her arms around his waist with a sigh as his tall form collapsed to negate their height difference. He melted like candlewax, forming into her exactly being melding into firm edges, all clumsy joints and loose muscles.

She looked up at Simmons who simply shrugged. “Hey, I stopped at five. But McNab wanted to see if he could drink him under the table.”

McNab’s head shot up at the sound of his name. At 6’5 and thin as a rail, he swayed like a life-sized Gumby. Two fingers waved insistently. “Missed by two, two! I demand … I demand a rematch!”

Lazo scowled and pushed him forward. He groaned, groping against the wall for support. “I don’t care how many cases your department collabs with ours, bobo, I am not dragging you through six blocks of ‘Show Me the Way to Go Home’ ever again.”

“C’mon, now, you didn’t even get to see his little strip show,” Strode slurred.

“Oh, God,” Emma said with a shake of her head, noting Lazo’s clear disgust. Graham nudged his forehead into her jawline, softly nuzzling her, and she fought against her typical inclination to his signs of affection.

A nearby door unclicked, and a sleepy Ritu joined their little hallway party. “What…?”

“I am so sorry,” Emma said with a wince.

Her neighbor merely raised one brow as she took in the scene.

Lazo’s face was flat, and she raised her purse above her head without missing a beat as Garcia grabbed for it. Lightly had turned his back and was loudly shushing the group between giggles. Strode was loosening his tie with a suggestive wink. Simmons was busy conducting the next verse in his head, his body swaying with the tune. McNab was loudly swallowing in the corner, holding back from what Emma knew with certainty was him getting sick.

Graham was still oddly quiet, his hands splayed over her back and gently pulling her in closer. Emma gave a small, apologetic smile. “I’ll make some extra strong coffee tomorrow. Come by.”

“Not before eight, mkay?” Ritu replied. She looked particularly amused as the door was shut behind her, not a word of reprimand spoken.

Lazo took two collars, and then attached McNab back to the chain. “Just four more stops,” she said crisply, and turned back toward the elevators.

Simmons bowed, then stumbled backwards a few paces. “Good night, my dear,” he said formally, then snorted back a laugh as he ran after the rest. “On land or sea or foam!”

“They haven’t had the right key all night,” Graham mumbled into her neck, then
pressed a kiss into her skin.

“Poor baby,” she mocked. “Let’s get you to bed.”

He simply nodded, leaning his weight into her as she fumbled with the door. She pulled him inside with a sigh. He made a low whine of protest at the sudden increase in brightness, and she clicked off the main entry light so that only the glow from the kitchen remained.

“Water, Graham. You’ll need it,” she advised. She poured him onto the barstool, but his hand sought out hers and clung tightly. She chuckled. “I’ll need that.”

He leaned his head on the counter and peeked up at her. She took a moment to consider how boyish he looked, all clean-shaven with half-mast eyes and messy curls. She bit down on her lip slightly, and let his fingers coil around hers. “Don’t wanna let go,” he said with a slight pout.

She forced herself to scoff, untangling their hands briefly. She denied the fact that she was shaking as she removed the glass from the upper shelf. By the time it was set in front of him, filled with clear liquid, she was better. “You’re needy when you’re drunk,” she teased.

She sat beside him and, before she knew it, her fingers were in his hair. She pet back the strands in long, languid strokes. It felt good to touch him, comfort him. To be physically reminded that he was there, that he was beside her, and that he wanted her near … it was a strange craving that twisted in her gut whenever he was away, and she tried not to be so reliant on it when he returned.

He leaned into her touch, his eyes fluttering shut. Suddenly, he caught her hand and pressed a kiss onto her wrist, along her pulse. That feeling stirred in her, both tying her to the moment and making her want to push away, all at once. Her fingers flexed and she curled them against his jaw before mirroring his posture, cheek laying against cool tile.

After a moment, he shook his head in response to her statement. “No, not normally,” he said.

“You closed the Nimitz case, then?” she said.

He nodded. “We celebrated, like normal. Maybe a little more than normal,” he said before lifting the glass to his mouth. He took a few long sips before lying back down. His accent was much more noticeable like this, swallowed consonants and rolled vowels blurring the words even more than the slurs marked between them.

She smiled at him, unable to keep the warmth from the action. “Yeah, maybe a little more. This is a side to Inebriated-Graham that I haven’t seen yet. You’re so quiet,” she observed once more.

Usually, he was about as boisterous as his colleagues, laughing loudly and telling bad jokes with horrible timing. The memories had made him more extroverted in that regard, at least around his friends. However, she found that he needed something solid to keep that comfort level when he spent a long time with those he didn’t consider family. Thus, the touching was normal; he always made it a habit to keep light physical contact on her in public, and intoxication only increased that impulse.

He shook his head and groaned once he did. His head flopped around before he rested it on his knuckles. “I’ve not drank this much in ….”

She waited for the end to his statement, watching as he struggled. Her brow furrowed and she lifted one shoulder. She scooted her stool to be closer to him. “Must’ve been a long time
to get you like this. I thought it was bad when Simmons joined in on your out-drinking games,” she pressed with a slight nudge against his arm.

He took another drink of his water. “Not since Storybrooke,” he finished.

Emma felt a flash of hot tension run down her extremities before she pulled back slightly. She couldn’t get far, though, as she found his hand against her knee, holding her tight in place. His reflexes were still surprising at times. Her eyes met his before she shied away from them, trying not to think too much about those last 24 hours. It made sense, now, why he had been so in his head. “You weren’t exactly quiet that night,” she joked weakly.

He smiled into his cup. “Just ‘round you.”

She sighed and pulled him into an embrace. His head fell against her chest, a shuddered breath expelled. “We need a phrase for this multiple memory thing, when it splits our heads like this.”

He ground his forehead against her collarbone back and forth, then his grip tightened along her waist to bring her into his lap. She followed wordlessly, letting him pull her close. “They’re both real,” he said stubbornly.

“I know,” she replied. She pushed his hair back. The fingers of his right hand slipped under her shirt, rolling small circles against bare skin. She wondered whether they were both seeking reality by the feel of each other alone.

He pulled back just a fraction, a lopsided, goofy smile crossing his face. She almost wanted to laugh at the sudden change in emotion. “I want to kiss you,” he pronounced, then leaned in.

She stopped him with a hand to his chest, but grinned widely. “Not now. Finish your water, then we’re getting you to bed. You can kiss me all you want tomorrow, after you wash the smell of whiskey away. If you don’t have a massive hangover, that is.”

He shook his head with a scoff. “Please, I’m Irish. That stuff’s like milk to me.”

Emma pushed out of his arms and back to her feet. She crooked her finger to have him follow. “That excuse might’ve worked if you were actually Irish, Graham. Or, you know, if it didn’t sound like you were speaking in cursive.”

He kept eye contact and a smile as he finished off his glass, then stumbled upward. “There’s things I couldn’t do the last time I was like this.”

She rolled her eyes. “Like what?”

His face softened, dreamy and comfortable as he studied her. “Like explain why I care how you look at me.”

She came forward, supporting his weight as she led them to the bedroom. “I think you got your point across that night.”

“But now I can say it,” he reasoned.

She hid the amusement on her face and pointed to his clothing. He rolled his shoulders, helping her remove his jacket. She unbuckled his pants next and let them pool at his feet. Carefully, she led him over the pile and then they collapsed more than laid on the bed.
His eyes were a fraction away, deep and dark and only a little fogged. He tangled his hand in her hair, that awe that she sometimes noticed crossing his features. He leaned closer, nudging her nose with his. “I love you.”

She noticed that he was still heeding her request, not leaning close enough for their lips to touch nor even asking again. “I know. Go to sleep,” she said. It was a strange mirror to that last time, with the words and not the action.

“I’m tired and I wanna go to bed,” Graham sang sleepily.

She shook her head and pulled the sheet around them. She’d tease him mercilessly tomorrow for all this, but for now … “love you, too, Graham.”
Week's End

Chapter Summary

The end of a busy week.

Chapter Notes

Super short little ficlet. Based of an "imagine your OTP" that an anon sent on tumblr. The beginnings of the relationship, pre-married.

She plopped down on her stomach, feeling the ache slowly releasing from her body as she let out a low groan. “Never again,” she insisted, the words a low whine.

Graham chuckled from his place at the head of the bed. “What, two cases in a week is pushing it?”

“If you say ‘I told you so’ …,” she warned lowly. She dragged herself up his body and then rolled her head onto his chest. Lazily, he pulled his arms around her, cradling her loosely as she nuzzled against him.

“Never,” he swore. His eyes were closed, breathing steady but heavy.

“And how much overtime did you log this week, Detective?” she asked.

“Enough,” he said. A smile crossed his face even as he didn’t bother to open his eyes. “And I managed to cart Henry and the crew around all week.”

“Mm,” she hummed. She inhaled lowly, taking in his scent more than sighing. “Thanks for that.”

“Not a problem,” he replied, the words a little mumbled in his fatigue.

A few beats passed before she nudged her forehead into his side. “We’re supposed to get ready and go to Gia’s thing,” she reminded. She made no move to get up.

He pulled her closer and rested his chin on her head. “Totally still happening. I am getting up now,” he said. His arms tightened around her waist, fingers trailing just beneath the hem of her blouse.

“Bad influence,” she scolded. Her right hand slipped open the buttons on his shirt, and she rested her palm against the warm skin of his chest. She settled over his heart and finally felt herself relax. “Tell me about it. Your week, I mean.”

“You just want to listen to me talk so you could fall asleep,” he accused.

“And you’re going to fall asleep mid-sentence,” she reminded.
“Fair,” he said. He pressed a kiss to the crown of her head and trailed his fingers up and down her spine soothingly. “It started with Monday’s interview. We’re getting close to finishing the case, and” ….

As predicted, she didn’t even make it to Tuesday. When she woke hours later, they were still tangled together and fully clothed. She felt warm and safe, locked in his sleep-slackened embrace. She tilted her chin to watch him a moment, feeling the edges of sleep curling around her consciousness. She smiled, leaned up, and pressed her lips against his jaw before settling once again.

The long weeks were worth it if this was how they ended.
Failure and Archetypes

Chapter Summary

For once, the 20th found one before Emma could.

Chapter Notes

Anon asked if we could see slightly tipsier Graham or Emma. We’ve seen fluffy Graham, now’s time for angsty Emma. Something about recent episodes and spoilers made me want to address one thing I’ve mentioned only in passing in this verse: Emma’s title.

He put the file between his teeth, hitting save on the document still on his screen while pulling on his jacket.

“Clocking out?” Simmons questioned. He leaned back, letting the bones of his spine crack noisily.

Graham nodded and tucked the papers in the crook of his arm. “Yeah. I’ll drop these with Miller before I go. Unless you want a last look?” he said.

Simmons rubbed his temples. “Please, don’t tempt me. I hate this case,” he said thickly.

“DNA comes back Tuesday,” he reminded.

“Doesn’t stop Miller from wanting every other piece turned over in the meantime. ‘It’s gotta be airtight this time around.’ Like we don’t usually work ourselves raw on these cases,” he said grudgingly.

Graham sighed and gave a half shrug. “Departmental screw up. Makes the 20th look better.”

“I know.”

A blip on the computers a few paces away drew their attention. Garcia leaned over his screen with a grimace. “It’s Lightly. He says they found Delabert. I thought that was Robbery’s division?”

Graham dropped the file on the table and went to join Garcia. “Yeah, it was. Emma was working that rundown, been on it for months. What’s Lightly doing on it?” Lightly worked in Homicide; the case shouldn’t have crossed his desk.

Garcia whistled through his teeth. “That’s why. They found him at the girlfriend’s apartment. Looks like a murder/suicide.”

Graham froze. “What?” A cold grip seized him, how close Emma had been to that guy
within the last few months.

Garcia’s head bobbed. Simmons had come in closer, and even Lazo’s head popped up from her station. “Nasty scene. Lightly … Lightly said he told the recovery agent about the development.” Garcia’s gaze turned upward, focusing on Graham. Graham felt the others do the same.

He took in a shaky breath and fished out his phone. He found that the email Lightly sent was sitting in his inbox, but there was nothing from Emma. No email, no call, no text. He swallowed thickly. “I—“

“Go home. I’ll get the file back,” Simmons said simply.

He nodded numbly, scooping up the papers he needed.

“Humbert.” Lazo helpfully tossed his keys at him, and Graham couldn’t even find the will to smile in acknowledgement as he caught them.

Emma had known that girl. Emma had sympathized. Emma had cared.

He barely remembered the taxi ride home, having forgone the subway in an attempt at solitude. He had only sent one text, but so far it went unanswered and unread.

He walked down the hall to the apartment, still checking his phone as he went. A lock clicked open as he did, and his head shot up. He saw Henry’s face peek out of Sam and Ritu’s. “Graham,” he called in a whisper.

“Hey kid,” he greeted. Henry scurried out and came into his arms easily, hugging him loosely.

“Mom’s not great,” he said solemnly. One shoulder shrugged up, though his face remained worried. “She picked up me and Avery, but she was real quiet. She asked Aamer to watch us until their parents get home. Mr. Wilson’s on his way.”

He looked around him, finding the teen setting bowls of top ramen in front of Avery and the empty place that was Henry’s. “You’ll be okay?”

Henry nodded. “Aamer won’t hang with us, but he’ll make sure we’re fed and safe.”

He smiled and pushed the hair off his forehead. “You have your stuff? Homework finished?”

He rolled his eyes good-naturedly. “Yeah, Graham. All set.”

He nodded. “Okay. See you tomorrow, then. I’ll take you guys to school, okay? Have fun.”

“Thanks.” He hesitated in the doorway before finally giving a half smile. “Make sure she’s better, okay?”

The corner of his lip quirked, and a low sigh escaped him. “I’ll try. Be good, kid.”

He nodded and the door shut behind him. Graham turned toward their home, feeling a bit of tension curl its way into his spine.

When he entered the apartment, it was dark. No lights were on, and only the barest hint
of the last of the sun was peeking in through the blinds. He took off his jacket and set it and his stack of papers to the side. Silently, he walked toward the bedroom.

“You’re home.”

He glanced to the corner of the living room, finding Emma slouched against the wall. A bottle of whiskey lay cradled by her side, the other hand resting against her temple. In the dark of shadows, she looked grey and drawn, her eyes red-rimmed but dry.

He hesitated a moment before leaning against the back of the couch. He pressed his lips together and bowed his head. “Lightly let us know.”

She nodded and brought the bottle to her lips, taking a deliberate swig. “Four months.”

He let out a low breath and sat on the ground so he was facing her. “I know. He went off-grid. There was nothing you could do.”

Her gaze rose, settling on him with barely contained fury and sorrow. “‘Nothing I could do?’ I kept hitting dead ends, and taking on new cases in the meantime. I didn’t put the effort I could have, and he killed her. She trusted me to find him. All that time, and I failed and—I’m supposed to be the—” She cut herself off, and brought her fist to her mouth.

His eyes bounced across her face as he realized where the end of her sentence lay. He swallowed, thinking about the title that had been forced so heavily upon her. He carefully chose his next words. “You are. One person’s evil doesn’t negate who you are.”

She shook her head and took another long drink. “I’m supposed to be this big Savior. I’m supposed to bring back happy endings, to help people, and I just … I get close, and then—”

“Hey, stop. You have done those things, and you continue to do those things. You’ve saved so many—“

“I didn’t save her. I didn’t save you,” she said plainly, meeting his eye straight on. “Don’t you dare say otherwise, not again. Not when I was too damn stubborn, too blind, that I couldn’t stop her from killing you.” She covered her face, a sharp exhale leaving her, a hitch in the next breath.

The protests felt heavy in his chest, the want to comfort her mixing with the knowledge that being too reassuring on this would only make her push back harder. Carefully he scooted forward and turned, leaning against the wall next to her. He rested his knee against hers, making sure she could feel his presence. “Okay,” he said slowly. “You didn’t save me. You didn’t have the chance, and I died.”

She sniffed and nodded. She pulled her hands through her hair. “See. Not so hard.”

He left his hand palm up near her side, leaving the offer there but not reaching for hers. “Just because you have that title, that destiny, whatever you want to call it, it doesn’t mean you’re infallible.”

She stared forward wearily. “All the happy endings, they said. Instead, all I bring is my bad luck,” she said thickly. “I thought I was, I really did. At least for Henry, you know. But more and more I just find—“

“What? That we struggle sometimes, we fail sometimes, but ultimately this life is happy? It’s real, this life, and that comes with all the realities of it. Unless I’m wrong. Are you not happy?” he countered.
She looked at him and her hand slipped into his. “I am. I promise. I just ….” She paused and swallowed another mouthful of the liquor.

“It’s not a picture-perfect fairytale, not like the book tries to make things, and not even like it was back then,” he said. He twined their fingers and brought it up to kiss along her knuckles. “I like it better, though. And just because we have these times, doesn’t make you any less of a –“

“A savior? A savior that can’t even manage to save her tru—her l— … well, you know.” Her face soured as she drank, blinking rapidly.

Graham thought about the label that rested a little more comfortably along their relationship, but still seemed so impossible. He knew she didn’t like to mark it in those quixotic terms, that she liked feeling it more than saying it, so he didn’t take offense to her stammering. “I did come back, you know.”

She huffed. “Yeah. And yet I still keep losing people.”

He played with her fingers, twisting them along his own. Quietly, he offered, “maybe you’re not the savior anymore. Maybe that ended when the Dark Curse broke.”

She grimaced and her lashes brushed across her cheeks.

He bumped her shoulder. “I’m not saying it’s true. I’m just saying you wouldn’t need the title to make you a good person, Emma. And I think I can speak for Henry when I say that it doesn’t make us love you any less if that were the case.”

Tentatively, her eyes rose. Her gaze traced his features, and he let her have the moment to discern the truth in his words.

He waited another beat before continuing. “You did so much for everyone, and especially for me, but okay: you didn’t save my life back then. You didn’t get the chance—“

“Or I failed,” she muttered darkly.

He raised an eyebrow but nodded. “Okay, let’s say you failed. Do you also believe me when I say Henry loves you?”

She huffed. “Yes.” There was something in there, though, the worry that always seemed attached, like she wasn’t enough for her kid.

Determinedly, he twisted his body toward hers. “And do you believe that I love you?”

Her face softened and she nodded. “Of course. I love you, too.”

He rested his forehead on hers, their noses touching slightly before he pulled back a fraction. “Then you don’t have to worry about being some archetype. You’re such a good person, Emma, and that echoes in everything you do. Knowing you take it this hard when you ‘fail’ … well, that’s just reinforces who you are.”

“Which is?”

“You are you. You don’t have to be anything else, not for us.”

She huffed a short sound of amusement, and shied away from his gaze “For someone who claims to be not good at the talking thing, you pick some choice words.”
He knew she was only trying to hide from the seriousness, so he decided to play into the teasing. “Only with you. Maybe Henry sometimes,” he said. He pressed his lips to hers in a shadow of a kiss. “Take the loss this time. One miss doesn’t take away the wins you’ve made before.”

She closed her eyes again, but nodded. “She just …,” she trailed off.

“You saw yourself in her,” he finished. Marina had been nineteen, trying so hard to scrape together the funds to get her boyfriend, a thief, out of jail. There were a few easy similarities to find, even though there wasn’t enough for full parallels. The lines intersected only minimally, but he had seen the way Emma’s soul had steeled whenever she spoke of the case.

She nodded and scrapped the bottle closer, almost as if she was cradling it. “It’s not fair,” she whispered.

He shook his head and rested it on top of hers. “No, it’s not. But it’s also not your fault that that man took her life,” he said.

He kept a part to himself, the part that was morbidly pleased that Grayson Delabert was dead. Emma had been so close to crossing his path over the months, so close to finding him. If he was capable of killing someone that cared about him, he didn’t want to consider what could have happened if. He was still stamping down the protectiveness that had initially consumed him when he heard the news.

He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “We can go to the service, but only if you want. Whatever way you need to mourn, I’ll help.”

She shifted and rested her head against him. “I don’t know yet.” She pushed away the bottle, before looking up with big eyes. “Take me to bed?”

He nodded and tucked her into his arms. He lifted them from the floor and carried her to the bedroom, feeling as she melted into his embrace. It would take a while before she could actually cry for what happened, he knew, but he’d take the chance to care for her now, when she was letting him. “Shower first?”

She shook her head. “Just want to sleep.”

He untied and removed her boots, and she lifted her hips to help rid herself of her pants. She opened her arms to him next, the request clear. “Let me get you some water,” he said, and started to get out of bed.

“No,” she said firmly. She grabbed him by the tie, pulling him back into her arms. “Just—just hold me, okay?”

Unable to deny her, he fell easily to his side of the bed. She rolled into him with her head positioned just so, ear on his fourth and fifth ribs. He sighed and curled his arms around her. Faintly, he could tell she was trembling in an effort to keep her emotions at bay. “I’m so sorry, Em.”

She was silent a moment before she nodded wearily. “Me, too.” A kiss pressed against his chest, and she fisted his shirtfront to pull him even closer. “Thank you.”

He waited until her breathing had evened out, enough that she wouldn’t be awake enough to protest, before whispering into her hair “you’re more than enough, Emma. Just as you are.”
Her shoes made a muted crunch with each careful step amidst the roots and brush of the forest. Emma felt something cold grip her insides as she forged her path through the woods, twisting in a barely-there breath of trepidation.

She had never felt uncomfortable in the forest, even less so since being with Graham. It had always been a sort of calming peace or bubbling of excitement in the fresh air, so alive it was in both sight and sound.

This was different. It was a dread of something she could feel just outside her reach, like a phrase at the tip of her tongue.

Her foot scrapped along the dirt and she paused. It was too still. No birds chirping, no small creatures rustling leaves, no footfalls of the people she was seeking.

A quick twist pressing along her abdomen reminded her to be on guard, and she patted her stomach in acknowledgement. She swallowed and pulled out her phone. Her arm flicked with energy, the leftover magic that had peaked during her fight with Neal. She took a deep breath, making sure she didn’t short the electricity. She scrolled through contacts before resting on David’s. Poised to dial but not yet pressing “send,” she took another cautious step toward the creek.

A twig snapped and she spun to the sudden noise, drawing her weapon from its place at her hip. She released a heavy breath to see her father. “David. Any sign of him?”

David gave a small smile, then shook his head. “Not since I first caught a glimpse. He’s hiding. I have no clue why that’d be.”

Emma sighed and brushed a shaky hand through her hair. “Neal stalked off in this direction, too. I wonder if he’s hiding from him.” She paused, looking over the empty, hollow woods again. “But you’d think we’d have run into him.”

“But anything else,” he agreed grimly. He looked her over, concern beaming out through his gaze. “You look tense.”
She forced a tight smile and nodded. “Yeah, seems about right,” she admitted.

“Here, sit,” David said, holding his hand out to lead her to the overturned tree.

Her lips tugged downward. “I’m fine,” she said stubbornly.

He took the chance to give an embarrassed flush before he shook his head. “We don’t know which way to go. Give yourself a chance to calm down a bit before we go on.”

She opened her mouth to protest when the baby rolled once more within her. She wrung her hands together before finally settling next to him, though she blatantly ignored his outstretched hand. “Just for a minute,” she insisted.

“Of course,” he replied gently. He cleared his throat. “You’re, uh, sparking a little.”

She looked down, noticing how the veins in her arms colored with light. She swallowed. “It’ll go away in a bit,” she said, then tugged her sleeves down.

He watched her for a moment before cautiously extending his palm to rest on her elbow. “I’m sorry. You wouldn’t have to deal with this if you weren’t here.”

She looked up, her blue-green eyes steady on his face for a moment before she shook her head. “It’s my magic, and I have it here and in New York and even in Orlando. It’s just more conspicuous, what with the town and the newbie.”

David smiled softly. “A lot’s changed since the last time we talked alone, huh?”

Emma huffed a laugh, thinking back to sitting on that cold bench, his arm hooking into hers to lead her back to town. “Despite the new curse and everything, definitely in a better place.”

David twirled his phone in his hand, nodding absently. “You let yourself find the good moments. I’m so glad you had that chance.”

She peeked up at him, giving a stiff smile. “You okay that it wasn’t with Neal?”

She wondered about that, if only in passing. For some reason, all that she’d told Mary Margaret when they’d only been friends had fallen from her memory once Neal came trailing into Storybrooke. Both Mary Margaret and David had seemed so adamant about her and Neal, so certain that first love, father of her child, meant that they could connect again more than a decade later. A decade’s worth of betrayal and abandonment and walls piled thick and high.

She remembered when she realized Graham had gotten past those defenses, in such a way that she didn’t even realize they had grown around him (and Henry, of course). With tender hands brushing her hair back and pressing the gauze so gently to her skin, she had believed. In that moment, she had felt how she could collapse those structures, send them crashing, and yet still trust him to keep her heart safe.

Even in the best moments with Neal, she’d never truly believed that.

But her parents had been so optimistic that Neal was the one that could make her happy. She hadn’t had the heart to explain that looking at Neal, being around him, only made her feel small.

David looked surprised, the cell gripped tighter in his hand. His eyes were wide and soft, sheening with emotion. “You and Graham broke your curse. How could I be anything but ecstatic that you found your true love, Emma?”
Heat rushed to her face and she ducked her head. She didn’t like labeling her and Graham like that, with such a specific label. Even if it were, she knew, technically true. It was that something quieter, that feeling in the pit of her stomach that warmed and grew with every moment around him, that made her feel more at peace.

With him, she was fuller, more, and not just in the sense that her belly was currently swelling. And it wasn’t that she was complete with him, but more like she was augmented with him, and Henry and the baby.

She rolled her palm over her belly. “I—thanks,” she said simply.

He clicked his phone awake and set it between them. “When you’re this happy, Emma, I don’t understand why you’d think your mother and I’d be disappointed,” he murmured.

Emma looked down, surprised to see the picture set as wallpaper on his screen. It was one that Henry took of them on the monorail, his wide grin taking up the majority of the frame while she and Graham laughed in the background. She cocked her head to the side. “How—“

“Graham sent a couple photos, after I asked. I hope you don’t mind.”

Her lip quirked up on one side, and she pulled the phone closer. “He didn’t send the one of us at the castle?” she teased, even as a build of tears began forming at the back of her throat. She swallowed, knowing it wouldn’t be the case if it weren’t for the hormones.

He chuckled. “Yeah, he sent those, too. I think your eyes were in mid-roll, though,” he said.

She smirked. “Yeah, well. Posing with a Disney couple was a little too …”


She nodded. “Yeah, something like that.”

David pulled the phone back and flipped through some photos. “There’s some great shots in here. It really starts to tell me about how your life’s been.” He hesitated, and he seemed to cradle the device closer. “I understand why you told your mother you’d prefer to go back.”

The sudden shoot of pain up her back alerted her to the fact that the power had died down sometime in their talk, only to crest once again. She tensed, her fingers digging into her palms. “But you are still going to argue it, is that it?”

David closed his eyes and sighed, before finally looking skyward. “Emma … if you’re asking if I want you to stay, then yes, of course. You’re our daughter, and our family is expanding and I want all our family together for that.”

She bit back the bitter feeling, the wall resurrecting in her soul as her spine steeled. “You don’t get it—“

He raised a single hand. “But I also know that you were happy and, better still, safe in New York. I can’t be so short-sighted as to not understand that you want your family to be safe.”

He sounded so sad as he said it, so resigned, and Emma felt herself deflate. “I want you guys to be safe, too,” she said hoarsely.

He smiled then, one that tried so hard to be happy and yet was too miserable to make it happen. “I know you do, Emma. You came here because you want to save us.”
She felt her eyes mist and her nails scraped against the wood at her side. “Not just because of that,” she admitted.

His mouth parted, a soft exhale escaping him. “We missed you, too.”

Her stomach churned a little, that feeling of indecision that weighed on her despite her resolve. “But you get it?” she asked, and it surprised her how small and weak her tone was.

He nodded, his Adam’s apple bobbing. “And I’m trying to get her to, too. Logic is only one thing, though.”

She winced and nodded. “If you could come …?” The question left her before it could fully form in her mind. That wistful feeling that tugged inside, the plain hope that ignited the child that lived in her soul, the one that so desperately wanted her parents.

He turned to her more fully, his whole face open and readable. “Of course, Emma. If it was an option, we’d take it.”

Unsaid was the knowledge that their leaving still meant danger, but his acknowledgement was enough to lighten her whole head. She was quiet a moment, twisting a string around her finger. “It wouldn’t be so bad if we could go back and forth. When I left Boston, I was so … I was scared. I was leaving everything I knew, the people that helped me so much. But now, in Manhattan … I still see them. I’m able to thrive, and they are, too, and Maggie can still visit, and Ryan will email every now and again, and Beth still sends things.”

David was trained on her every word. “So many people,” he murmured.

She blinked. “Yeah. If we had that sort of ability, to still keep in contact when we left, it wouldn’t be so bad.”

“I wish …,” he said, his voice trailing off as his gaze fogged over. It was as if he was afraid to say the words, like saying them would immediately make it impossible.

She studied his features for a long moment. “Maybe.”

“Maybe,” he agreed.

She sighed and pulled her hands through her hair. “If only we had even the slightest clue who was doing this, then we could take care of them and then work this out.”

He rubbed the back of his neck. “If even Gold is hiding from them, it can’t be good.”

“It wouldn’t be Storybrooke if it was easy,” she muttered, then rose carefully. The baby shifted again, and she held her belly loosely as he settled.

He looked at her fondly. “You must be carrying more towards your back. You’re so tiny, still.”

She looked down and tried not to roll her eyes at digression. “Graham took great pride in letting me know that the baby sizer says he’s the past the size of Thor’s hammer now.”

He grinned. “Another boy?” he asked.

She felt a frown tug on her lips as she realized that was the first time either of her parents asked. “Still not sure. Today’s a boy day, but we alternate. He’s been hiding pretty decently in the ultrasounds, so,” she said. She shrugged. “He’s healthy, he’s growing. And at least
“Poor Henry,” he said with a laugh. “I know Snow gave you the name of our midwife; have you checked in with her since you’ve been here?”

She shivered. “No, I—“ She didn’t want to say what she clearly felt: that the midwife gave her chills. Not when Mary Margaret was so confident in her. “I just had my 28-week. I should be fine until 30.”

He shrugged. “Just know she’s available.”

She smiled stiffly. “Yeah, I do. Thanks.”

He glanced around them, his eyes turning to the treetops and then back through the woods. “I haven’t heard anything that could mean he’s close. Let’s have a quick look around before it gets dark, okay?”

He offered his arm, and this time she took it. “Thanks for … you know … understanding,” she said, just barely above a whisper.

He squeezed her arm. “I want to protect you as much as you want to protect us. Don’t forget that,” he reminded.

Her head tilted, and she bumped his arm affectionately. “I’ll try not to,” she replied.

Savior or no, it was good to know she wasn’t alone in this ordeal. And she couldn’t help feeling so wistfully pleased that her brother would be so lucky to have him from the beginning.

She just needed to find a way that David’s grandchildren would have that same honor.
Halloween

Chapter Summary

The first Halloween.

Chapter Notes

Prompt from anon. Remember that they haven't met OUAT-verse Arthur.

She didn’t know why she expected anything different.

The apartment building was decorated within an inch of its life. Dark cloth covered much of the typically light-colored building, its many lights made to look illuminated by black flamed candles. Massive spider webs curled along the edges, their spinners looming impressively from the expanse of the second story windows. Fog reflected the colored lights beaming from beneath, rich in greens and reds. The trees dotting the grounds were covered in ghoulish entities, hanging from low branches to sway in the wind. Intricate Jack-o-lanterns were lit all along the dark carpeted path leading to the tattered curtain entrance.

Henry’s eyes were wide as he took in the scene, hands clutched around his pillowcase turned trick-or-treat bag. He adjusted his helmet and then took a small step closer. “Better than last year, even,” he murmured.

Emma had to agree. The building was home to many rich patrons, including a couple of movie producers that had no doubt helped orchestrate the décor. She was prepared for some impressive effects inside as well, if last year’s memories were any indication. As they approached, she became aware of the looping record that played stereotypical spooky sounds. Emma looked to Graham in amusement as a wolf howled.

He caught her look and raised one brow. “Why are you looking at me? This is your friend,” he teased.

She snorted a laugh and curled her hand into his. She looked to the doorway, where Gia, or rather Marie Antoinette, with full period costume and a dark scar along her neck, mingled with arriving guests. “Hey, you were the one that agreed to the invite,” she quipped back, then waved to her friend.

“Emma! Come in, come in! We’re doing appetizers in the parlor, okay?” she said, and dramatically kissed both cheeks.

Emma chuckled. Gia was usually over-the-top, in many ways, but she was outdoing herself with the current display. “Plenty of food?”

“Of course!” Gia shook her head with a scoff. She pressed a finger to her mouth then gestured to the three. “So, what actually is this theme?”
Emilia popped in and hugged both girls tightly, then went back to her place beside Michael and Jason with a flourish befitting her gossamer fairy costume. “Happy Halloween, guys! I have to agree, though. What’s Wonder Woman doing on Sherlock Holmes’ arm?”

Graham playfully grinned around his pipe. “Because Tinkerbell with Dracula and a zombie is its own category?”

Emilia only smirked. “Smart ass. Please, everyone knows the Swans do themes.”

“Because Henry picks them,” Emma finished with laugh. She forgot that they would have understood their traditions. Graham’s hand curled into hers and squeezed, letting her know that he was just as in awe of it as she was. “Literary heroes. Arthur here can explain why he was insistent that comic books count.”

“Comics are books. It’s there in the name. Duh,” Henry said. He was barely paying attention, though, as he’d pulled out his phone to show something to Michael.

“Okay, okay, I see it,” Gia said with a nod. “I like it. Come on in, darlings, I will join once everyone’s here. Henry, Michael, the Garners are hosting the second floor for the haunted house, up the winding staircase.” She trilled her fingers up to point to the cobweb covered stairs. She froze almost mid-action as her eyes set on Michael, then quickly changed tactics. “But you two can take the elevators. Special treat, extra creepy. After you’re done, Georg already has the room set up for the sleepover. Have fun, boys!” she said.

Henry beamed and looked to her in question. Emma nodded. “Go! Have fun! Protect the cell phone, though! I’ll be checking in before we leave.”

She watched him disappear into the building with a small tug on her heart. Her breath caught in her chest just for a moment, before she released it with a sigh.

Twelve years of trick or treating. Choosing costumes, painting faces, sorting through candies … it was all routine now. But there was also just one single year of watching from afar as Regina tugged Henry through Storybrooke as he wistfully stared at the decorations lining Granny’s.

It was better than a week ago, at her birthday. There was no rush of tears, no sudden loss of equilibrium. But it still tore at something deep in her, and she knew the coming cascade of holidays would only make the feeling grow stronger. It was an improvement, though.

And still, she surrendered to the feeling as Graham grabbed her shoulder, tugging her back into him. She relaxed, letting herself meld into his body. He was good about this, recognizing when she needed his nearness as a touchstone. But he also knew when to pull her out of it. He pressed a soft kiss between the headband at the crown of her head. “C’mon, Diana. Let’s get you a drink.”

Emma looked up at him sideways, and let the worries slide back. “Already deduced my secret identity, huh?”

He grinned. “Do I have to say it? Elem—”

She snorted. “Please, don’t. Bad jokes are at a two-drink minimum, whether I walked into it or not.”

“Noted. But you know you want to go inside,” he said, pulling her gently toward the door. “Gia would’ve prepared for your appetite.”
“Plenty of cake,” Gia quipped from over the heads of a couple more guests.

She rolled her eyes. “If it wasn’t going to be you ….”

“Ah, I’m sure I’ll have plenty more. Let’s go celebrate my first Halloween,” Graham said.

Emma chuckled, linking his arm in hers. “You’re right. We need to get you fully into these traditions. Let’s go, Holmes.”

Even though this was the twelfth or first Halloween with Henry, it was the first with Graham. And that was something to get her in a celebratory mood.
It started even before the sun had risen.

Graham was usually the first to wake in the morning. He was a light sleeper anyway, and somehow still those years in the forest influenced his internal clock. He didn’t have to worry about finding food anymore, but it still allowed him to make coffee and breakfast and feel that peace that came in the stillness of morning.

So, he was surprised to be blinking sleepily into wakefulness with Henry’s face mere inches from his own.

“Finally,” Henry sighed dramatically. His hair was in messy cowlicks all along his head but his eyes were twinkling merrily. “C’mon, wake up.”

Graham stifled a groan and leaned further back to check the clock at the nightstand. The time seemed to stare down at him mockingly: 4:16 am. No wonder he still felt the heaviness of sleep through every limb.

He couldn’t even remember when he had finally fallen asleep the night before. Emma, on the other hand, had passed out quickly despite her preference for late hours; this was becoming habit over the last week or so. She was breathing steadily beside him, fingers curled around his waist and head tucked into his side. She had not moved an inch since he’d woken, and he looked over her sleeping form wistfully.

Henry grabbed his arm and tugged gently. “C’mon, it’s morning,” he whined.

Graham chuckled. “Barely qualifies,” he stated, but dragged a hand across his face and rose to sitting anyway. “How come you went after me and not your mom?”

Henry rolled his eyes. “Please. You know she wouldn’t budge,” he said.

Graham made a noise of agreement and looked back at Emma. She was crumpled into a ball beneath the pile of blankets, dragging more of them into herself as he left the warmth of the sheets. Her mouth was parted, a soft snore escaping her. “Place your bet.”
Henry shrugged. “Six. She’ll get up early because it’s Christmas.”

Graham smiled slightly and squinted at the kid. “Is that your guys’ normal?”

A slow grin crossed his face. “You still got a lot to learn, Graham,” he said, then resumed tugging on his arm.

“I’m up, I’m up,” he stated, a laugh in his voice as he stumbled to his feet. “Breakfast?”

“I’ll help,” Henry offered with a bright smile.

He leaned over and grabbed the half-empty water bottle from Emma’s side. “Water the plants first, okay?”

Henry nodded and quickly dashed out of the room. Graham took the moment to stretch and breathe out the last vestiges of sleep. He rubbed the back of his neck as he padded out of the room in socked feet and yanked a sweater over his head as he left the bedroom. It was finally getting cold after an unusually warm December, though there hadn’t been word of snow yet.

He didn’t have to worry about lights as he entered the kitchen area. The glow from their tree cast enough radiance to be sufficient in the early morning. He paused to look at their decorations, still marveling at the soft glow of color. It was so different than anything he’d experienced, even in the current life. Other than a tree at the precinct, there’d never been anything to remind him of the holidays before. He would also admit he was glad he finally buckled and agreed to the real Douglas fir in their home; the smell caused nostalgic feelings deep within him.

He opened the door to the fridge warily and almost sighed in relief when nothing came tumbling out. For some reason he’d allowed Emma to empty the grocery bags yesterday and she usually took to cramming things into too-tight spots. He picked through the items that were waiting to be made for the rest of the day (lunch and dinner would likely be blurred together) and finally found eggs and bacon at the very back.

He opened the carton and carefully counted the remaining eggs. He needed to ration to be sure there’d be enough for their meal later. “Sure you want to start breakfast now?” he asked.

Henry nodded. “We have to do something while we wait for mom,” he said and looked longingly at the presents tucked under the tree.

He chuckled. “Well, how about I just get our drinks ready first. We can watch a movie or something in the meantime, and I’ll make breakfast closer to dawn. That’ll get your mom out of bed sooner,” he teased.

He nodded. “Guess I’m not really hungry, anyway.” He snagged a candy cane off the tree regardless and flopped down on the couch. “Which movie, then?”

He shrugged and started the kettle. “Your choice.”

He flipped through channels with a serious look on his face before finally settling at the beginning of Home Alone. Graham sat on the other end of the couch and quickly relaxed into the seat. “So, what’s this movie about?”

Henry looked at him oddly. “Seriously?”

He chuckled, hearing every bit of Emma in his voice. “Yes, seriously. I didn’t grow up with Christmas movies in any life. Not really.”
Sometimes they played in the background of group homes, the same ones over and over on a loop, but he’d never been included enough to sit through one. Even in this life he’d been branded an outcast, for one reason or another. There was never enough time in his childhood to form many relationships as he bounced from home to home. In school he’d been acknowledged but was only ever an acquaintance, someone people liked but never enough to get to know.

This trend ran right up until he’d joined the force in Maine. Having to depend on a partner quickly rose to depending on coworkers, and he’d been able to truly call people friends for the first time. Remembering all the lives combined now only made that all the more unusual and amazing.

Of course, now with Emma and Henry, the bonds he made with people were more on the level he’d placed his family in his first life. He would protect every last person in their circle with his life. Emma and Henry were on a separate list, so above anything he’d ever felt that it frightened him sometimes.

And they were the only ones he’d want to share Christmas with, and be included in all their traditions.

After Henry gave a brief run-down on the film, the water was ready. Graham got up to pour a mug of hot chocolate and let another drip through with coffee. He also readied the coffee maker to begin at five-fifty, just in time to wake Emma. He returned to his seat with a couple more candy canes and the mugs clutched in hand. “So, the parents fly to France while the kid is at home?”

“Yes, pay attention,” Henry said simply, and took the chipped santa mug with a grin. “Thanks.”

“Mhmm,” he said into his coffee. He could feel the sleep still wanting to web up his thoughts and hurriedly swallowed back a mouthful. It would keep him up through the cooking, at least.

Henry took a long sip of his chocolate and then licked the whipped cream off his lips with a thoughtful look. “Merry Christmas.”

He bumped his shoulder gently. “Merry Christmas.”

He watched the movie almost absently, chuckles rising faintly from within him. A glance to Henry showed that the adrenaline was wearing off, and he was blinking slowly at the familiar sounds of the film.

Graham had finished the drink and was watching Kevin set up his microwavable meal when Henry slumped onto him, his eyes fluttering sleepily shut. Carefully, he placed his cup on the end table and then slipped further down into the cushions so Henry could lay more comfortably against him.

Even with the caffeine buzzing through his system, being curled in with family took its somnolent effect. He didn’t even remember dozing until he felt warm fingers scratching pleasantly at his scalp and then brushing his hair back in smooth strokes.

He opened his eyes for the second time that morning and smiled immediately at the soft look on Emma’s face. She was crouched beside the sofa donned in one of his sweatshirts, hanging off her shoulders loosely.

“Hey,” she greeted in a whisper.
He reached up with one hand to tuck her hair behind her ear and the other unconsciously pulled Henry in closer. His lip turned up, and he leaned forward to press his smile against hers. “Good morning,” he said as they parted.

She looked at her son and then back to him, her sea-colored eyes sheening with moisture. “Merry Christmas, Graham.”

He breathed in deeply, the smell of cinnamon and pine and coffee melding into one. Peppermint still clung to his tongue, sweet but clean. The colored lights made Emma’s golden hair reflect red and green and blue, warm with light. The TV was on to another themed special, and the sound of Whos singing was placed in the background of his mind.

These hallmarks of the holidays filled his every sense, a peaceful aura around the people he loved more than anything else. He traced a line down her jaw and curled a lock of hair in his fingers. Her eye closed, the smile resting on her features gently. Her skin was glowing even though he knew she must still be tired. The moment felt intimate, private, and he felt the awe settle low in his stomach that he was a part of it. “Best Christmas I’ve ever had.”

She grinned. “You haven’t even opened your presents.”

He shook his head and looked back down at Henry, then once more met her eye. “Don’t need to.”

She bumped his nose with her own before rising. “And this is just the beginning,” she said with a raised brow, then sauntered toward the fridge.

He slipped Henry down to the couch as he rose, but couldn’t help the play of a smile on his face as he silently agreed.

Only the beginning.
Graham entered a mostly quiet apartment that evening. Henry sat at the breakfast bar, chewing absently at some pretzels as he read from the open textbook. He barely gave a sound of acknowledgement as he clicked the lock behind him.

“Hey,” Graham greeted, dropping his keys and papers to the side. “Good day?”

Henry sighed and rubbed his temples. “Long day,” he corrected. “I had the math test, then got two more essays assigned. And the programming homework is due tomorrow, and I’m supposed to have an idea for the next yearbook page.”

“You’ll get through it. And I know you aced that test. You were on top of it,” he said confidently. Every question he’d drilled at Henry that morning had been readily and enthusiastically answered. Graham grabbed a juice from the fridge and grinned. “Still better than the rotating assignments, though?”

“Graham.” Henry wrinkled his nose. “I guess,” he grumbled, but a smile edged along his lips.

Despite preteen protests, he knew that Henry actually enjoyed learning. The private school he went to certainly facilitated that, in stark contrast to Storybrooke’s repeating days.

“Ritu just left.”

Graham’s eyebrows rose and he angled his body toward the bedroom. “Any better today?”

Henry hesitated a moment. “I think so,” he said uncertainly. “She picked me up, at least.”

“Good,” he murmured. The fact that she’d had enough energy to do that was better than the last two days. He dropped a hand on the kid’s head. “Finish up. I’ll be out to check before bed, okay?”

He nodded, his pen thumping rhythmically against his notebook.
Graham rapped twice on the door before coming into their room. It creaked on its hinges to reveal Emma in dim lighting. “Hey, princess.”

Emma groaned good-naturedly, but threw a pillow his direction anyway. “Do I really look like a princess right now, Graham?”

He smiled widely and shut the door behind him. Her hair was a mess of tangles, falling into her too-pale face. Her blue-green eyes were only partially open, a scowl half-set on her lips. He sat next to her and brushed a few tresses off her face. “Always,” he replied simply.

“Cheesy.” She rolled over with a snort, but allowed room on the bed for him. He took the wordless request and curled into her, pulling his arms around her waist. He let his palm rest against her belly, the barest of swells there a comfort that she was finally gaining weight.

“Henry said you picked him up today,” he said, but didn’t voice the actual question.

She sighed. “Yeah. Afternoon wasn’t so bad.”

He frowned and pulled her closer. “Do you want me to get you some ginger tea?”

She shook her head. “No. Already had some. I’m getting so sick of it.”

“You need to get fluids, Em,” he noted. He brushed her hair back soothingly. “You’ve been teetering on that edge too much recently, and I know you don’t want to go back to the hospital.”

“I know,” she murmured. She leaned back and nudged her head into his. “I’m doing good, promise.”

“And eating?”

She pointed to the crackers on the nightstand. “Trying. It’s just so bland.”

He smiled. “That’s the point, I think. But are you hungry? Craving anything? I could always send out for something.” At this point, he’d be willing to get practically anything if it meant she would eat more.

She rolled her head back to the pillow and her eyes fluttered shut. “You know what sounds amazing? Grilled cheese.”

His head popped up and his mind raced for all the places that might be able to deliver. “I think one of those food apps can send out to the diner or something –”

She reached for his wrist and gripped tight to stop his thought process. “From Granny’s,” she finished.

He let out a low whoosh of breath. He studied her face a long moment, catching the minute expressions on her face as she closed her eyes and licked her lips. He thought back to the diner, to the older woman and her wired framed glasses covering a glare that couldn’t disguise how protective she was. “She has the best comfort food,” he agreed, and tucked his head back into her neck. “The golf ball would only be satisfied with Granny’s, huh?”

“Mm,” she hummed in agreement. “Granny made the best grilled cheese.”

“Her pastrami, too,” he said. He rolled small circles on her belly. “And every fry was perfect.”
“Oh, I forgot about the pastrami!” she moaned. “So fatty and greasy and … God, I’m drooling.”

He chuckled. “Well, at least it means you’re hungry for actual food. I can try and get something less perfect than Granny’s, but in the same food group.”

She sighed, and her stomach vibrated with a growl under his palm. “Not the same,” she said with a pout.

“I know, I know,” he said with a chuckle.

She didn’t respond to his teasing tone, and instead bit down on her lip. It was like there was a shift in the air.

He hesitated a moment. “Just the food, or…?”

She tensed in his arms, but didn’t come back down from it as quickly as usual. She shook a bit as she tried to steady herself, and he felt a flicker of energy pulse against him. Concerned, he brushed his hands up and down her body, trying desperately to help her relax. Finally she gripped his hand hard and swallowed. “Or.”

“Emma,” he said softly, seriously. “You’re shaking.”


“Not until I brought it up. Are you okay?” he pressed.

She shook her head. “I need to get up again.”

He watched helplessly as she bolted out of the room. His eyes shut tight before he followed into the hall.

“Graham?” Henry’s eyes were wide as he clutched his pen, peering from the kitchen to where he stood.

He shook his head. “Just another bout. It’ll be all right.” He was sure the worry he felt was painted all over his expression, but he couldn’t add to the lad’s stress on top of everything else.

He blew out a breath before entering the bathroom. As expected, she was on her knees, retching into the bowl. Wordlessly, he kneeled beside her and swept her hair back. Her whole body felt knotted against his side, stiff as she heaved. They had had to deal with this so often in these first months of pregnancy, and her embarrassment and pride had waned enough to allow him to help her through this. It was not an unfamiliar situation.

But this time, something occurred to him. He waited until she had collapsed against him before voicing his concern. “Emma … this isn’t about morning sickness, is it?”

Her eyes were red as she glanced up. “What do you mean?” She swallowed and pushed herself up off the floor. He quickly followed, catching her as she stumbled to the sink unsteadily.

He watched her carefully as she pulled down her toothbrush and avoided his gaze. “I mean that it felt like when you used your magic before, but then it stopped. Then you got sick.”

She caught his eye in the mirror, a flash of fear in those depths. “I don’t use my magic,” she said firmly.
He shook his head. “I’m not saying you’re doing it on purpose. I’m saying that instinctively you’re trying to use it, but then you’re suppressing it.”

Her gaze dropped to the sink and she braced herself against the edge. “Maybe,” she mumbled.

“Okay,” he said with a short nod. He felt somewhat relieved that he made the correct assumption. “Why?”

She sniffed and turned on the faucet. She cupped the water in her hands and then splashed it over her face, silent and serious all the while. Finally, she looked up. “You shouldn’t have to deal with my magic.”

His heart stuttered as his stomach bottomed out. “What?”

“I don’t want magic, I never asked for it,” she spat. “And I can’t take that look you give when I’ve used it before.”

He stepped closer to her, keeping his body close enough that he could feel the heat emanating from her body but not close enough to touch. One hand came to rest beside hers against the porcelain sink. “I’m not scared of you, Emma. I’m not even scared of it. I know you, I trust you. You can’t keep quashing it, especially if it’s making this happen.”

She shot him a look. “It’s not ‘making this happen.’ It’s a pregnancy thing,” she insisted.

He sighed and pulled an arm around her waist. Surprisingly, she let him bring her close, the press of her back melding into his front. She kept her eyes on the drain, but relaxed into him. “Morning sickness is one thing. You and I and your doctor know this is more than that.”

“Hyperemesis is common enough,” she said stubbornly.

“Do me a favor, then,” he said softly. “Let it out, whenever it comes. If you still get sick as often, then we’ll figure something else out. But for now, just humor me, okay?”

Her frown deepened. “I don’t even know how to control it.”

He looked up to the bulb hanging above the mirror. “Granny’s food always had that extra something, you know?”

She gave him an odd look before she shrugged. “I’m sure it got tiring after twenty-eight years.”

He chuckled. “Well, she seasoned better than my brothers, that’s for sure.”

She made a low sound of disbelief. “I would have thought wolves were big on spices,” she said with a sarcastic bite.
He grinned, and began to rock her soothingly back and forth. “No, but really. Remember the way each bite tasted? Like everything was cared for.”

She nodded. “Warm-feeling,” she murmured.

He nodded, and wondered if he imagined the light brightening a fraction. He ducked his head back into the crook of her shoulder. “It wasn’t just her food, either. The few times Regina would have something for Henry,” he hesitated, not wanting to mention how the celebrations were always cut short, always the boy dragged away when people got too close. “Well, Mary Margaret had a way around her recipes.”

She began to tense up again, and he pressed a kiss onto her cheek to remind her to relax. “Yeah. Mary Margaret did the same something with her cocoa. It tasted **different** whenever she made it.”

“You have that touch, too,” he promised, tucking a bit of hair behind her ear. “Not that I think you should be cooking more often.”

She huffed a small laugh. “I can get by.”

“Getting by is not the same as making full meals. As capable as you are, if you are given anything with directions . . .,” he trailed off with a pointed look.

A smile tugged firmly on her lips. “This is why I have friends,” she said.

“And why you always looked content when you walked into the station in the morning. She kept you fed, which in Emma-terms is the highest form of affection.”

“Why I fell for you,” she teased, though the words were still strained. She bit down on her lip. “It was easier with Mary Margaret when we were just roommates.”

“Friends,” he pressed.

She nodded. “The closest friend I’d ever—“ A hitch in her breath trapped the words for a moment. “In that life, the closest friend I’d ever had.”

He pressed his lips to hers and she kissed him with infinite care, a taste of mourning in the action. He closed his eyes and touched his forehead with hers. “It’s okay to miss that life, Emma.”

A short, stiff nod was the only response. After a moment, she raised her hand and curled it slightly, letting the light click off.

Even in the dark, he could feel her eyes on him. He cupped his hand against her belly and breathed in the skin of her neck. His heart rate still had picked up a few beats, but having her control it instead of the magic controlling her was something he could handle much more. “I love you,” he said softly, reassuringly.

“You’re really okay with it?” she asked, her voice small.

“I’m really okay with you,” he said honestly.

The tug of trepidation likely could never fully amend, he knew. After all, three decades of magic’s misuse left its scar. But with her, he knew he could bear it, even accept and appreciate it.
She placed her hand over his, over the place where their child grew. He felt the smooth metal of her ring against his skin, something solid to ground the moment. He kissed her again, this time with a softer emotion pouring through it.

When they parted, she remained close, one hand firmly bunched into his shirt. “I feel hungry.”

Graham let a full grin cross his face and he ducked his chin. “Diner food?”

She shook her head and raised her eyebrows. “Not that kind of hungry.”

He shivered and ran his teeth lightly across her pulse by way of a promise. “Let’s feed the golf ball and get our other kid off to bed first.”

She nodded. “Then bring on the subpar grilled cheese,” she said. She reached up and the light came back on, though it was softer and gentler than the glare it usually brought. Her eyes were twinkling with exhausted relief. “I think I could stomach some real food.”
Lack of Guilt

Chapter Summary

It's an unwelcome reminder of just how dangerous his job was.

Chapter Notes

Set before Storm, so just before they are living together. This is not technically prompted. I was listening to The Departed while it played in another room, and had this idea come to me. It reminded me of headcanons made with lessawildmoon, and thus I will blame her for my muse. Thank you, sweetie.

Emma jogged across the street at a steady pace, still feeling the nag of confusion tugging at the back of her mind. She glanced back to the precinct and frowned.

She had gone by the station to essentially bother Graham. It had been three days or so since seeing him, and she wasn’t used to being apart so long since they’d gotten their memories. She was trying not to let the crack of something familiar peek through at not seeing him as he had responded to her every text, but she needed to physically see him. Henry was at school, so she thought she’d visit for a few hours before going to pick him up.

But even though it was just past twelve on a Wednesday, Graham was not within the offices she’d come to be so familiar with. In fact, the whole department had been pretty empty. Only the detective that always looked like she’d had a bad day was left, and she’d told her that Graham was at the bar.

On a Wednesday. Just past twelve.

It was safe to say that Emma was nervous. She had no idea what could have happened to send her … Graham to go drinking in the middle of a workday.

When she walked into the bar, she heard the staccato tones of Andie rapidly speaking in Vietnamese. She squinted as her eyes adjusted to the dark. Eddie was at the end, looking into his drink almost in confusion, as he was absolutely ignored by everyone else in the room. Mrs. Nguyen was in a far corner, working silently on paperwork. Emma was not surprised to find Andie fluttering behind the bar while fussing over the only patron she cared to wait on.

She seemed to be finishing her rant, ending in English “and it’s not like you ever mentioned it to anyone.”

“Andie,” Graham sighed, and pulled his hand over his face, rubbing. “It wasn’t a big deal.”

Andie looked startled, and started into another non-English tirade. Emma only noted one word that she knew, that basically translated to “idiot.”
Emma slid into the seat next to Graham. “So, why are you an idiot?” she asked, bumping against him.

Graham’s posture changed from stiff and uncomfortable to relaxed and relieved, and a smile crossed his face. He sought out her hand, weaving their fingers together under the table in greeting.

“Oh, and you didn’t even tell the girlfriend. Bó tay.”

Graham rolled his eyes. Emma’s curiosity piqued, even as the label caused something hot to build in her cheeks. It still felt new, to be referred to as “boyfriend” and “girlfriend,” despite the markers of relationship they had already made.

He pulled a hand through his hair and gestured to Andie with a flick of his eye. “Andie thinks I should go back to the shrink and actually talk.”

“You went to a shrink?” Emma asked with some surprise. It wasn’t that she found anything wrong with it, and God knows between the two of them they could keep psychiatrists in business for years, but it never seemed like something he would do. He didn’t like talking about personal matters with others beyond their circle.

Graham’s face twisted and he dropped her hand to take his drink. He shrugged one shoulder. “It was required.”

“Yeah,” Andie piped in, her eyes narrowed. “All personnel are mandated to see to their mental health after an officer-involved shooting.”

“Oh,” Emma said, nodding in understanding. “I heard rumblings around the station. That guy, Fell, right? That was your department?”

Dr. Richard Fell had gained some press for being the lead in a string of murders from a few years back. She’d heard on the news and around the station that he’d tried to take a hostage and was killed during the standoff. She thought it had still been an active case when the incident occurred, and thus not one for Graham’s group. Perhaps all of Fugitive Enforcement had to go to therapy.

Andie snorted. “His department? He was the officer involved.”

She turned to him in surprise. He avoided her eye, fiddling with his drink. He grimaced slightly as he took a sip. “Yeah, well,” he said around the rim.

Emma stared at him, that fear creeping in deep inside her. Fell, according to reports, had been ruthless. Even though he was gone, she felt the leftover tendrils go out to what could have happened to Graham. Her thoughts were broken as Andie slid a beer to her. She took it without a second thought, chugging a third in one go.

She could feel Graham eyeing her between staring at the amber liquid in his own cup.

It took her longer than she cared to admit that he was looking to see if her reaction would be negative. She swallowed back her panic and leaned in. “Graham,” Emma finally said in a hushed voice, sliding her hand along his stool. “What happened?”

His eyes were steel as he fully turned to her. “Supposed to be a quick interview. Fell saw us, so he was prepared. We weren’t. He got the drop on Garcia.”

Emma winced at the clipped explanation. Something about the sterility of Graham’s
explanation was concerning to her, like he was trying too hard to only give the facts. Like he’d probably used the same words in the debriefing and to the psychiatrist. She hated that he was doing the same to her.

She shrugged off the impersonal tone and took a moment to focus beyond the words. Garcia was one of the older cops, or “seasoned” as he preferred. He mostly worked from his desk and rarely went on out-of-office interviews, especially after his surgery. “Is he okay?”

Graham smiled slightly. “Yeah, nothing can take him down at the point. He was angrier he missed dinner with the kids.”

She nodded. He sounded more natural, the warmth back in his voice. Her hand slid further, resting on his thigh in support. “So, he got to Garcia. What happened next?”

He pressed his lips together, something stormy brewing underneath his calm façade. “He had a blade to him, cut into his neck a bit. He was trying to negotiate with the beat cop to let him take Garcia and go. I had a better angle.”

Emma didn’t have a chance to consider that he was back to the mechanical storytelling, as she felt dizzy at the realization. “You shot him?”

Graham nodded.

Andie leaned forward, her forearms resting against the cool of the tabletop. She had almost forgotten she was there. “Two shots to the head, not even center mass. Didn’t graze Garcia in the least, though he was pressed right into him. Leo says he blames you for hearing loss, of course. Perfect aim, from what I hear. Dead before he hit the ground.”

*I never miss.* Emma felt his words creep into her consciousness and a shiver crossed her.

“He was human waste, but I know there must be something inside you festering off this, Humbert,” Andie said with a click of her tongue.

Graham’s look was wholly defiant, and the hand that rested on his lap curled into a fist. He said nothing, however, and only took another sip of his drink.

Emma’s mouth tightened and she dug around in her pockets. “Andie, what’s his tab?”

Andie looked surprised. “For Hero Cop? It’s Happy Hour, Bounty Hunter.”

Emma snorted and rose, placing a ten on the bar regardless. “Graham,” she called softly.

He looked up, squinting at her slightly. She could feel every flick of his gaze as he looked her over, before he nodded and joined her to stand.

“See you later, Andie,” Emma said.

“Fine, fine, as long as you get him right again,” she said shortly, waving them off.

They didn’t say a word to one another as they hopped into a taxi. Graham never took his eyes off her, though, and she tried to piece together the emotions she saw in them. There was something like a challenge in those dark blue depths, a tension and a stubbornness mixing with the uncertainty. It was that that made her realize exactly what was putting him on edge. But with the presence of the cab driver and the palpable silence, she didn’t speak up.

When they finally reached her apartment, Graham hesitated once she closed the door.
“Henry?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Still in school, yearbook after. I’ll text Gia if he can stay with her a couple hours if we need more time.”

Graham pulled his arms around her waist and pressed his forehead into hers as he nodded.

She felt like he might need to hear it, so she brushed her hands over his jaw and leaned closer so the words breathed over his lips in place of a kiss, “I love you.”

He shivered and bumped her nose with his, his silent response.

She let them bask in the reassurance a moment before she pressed on. “You don’t feel bad about it,” she said bluntly.

His face hardened. “They all expect me to feel guilty. I don’t.”

She brushed her fingers along his arm soothingly. A part of her knew, even if he hadn’t explicitly told her, and she brushed past the realization and formed it into an explanation. “They think it’s the first time.”

Graham released a low breath. “I was forced to kill innocent people before, people who didn’t deserve an ounce of pain. I never wanted to. I can see each of their faces in my head, in vivid detail, and I know I will never be able to make up for what I did. But Fell … I can’t feel sorry for killing someone who threatens ….” He trailed off, his brow furrowed as he searched for the right word.

“Threatens your family?” Emma offered.

Graham sighed. “Garcia isn’t family like you are, like Henry is. But every one of those people I work with, that I’m friends with, they do feel like how the pack used to.”

“Did you ever … for your pack?”

“Yes,” was his steady reply. “And I didn’t feel guilty then, either.”

She tried to look into herself, to find that alarm that should go through her. She wondered if she should feel bad that it never came. Something buzzed within her, but it wasn’t that. Instead of dwelling on it, she nuzzled into him, pressing hard into his chest. “You would do the same for me and Henry, wouldn’t you?” she mused under her breath. It was more to herself, and she was not expecting a response.

“Worse,” he said firmly. “If someone threatened either of you … I don’t think you’d want to know what I’d like to do.”

His muscles were rigid, his whole body tight as a bow. He hovered in anticipation, and she realized that she hadn’t explicitly reassured him in words. She felt more concerned at the danger he’d put himself in than in the idea that he’d be merciless to anyone that wished harm on them. “What you did, and what you’d do … that doesn’t scare me,” she promised. “But I need you safe and with us.”

He slackened and dipped to fit into her. He didn’t answer, nothing to placate her fears nor disagree. But he pressed a kiss to the crown of her head and knotted his fingers in her hair, and she understood the unspoken “I’ll try.”
It was the best she could expect. She met his gaze and held it steadily, gripping his forearms tightly. “I would protect Henry with my life, and you know that. And I need you to know that I would do the same for you.”

His face changed, worry and rebellion piercing through. “Don’t. Please. I couldn’t—“

“I couldn’t, either,” she says, her voice cloying with the emotion she didn’t want glaring in. “You might protect me, but I’d protect you right back. You need to know that.”

Without waiting for a reply, she tilted her head and brushed her lips to his a few times, until he felt comfortable enough to respond in full. He took a second to nod, breathing a simple, “together.”

The word, an echo of a promise made before, caused something bright to pop up into her stomach. She thought that if they both were fighting this hard for each other, maybe they’d both make it through their lives relatively unscathed.

She hoped. She *hoped.*

At the very least, between them both, Henry would be okay.
Entitlement (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Some people feel entitled to what they think is theirs.

Chapter Notes

Takes place after Not So Simple, semi-during Understanding Safety. Prompt from lessawildmoon wanting a Neal-Graham confrontation, and also another prompt that is only set up in this part and will continue in Part 2.

Some anti Neal sentiment here. Keep in mind that I’m not trying to vilify him. This is in Graham’s POV and his prejudices are going to be prominent. I also kind of enjoy that Neal doesn’t get a life that’s neatly tied in a bow by the end. There will be a lot left wanting.

Graham and Henry left the hospital, headed towards the center of town once again. Henry was being unusually quiet, kicking a stone in his path thoughtfully.

“Dad … do you think he’s mad at me?”

Graham looked down at Henry, feeling his heart sink as he realized what he was asking. He sighed and pulled him close. “No, I don’t think he’s mad at you, Henry. I think he’s having to deal with a lot and needs some time, but that you shouldn’t feel like it’s your fault, okay?”

Henry frowned, his face tilted downwards. He tucked his head into his side, leaning his weight against him. He shrugged one shoulder. “It’s just … we’ve been gone a whole year. He told mom he wanted to see us again, but he left before—“

“Today’s not the end, Henry,” Graham reminded gently.

He felt a flicker in his gut, the fierce protectiveness that always triggered around Henry and Emma. He didn’t understand Neal, even as he tried to reassure Henry. There was a lot unanswered for. Emma’s pale face and shaking frame had only made it worse, making the rise of anger spark inside him. Seeing the kid so ill at ease made him want to track down Neal himself and force his head on straight. Preferably with his fist.

But, for Henry’s sake, he managed to control the impulse. “You’ll get to see him soon, I’m sure.”

“Yeah,” he replied solemnly. He waited a beat, and squinted into the distance. “I just want to see him, and then go home.”

He didn’t have to ask which home he meant. He let out a long exhale and nodded. “I know, kid. I want to go home, too.”
Especially after the day before, after feeling the weight of his past wrongs and the threatening reminder of Regina. At the very least, they’d been able to keep Regina separated from Henry since their meeting at the diner when they first arrived. It was a blessing they all knew wouldn’t last forever, but one they took for what it was.

“Soon, right?” Henry said, hope coloring his tone.

He pulled him close to his side as they continued down the street. “Hopefully,” he replied. “In the meantime, ice cream.”

Henry glanced up at him with a small smile. “Thanks, dad.”

“Graham!”

His hand on Henry’s shoulder tightened only a minute before he recognized the voice calling him. The tension released, but he felt a wash of unease at how quickly he reacted at simply the sound of his name.

It used to always be this way. Always, that lash of stiff muscles and guard up, waiting for the attack. He thought he’d lost that in the past year, but he finds the impulse comes just as quickly. It was somewhat disheartening to discover.

Henry was looking up at him with soft eyes, and he knocked into his side comfortingly. Graham’s mouth edged upwards before he glanced up to meet Snow’s gaze. “Hey,” he greeted simply.

Snow looked up and past them, her face falling slightly. It was obvious she was seeking Emma. “Graham, Henry … it’s good to see you again. I was wondering … is Emma around?”

He shook his head. “David called. Apparently someone saw Gold in the woods, so she went to help him.”

Her features twisted, looking at him in bewilderment. “And you let her go?” she asked, cradling her stomach protectively.

“Let her?” Graham asked, his brow furrowing. “Do you remember who we’re talking about?”

Snow managed to look contrite, a blush tingeing her pale cheeks. “No, I know Emma,” she said softly. Her gaze was distant, fogging into unfocus in a way that said she was truly remembering. “I just thought … well, I thought she might be allowing herself to slow down a bit.”

He shrugged one shoulder. “After the first couple months, having to stay home, she got pretty stir-crazy. If anything, she’s taken on more.”

“Definitely more,” Henry agreed with a smirk. “She’s making up for lost time.”

“First couple months?” she echoed.

He nodded. “Yeah, she … the beginnings weren’t easy on her. She was trying to control everything, and her body just wasn’t up for that. She was on bedrest for a while,” he explained.

“Oh,” Snow said simply, and she began to wring her hands together.

“Did you want to speak to her about something?” Graham asked, and he found that he
couldn’t keep the wariness out of his tone. Yesterday, Emma had been devastated. After her encounter with Neal, he suspects that she wouldn’t be up to another fight if that was what Snow was looking for.

Snow glanced at her watch, and there was something strange about her eyes. They were shaded, even as she offered a smile. “Actually, I was hoping to speak to Henry.”

He looked down at the kid, and Henry’s eyes narrowed in plain question. In unison, they turned back. “Why do you need—"

His phone rang in his pocket, cutting off his statement. He fumbled to pull it out and squinted at the caller ID. His frown deepened as he answered. “Belle?”

“Graham, thank God,” came the rush of breath. “Emma asked me to help, and I’m trying to identify this rune that’s on Neal’s hand. But I feel like … there feels like someone’s watching me. I don’t feel … I don’t feel safe.”

He could hear the shake in her voice, the effort it was taking to admit even that. Belle didn’t have many people left that she trusted to lean on. Graham barely qualified as that, being that they hadn’t seen each other in decades, but their past allowed some trust again. He pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’ll be there, okay? Five minutes.” He clicked off the line and glanced at Henry.

He knew that he could not let her be harmed. He had worked too hard in the other world to keep her safe in that tower. She had been the one person to see the bar-less prison he was in, to empathize, to want to reach out. She had been the closest thing to a friend he’d had in that other world. She had such a good soul … he needed to keep her safe.

But Emma and he had just spoken about how they didn’t want Henry near Belle. She was a possible target with Gold alive, and thus could endanger Henry just by being near. And it certainly was sounding more and more like a target was exactly what she was. The fact that she was afraid pricked along his spine, making him nervous in a strangely familiar way.

Making a quick decision, he nodded once and squeezed Henry’s shoulder. “Okay, kid, I’m going to take you back to the diner. You’re going to stay with Red and Granny, okay?”

Henry’s mouth parted, a protest on the edge of his tongue, when Snow spoke up. “I could take him. It sounds like she needs help.”

Graham pressed his lips together as he thought, not even completely sure he knew why he was hesitating.

Snow let the corner of her mouth incline, eyes soft as she regarded Henry. “It’ll give us a chance to talk … catch up … be with family.” When she turned to meet his own eyes, hers were slightly misty.

He nodded, a tight smile across his face. “Yeah, that makes sense,” he said. He wasn’t sure if the pit of worry in his stomach was for Belle or for Henry. “Henry, you have my number if you need me. See you later, okay?”

“Keep her safe, dad,” Henry replied. There was pride in the kid’s eye, strong and beaming.

Graham chuckled. He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to the top of the lad’s head. “I’ll try.”
When he turned back to Snow, she looked startled. There was a question on her face before she masked it with a smile.

A warning sat at the top of his throat, but he didn’t voice it. He had to remind himself that this was Henry’s grandmother, and he had to believe she had his best interests at hand.

He was sure his caution was painted over his face regardless.

His jaw clenched before he nodded. “I’ll keep you updated if I’m longer than half an hour.”

Snow’s gaze was searching, but she offered a nod back. “We’ll be fine.”

He buried the hesitation as Snow took Henry’s hand and guided him down the path. He watched for a few seconds, then turned to go his own way. He tried to push the worries to the back of his mind as he walked to Gold’s shop. He knew he had to be aware of whatever was going on around him, and couldn’t be too wrapped up in what might be happening with Henry.

Instinct clicked inside of him as her neared, and he heeded the feeling. He was innately aware of his surroundings, and became attuned to the subtleties of the area.

There was something heavy in the air, something like anticipation brewing. He surreptitiously looked around, finding signs of disturbance all around. Whoever it was wasn’t adept at stalking. A part of him wanted to track those obvious clues, but he decided finding Belle was the priority. He swallowed back the impulse and entered the shop, his hand unconsciously hovering over his left ribs, the place he usually kept his holster.

“Graham, you’re here.”

There was relief in every note of her voice as she saw him. She had taken to using his new name easily, without any hesitation or stutter. He found it somewhat remarkable that she used it so freely, being that she wasn’t cursed into knowing the sheriff.

He turned and flicked the blinds closed. “How long have you noticed someone watching you?” he asked, getting right to the point.

She placed a locket on the glass display case and took a look side to side. “The last twenty minutes or so,” she replied.

“Whoever it is isn’t used to hiding, or isn’t very good at it; I suspect that’s as long as they’ve been watching,” he mused as he looked around for weapons. Gold’s shop provided many magical items to that end, but Graham definitely preferred the traditional kind.

“Here,” Belle said, pressing the handle of a blade into his hand. Her face was steely; he could see behind the fear to the annoyance that someone was threatening her. He may have found it amusing if the situation wasn’t so immediate. “Found it earlier.”

He gripped the leather, gauging the weight. He’d much prefer something that would put distance between the attacker and Belle and himself, but it would do. “If it’s whoever’s behind the curse . . .,” he warned lowly.

Belle nodded, her bright blue eyes wide. “The shop is enchanted. It gives a little protection that way, as well.”

He nodded. “Then we should stay inside,” he concluded.
A snap from the far window caught their attention, and he saw a flash of dark eyes and hair before it disappeared. He felt a growl build in his throat, the anger that whoever it was would threaten someone who would never harm anyone.

Belle looked startled, and reached out to grab his arm. “Graham … I think it’s Neal.”

That surprised him. “Neal?” He set the dagger down. The anger took new shape within him, mixing with aggravation. He crossed to the back in long, quick steps, having anticipated which entrance he would go to. He opened the door to find the man trying to sneak around the back. “Need something?”

The man turned to him, and his dark gaze flashed with recognition. “You,” was his gritted answer.

Graham took him in with narrowed eyes. He found some vague similarities to Henry, mostly in coloring. But in comparing, he saw that Henry definitely had more of Emma’s family in him. He looked messy, a hospital gown strewn across his shoulders paired with faded jeans.

Snippets of conversations with Emma floated in his head as he stared, colliding the build up with the reality. He inventoried him, his fist clenching and unclenching unconsciously at his side.

It seemed Neal was mirroring the posture, scowling and eyes hard.

He felt movement behind him, and tried to let himself relax. A hand rested on his shoulder as she peeked around him. “You’re supposed to be at the hospital,” Belle admonished gently. The heat was gone from her face, and he tried to temper his own to at least impassiveness.

Neal looked up and huffed. “I’m fine,” he said gruffly.

“I’m glad it’s been you watching, really, but why were you hiding?” Belle asked. She had approached the threshold, but didn’t cross it. It made Graham very aware of just how conditioned she was to assuming everything was a trap. Being Regina’s prisoner for decades had instilled that in her, and it made something inside him deflate in sympathy.

“You should come inside. It’s safer,” Graham said, and despite his efforts it was still clipped and flat in tone.

Neal stared him down with dark, angry eyes, but Graham held firmly in place. Finally, Neal pushed past him and into the store. He strode to the back, attempting to exert authority with the purposeful movement.

Belle fussed over him for a minute, before huffing a soft reprimand. It took a moment to realize that the she was basically the stepmother of this man who was older than her. “Where have you been?” she asked.

“Doesn’t matter,” he spit out.

Graham closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. His rudeness to Belle only fueled the previous anger. He felt the argument even before it began. The desire to take physical action against him was bubbling just below the surface. “Henry was looking for you,” he said bitingly.

Neal stopped in his tracks and pivoted to him. A snarl took over his face. “That’s none of your business.”

Something hot and sharp ran down his spine, and his shoulders squared. “It’s exactly
my business, when Henry is as upset that you are avoiding him as he is.”

“He is not your kid,” came Neal’s glowering response.

His fist tightened, but he remained steady. “He is my son, too.”

“Just because you knocked up his mother—“

Belle gasped. “Neal!”

“Don’t,” he warned lowly, taking a pace threateningly closer. “I watched Henry grow up in one timeline, and have done everything I can to keep him safe and happy for the past year in this one. I made sure to get his permission before I went through the adoption, made sure it was something he wanted. Don’t you dare assume that biology makes you are more of a father to him than me.”

“It’s not my fault I didn’t know him from the start,” he said defensively.

He remembered the conversations with Emma, the explanation of her jail sentence and this man’s involvement in it. He could easily argue that it was his fault that he didn’t know, but he decided that bringing up the past would only garner further denials. “It’s your fault that you’re not seeing him now,” he reminded instead.

His nostrils flared and he shook his head. “I can’t pretend that I’m okay with my kid calling someone else dad,” he replied.

“So you’re punishing Henry for having the capacity to love more than one parent?” Graham asked incredulously.

“No, that’s—“ He huffed out a breath, taking a step back. “You don’t understand.”

Graham saw sweat beading at his hairline, a pallor taking over him. He could tell that Belle had noticed, too, when she gave him a questioning look.

“Explain it, then, Neal. We’ll understand,” Belle tried.

Graham shook his head. “I understand that you’re hurting Henry. I understand that you hurt Emma. What I don’t understand is why you’re not trying to make up for it,” he pressed, though his tone was less heated than the one he would have taken if he hadn’t noticed the physical distress.

“I told Emma,” he began shortly, “that if you want me to pretend like I’m okay with this, I need time.”

“Pretend that you’re okay that Henry is loved?” came Belle’s coaxing response. “I understand needing time to come to terms with this situation, but you should truly be happy for him, Neal. He’s your son. Don’t you want him to be loved and protected by someone he loves back?”

Graham wasn’t sure why he was surprised at Belle’s defense. It made sense for who she was, what she had endured. Still, having someone else in this town back him up, to back Henry up, was a strange feeling.

Neal stiffened, tensely on edge as his eyes darted back and forth between the two. “I didn’t come here for this. For you two to gang up on me.”
Belle sighed. “Neal, that’s not what I’m doing.”

“It sure feels like it.” Neal braced his hands on the edge of the counter.

Graham’s jaw clenched. He would fully admit that he was trying to force the reaction, force *reason*, onto the man. He wouldn’t have cared if the kid didn’t; Henry didn’t deserve this wavering.

But he took the chance to see beyond what Henry needed for a minute, to fully analyze what was happening. The weakness, the distress … there was more going on than he first realized. “What *did* you come here for?” Graham’s brow furrowed as he recalled that none of Belle’s first questions had been answered.

There was something strange, a change in his eyes and face that disappeared in a blink. Neal stumbled slightly as he backed up. “Never mind,” he said, shaking his head more in confusion than denial. He brushed a hand to mop his brow, and the scar of an insignia on his palm was barely hinted at.

“Let me find the rune, so we know what’s going on,” Belle said quietly, steering the conversation. “You don’t look well.”

“I can’t stick around here,” he spat.

Graham was about to respond that when his phone rang once more. He felt an edge of panic as he saw Henry’s face flash on the screen. “Henry?”

When he looked up to meet Neal’s eye, he found only fire and another flick in his countenance. It almost felt like the power sparks Emma set when emotional, and it was perplexing.

“Dad.” His heart nearly shattered at the broken, half-sobbed out word. All thoughts to Neal were immediately severed, his focus entirely on Henry. “I *need you to come get me.*”

“Henry, of course, kid,” He was trying not to panic at the tears so present in the lad’s voice. “Where are you? What happened?” he asked.

“At the diner, in the bathroom. Please, please come.”

A clash sounded, and he looked up again to find Neal storming out the door. Belle sighed and placed her hands on her hips, shaking her head sadly.

Graham swallowed, but didn’t let his focus split. “I’m coming, okay? Stay put, but only if you think it’s safe.”

“Okay. … Dad?”

“Yeah?” he said, already in the midst of miming his leaving to Belle.

“It’s my choice, right?”

The connotations of his words made him feel light-headed with rage. “Your choice, *always*, Henry. I’m coming now.”
Entitlement (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Part 2: Some people feel entitled to what they think is theirs.

Chapter Notes

Shifting to anti-regina territory, here. This is the real part of lessawildmoon’s prompt, picking up right from the end of Part 1. Also, so not a V Day fic …sorry?

The door to Granny’s diner slammed into the wall as Graham stormed in. His eyes were hard and focused as he strode inside, fists balling in anger.

His focus narrowed to the path to the restrooms. Granny was staying out of the situation but her fingers twitched, the crossbow on the back counters and within reach. Red was watching from a corner, looking intense. But it was when he found the narrow hall to the back that a certain relief filled him. He caught Killian’s eye and released a held breath. He was standing just outside the men’s room door, arms crossed in front of his chest and trying hard to look like he didn’t care.

Knowing he wasn’t the only one looking after Henry’s safety helped his stride shorten.

But it didn’t let him even try to hide the fury as he was met with Snow’s teary face as she stepped into his path.

“Move,” he said shortly. He needed to get to Henry first; he couldn’t care about her right now.

Snow reached out. “Graham, I didn’t kn—“

He yanked back. “You did,” he replied sharply. “Emma told you as much.”

“It’s your fault.” The voice came from behind him, and he felt his insides twist.

“I won’t deal with you right now,” he said succinctly, not even turning to Regina as he took another step forward.

Abruptly, his movement was stopped and his body was twisted around forcefully. Shock and revulsion filled him as he realized what was happening, as he felt the magic track along his nerves. It left an imprint on his scars even as he was released. He had been near good magic for the past year, but Emma had never used it on him. To feel it again was like being ripped apart at the seams.

“You will not take him away from me. Not after you already turned him against me,” Regina spat. Her eye makeup was smeared from the crocodile tears he was sure she shred in front of Henry. His fury ignited tenfold at the sight, at what Henry would have dealt with.
Before he could even think, his body responded, hand grasping around her neck so suddenly that her head slammed into the wall behind her. He couldn’t even let himself feel the satisfaction at the sharp crack, the ringing of Henry’s pleas still echoing in his mind. “You did that,” he hissed.

A piercing shock of power made him wrench back, stumbling as he felt it fry along his skin. He let the pain recede, and he made to advance again with a growl in his throat.

“Graham, stop,” Snow protested, taking his arm. “This isn’t helping.”

He flashed wide eyes to her, his mouth dropping open. “Not helping?” he repeated, incredulous. “Like blatantly ignoring Henry’s wishes?”

Snow’s face fell. “She just wants to see her son,” she protested weakly.

He shook his head, turning to glare at Regina again. “That is not your decision,” he replied.

“So, now it’s a decision to let me see my own son?” Regina demanded haughtily.

Snow’s gave a reproachful look, but then turned back to him. “I tried to ask Emma, but she wasn’t with you, and Regina wanted to meet at two ….”

He felt himself start to shake. “You didn’t try to ask me. You didn’t try to ask Henry. You are as much in the wrong here as she is, Snow,” he replied bitingly.

She stepped back, looking stung. Her brow creased, teary once more. Graham only felt his ire increase at seeing it.

“Did you think you and Miss Swan were the ones that raised him, Huntsman?” Regina cut in, eyes beading. “Because I believe that was me. He is my son. He’d want to see his real mother.”

He nearly swayed with disbelief. The entitlement was baffling, especially in light of Henry’s barricading in the back. Snow had bit down on her lip, the first true sign of conflict, though he felt the dizzying realization that she also mostly agreed.

“I’m sure the lad feels just that,” Killian cut in dryly from the background, rolling his eyes skyward. He adjusted his back against the door, subtly blocking it further. “Must’ve been why he turned so pale at the very sight of you.”

Regina’s lips peeled back, sneering at him. “No one asked you. I have the right to him, to decide what’s best for him.”

Graham stepped between Regina’s sightline to the bathrooms, adding another barrier. “After everything you did, you have exactly zero rights. Especially ones that supersede his.”

“He is mine,” she insisted.

The presumption of possession made his vision gloss over crimson. “Get. Out,” he said through gritted teeth. His nails bit into his palms, every muscle poised to fight.

Snow inched forward. “Graham—“

“No,” he growled. He had no patience, for her, for Regina, for anyone but Henry. “You can go, too. I’m here for Henry. You have proved you can’t be trusted with him.”
Regina straightened, her shoulders squaring as she leveled him with an intense glare. “You will back down,” she said darkly. Her hand twitched, red light barely pulsing from it.

The blatant threat barely registered in his mind, his main concern getting her far away from Henry. “Get the hell away from him.”

Her teeth bared, eyes flaming. Her hand shot out before he could react. It just missed his chest as he was pushed aside, tumbling to the floor. His elbow and hip slammed into the linoleum, startling him into realizing what almost happened.

“What are you doing?” Snow cried, shaking as she remained in the place he had been.

Regina blinked. She seemed to realize her audience all of a sudden, her expression tempering back to one of neutrality. Still, she only looked down at him with determination bordering in her hard gaze.

“What are you doing?”

Graham stumbled up to his knees. “Henry,” he breathed.

The bathroom door was wide open, and he had no idea just how much of the scene the kid had witnessed. Henry looked terrified, struggling against Killian’s arm as the man tugged him back from the situation. “Don’t touch my dad!”

Regina hesitated, backing up a pace as she registered Henry’s fear.

“I’m okay, kid,” Graham assured, swallowing back the anger to focus on him.

Henry finally broke free of Killian’s grasp, and lunged himself into his arms. Graham sighed, hugging him close. His small body trembled, and a sob escaped against his shoulder. Graham pet back his hair, the other arm tightening around his body both in comfort and protection.

“I think it would be best if you left now, Regina,” Snow said firmly, stepping between them and the brunette.

Her eyes dragged across them all, lingering on Henry for a long time. She took another step back, her chest heaving. “This isn’t fair.”

Henry turned his head against him, peering up at her. “I don’t want you here,” Henry said with finality.

She looked like the words slapped her across her face, her expression crumbling. “Henry—“

“No! You never listen! I don’t want you here! Go away!”

Graham rose to standing, pushing Henry behind him. He was glad that Henry had found his voice regarding her presence, but that didn’t mean he’d leave him vulnerable in front of her. “You heard him,” he said coolly.

Her lips pursed, expression souring. “This isn’t the end.” She turned on her heel, storming out of the building.

“I know,” Graham muttered, sighing as he turned back to the kid. “You okay?”
Henry shook his head, leaning heavily on him.

“I’ll go, too,” Snow said softly. Her hands curled around her enlarged stomach, sorrow filling her countenance. “I’m so sorry, Henry.”

“S’okay,” he mumbled.

“No, it’s not, kid. But now she knows, and she’ll make it better,” Graham insisted, looking at Snow expectantly.

Snow nodded jerkily. “He’s right. I was wrong. I won’t ever do it again,” she said. “I’ll listen to you from now on.”

Henry buried his face into his side, and he felt tears collecting into his shirt. He nodded nonetheless.

She left then, giving one last apologetic look before heading out. She didn’t look defeated so much as sorrowfully empathetic, and he wondered if she was truly understanding after being witness to Henry’s emotion.

Graham breathed a sigh and pulled Henry back to look at his face. He wiped a couple stray tears from the kid’s cheeks. “What happened?”

Henry swallowed. “We came here and she was already waiting. She was trying to say that you and mom were keeping me away from her, and she started crying. She tried to hug me. Hook saw I was upset and asked if I wanted to leave.”

Graham looked up at Killian. He had been mostly keeping to himself through this all, hovering just outside their group. He felt the gratitude permeate through him; if he and Emma weren’t there and if Snow wasn’t willing to help, someone else was looking out for the kid’s well-being. Killian’s bright blue eyes twitched and he inclined his head slightly, acknowledging Graham’s look.

Graham turned back to Henry. “That’s when you went to the bathroom and called me?”

Henry nodded. “I know you were helping Belle, and I’m sorry—“

“Hey, no. Stop that. You are the most important, you and your mom. Belle is fine,” he insisted. He didn’t want to bring up Neal, as the feelings colliding from that encounter didn’t belong in this one.

“Are you okay?” he asked worriedly, eyes tripping along his frame.

Graham closed his eyes, inwardly chuckling at the protectiveness they all displayed to each other. “I’m fine. I promise. Not a scratch on me.”

“Beg to differ, mate,” Killian spoke up, tossing him the ice pack Red was already holding out.

He caught it in one hand, frowning. Curiously, he looked into the mirrors covering the back of the diner. He grimaced as he saw the bluish-black tracks along his veins on his throat from the power jolt. It ached dully, but he only noticed it once it was pointed out. The adrenaline was still coursing through his nerves, twitching along his spine. Still, he could only feel dejected that Henry had noticed.

“She used her magic on you,” he said, his voice small.
“Yeah, she did,” he agreed. He placed the ice on his neck if only to cover the marks. “But I don’t care, because you’re safe.”

“I hate her,” he said. There was no heat in the statement, though he looked doleful.

“And that’s okay. And it’s also okay if that’s not all you feel,” he said gently.

He nodded and looked away, obviously not wanting to talk about it all with their audience.

“Henry,” Red asked from behind the counter, “do you want me to make you some cinnamon cocoa?”

He turned a pale sort of green and shook his head. “No. Not now.”

Graham pressed his lips together thoughtfully, then looked up. “I think he needs some time first. I’ll call if we need something?”

Red nodded hastily, sympathy etching her face. “Of course. We’d send it right up.”

“Here,” Granny cut in, picking up the glass dome covering a plate of cookies. She chose a few and wrapped them in plastic. “Take these for now. Just in case.”

Graham took the gesture for what it was, smiling tightly in thanks. He rolled an arm across Henry’s shoulders, leading him to the back. “Let’s go to the room awhile, okay?”

“Wait.” He stepped away, walking up to Killian. He gave a smile close to a grimace, one he’d seen Emma wear more than a few times. “Thanks, Hook.”

Killian nodded. “You’re quite welcome, young sir,” he said lowly. He jerked his head in the direction of the stairs. “Go with your dad, okay?”

Henry didn’t think twice before taking the advice. He took the stairs two at a time, his pace increasing the closer he got to their room.

He seemed to visibly unwind once the door was shut behind them, as he all but collapsed onto the bed. Once settled, he turned back to him, thoughtful as he stared at his injuries. Graham tried to subtly adjust his collar to cover them, but he knew the action wasn’t lost on the kid.

“Can you have mom heal you?” he bleated softly.

Graham sat next to him and tugged on Henry’s sleeve. “We’ve never tried it, but I don’t see why not,” he agreed. He knew he’d have a certain panic at even the restorative touch of power from Emma’s magic, but also knew that it might have even more of a healing effect than Henry knew.

Henry pressed his palm over his heart, face crumpling ever so slightly.

“Still there, kid,” he assured softly.

“I want to go home,” he said in a hoarse whisper, as if saying it would tumble the unsteady moment.

Graham pressed a firm kiss to the crown of his head. “Soon. We’ll figure this all out soon,” he vowed.
He gave another nod and fell into him. “Love you, dad.”

His eyes flicked closed and he scooped him inward. “Love you, too, kid.”
The Funeral

Chapter Summary

Sometimes things end with strings attached, unfinished business left over that will never be resolved.

Chapter Notes

While I ended up being better toward him than I thought, this does still deal with some anti Neal content. For @ograndebatata, who wished to see the funeral (even though I had already written it). Posting slightly out of order (skips a few days) for reasons.

Two days. That’s how long it took to find Neal once again.

That’s how long he had left to live.

Emma pulled the car into the space, the breaks giving a squeal as she shoved the gears into park. She could feel the mask she’d pulled over herself slipping as tears pricked at the back of her throat.

She was just so frustrated, so angry. Not just that he’d died, and not just because she had been the one to have to do it. There was so much left unfinished and unresolved, and now it would never be completed.

She had gotten almost no sleep. She had been dizzy and exhausted the night before,
feeling ill again after such a long period of health. She had tossed and turned, skin buzzing with the itch of things left unsaid as well as the lingering fear. Graham had held her tight, offering gentle kisses and soothing brush of hands, but instead of tempering her it had only centered her memories. She had squeezed her eyes shut until the buzz turned into sparks.

Graham had finally led her to the woods and watched wordlessly as she had let her magic out in long lightning strikes. The air crackled gold and white until she had felt okay enough to stumble back. Her husband didn’t have one trace of fear to track along his features, and let her collapse into his arms and rest for a few short hours before dawn broke.

She woke feeling resigned in much the same way as she did on the day she decided to leave Tallahassee.

She felt Graham’s eyes on her now, and she glanced at him out of the corner of her own. He remained silent, even as his brow creased. His mouth parted slightly, but she knew he would offer no words of consolation or questions after her wellbeing. They knew each other too well for that.

Instead, he reached over and used a gentle hand to cup her jaw. Her fingers curled along his wrist, pressing him closer to her skin. She reveled in the comfort he was offering, and the feel of his steady pulse. His lips pressed together, and there was something stormy behind those grey-blue irises. He was feeling sympathy, that was certain, but he also looked angry for her.

She remembered the weight of Neal’s body in her arms, watching the life drift out of him, and how she had been unable to stop the comparison to how Graham’s collapse had been. She remembered the bolt of guilt, of thinking about a remedied tragedy as another took hold.

But she has mourned Neal’s death twice now, and this time she expected that it would be for good. There was a ring of finality when the last breath escaped, like someone had yanked all the chances away from him. And she was sure she was an awful person because she found herself overcome with concern for Graham; she had that determined, familiar feeling that she couldn’t lose him again, for good.

She took another few beats now to feel the steady tattoo of his pulse, the rich rush of life in his veins. Though it wasn’t necessary, she whispered out to him. “I love you.”

He gave a sad smile as her hand slipped from his wrist. He leaned in to press a kiss to her forehead. “I love you,” he replied firmly.

She let out a soft sigh and then turned to face the backseat. Henry was quiet, staring at his lap. Fresh tears collected at her lash line, and she swallowed back the bitterness. “Henry. It’s time.”

Her son looked up and she felt her heart tear at how solemn he appeared. He nodded once and clicked the latch on his door.

It was a cool day for early July, windy and overcast. In the distance, she saw the flap of dark coats from the group gathering in the cemetery. She swallowed hard and gripped Henry’s clammy hand. “Let’s get going,” she murmured.

Graham pulled his arm around her shoulders and helped lead them to the clearing. There
was a surprisingly high number of people, most of whom she recognized. Her parents were there, as was Belle and Tinkerbell. Killian stood along the tree line, watching with a darkly somber expression. The rest were random townspeople, filling in the edges of the cemetery. She wondered how many of them actually knew the man they were burying.

She wondered how much of Neal she actually knew.

“Emma.”

She looked up, catching David’s concerned gaze from a few feet away. She offered a small smile. His mouth was set into a firm line, his eyes doleful. He looked like he wanted to step closer, embrace her maybe, but he stayed firmly at Mary Margaret’s side. Mary, for her part, looked at her with too-large eyes, pitying and guilty and anxious all at once.

She turned her head quickly. She wasn’t ready to talk with her yet. She couldn’t. She would break if she tried to take on another thing at this point.

It was too real, the danger now coloring everything in this town. This was exactly what she had been fearing from the moment Killian crossed her threshold: a death far too close. She ached for the security of the Upper West Side, of their soon-to-be too small apartment, and of the comfort of their friends.

She took Graham’s hand as the funeral began, tugging Henry closer with the other. There were only a short few words spoken at the site while the casket was lowered deep into the earth. It was startlingly concrete to witness, with the finality of it all. Emma was almost surprised at how suddenly the dirt began to be leveled over the wood planks, and her head throbbed in the realization of how not ready she was for all this.

It ended so abruptly that it took a moment for her to realize why the crowd was dispersing.

Henry watched everyone leaving with a serious glint. “I’m going to use the bathroom,” he murmured.

Emma gripped his shoulder and turned him around. She brushed back his hair from his face, offering a small smile. He didn’t give the same back, and instead shied away from her eyes. His reaction made her nervous. “I’ll walk with you,” she said simply.

“I don’t need you to come with me,” he said stubbornly. He was closed off to her, something she rarely saw now. A pang hit her, a worry that he was upset with her for helping take his biological father away. She wanted to press, to make sure that he understood, but she also knew her son would need time.

She still led him to the restrooms near the parking lot with a shrug, insistent despite the anxiety. “Your sister’s on my bladder, anyway,” she said.

Henry broke away and darted into the bathroom before she managed to catch up with him.

He didn’t have many chances to be on his own recently; the threat of the witch and the presence of Regina meant he was being watched by someone at all times. She figured the kid needed some time alone, and couldn’t begrudge him that.

She placed her hands on her hips, and glanced back to Graham. He nodded in response. “I’ll wait for him out here, okay?” he said.
Emma leaned forward to press her forehead into his. He gave a small smile and brushed his lips against hers before she pulled away.

The bathroom was thankfully empty. The baby rolled within her, and she patted along her stomach before finding a stall.

After, she cleaned up quickly, and sighed into the mirror as she noticed the smudges beneath her eyes. She went into her purse to find concealer when her phone buzzed. She frowned, but then felt a sharp relief at seeing the name on the screen.

“Emma. Why in the Hell is Henry calling to ask about the arrest report?”

Emma’s brow furrowed, the relief sapped out of her immediately at her friend’s abrupt tone. “Maggie? What? Henry called you?”

“Yes. He asked me if I could go over your arrest report, more specifically what the officer detailed regarding the boyfriend who turned you in.”

Emma’s eyes shut tight and she leaned against the brick. “Oh, God.”

“Em, this isn’t the first time. It’s not like he’s just learning about the shitty things the guy did. But why is he asking about things he already knows?”

Emma walked back out onto the street and twisted her ring, looking over to the gated cemetery. “He—Neal. He was here. He … he died.”

There was silence over the line for a few moments. “What?”

“Yeah.” She winced. “It was … pretty sudden.”

“I’m so sorry you had to see him, Em.”

She shook her head. “No, it wasn’t bad to see him. We might have been heading toward closure, but—“

“Stop that. Play that game with someone that doesn’t know better. I was there for that fallout, remember?”

Emma bit down hard on her lip. She remembered a life in which she had vented all her frustrations and tears to her best friend. She remembered the support she had gotten in return, the way Maggie had been so infuriated for her. She remembered the list of warning signs the social worker had brought out, jabbing an insistent finger to each and having her memorize them all.

Maggie was right; she was oversimplifying her feelings.

But all her knowledge and mixed emotion didn’t change the conclusion. It clawed at her, the resolution that had been right at her fingertips. They may have gotten along eventually, been friends. “I mean it, Maggie. It could have been okay.”

Her friend sighed heavily. “Sure, okay. I might actually believe that.”

Emma knew she didn’t, not really. “It would have been good for Henry. To know him, I mean.”

Maggie said nothing in response, but she could practically feel the judgment over the phone line. “How did you find him?”
Emma thought back to the lie they’d made up to get them there. “Oh, well, coincidence. One of Graham’s old cases needed a look over out here. He’s investigating. And Neal lives … *lived* here.”

“Small world. Great. And how did he die?”

Emma sucked a breath through her teeth, contemplating. ‘Sold his life for his father’s’ wasn’t exactly something that made sense in the real world. It barely made sense here. “It was an accident,” she said, as close to the truth as she could get.

“You … Emma, did you have to see it?”

She felt a cold grip inside her, remembering him begging her to use the magic to separate them, to kill him. “Yes,” she replied simply as her stomach churned.

“Are you okay?”

It was the first time she’d been asked that point blank. She felt her chest tighten, something wound up inside her. “I’ve got Henry and Graham,” she replied. She knew Maggie would understand; she wasn’t okay, but with her family she’d get there.

“I’d feel a hell of a lot better if I knew where you guys were.”

Emma grimaced and stamped a foot, her body rocking as she considered. She’d gotten away with being vague with everyone so far, but she knew Maggie wouldn’t be satisfied with the same. “I’m in Maine,” she tried.

“Maine’s pretty big.”

She sighed. “Mags … fine. It’s this tiny little town called Storybrooke.”

“Nearest main city?”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously. I don’t want my godchild being born in some little backwater town.”

“Godchild,” she scoffed, even if the term would likely end up being completely accurate. “I’m only at twenty-nine weeks. Besides, it’s only like an hour and a half from Boston. Right near York.”

“Okay, good. I know some good docs over here in the area if you need, okay? Don’t let the stress of that asshole get to you.”

“Maggie,” she said, feeling her voice crack over the name. She swallowed. “I did love him, once.”

“I know you did, Babe.” Her voice had taken a more gentle tone, but there was something steely underneath. That’s how it had always been; she would sympathize, but she would always push her forward. “And I’m sorry he died. But he doesn’t deserve your tears, okay?”

Emma’s stomach turned, and she felt a headache brew between her temples. She knew what her friend was trying to do, but she was also being too pragmatic, too cold. “I promise we’ll make a visit on our way back, okay?” she said, ducking away from the topic.
“Sure you will.”

“Bye,” Emma said, clicking off the speaker. She pressed her lips together thoughtfully, and then tucked the cell into her bag.

She turned the corner, watching Henry press himself up against Graham’s side. They sat on the bench nearest the parking lot, waiting on her. Graham’s head was inclined, and she could see his mouth moving as he spoke to him. Henry was still; he looked pale and drained as he leaned against him.

Her hands fisted at her side, and she let the wind blow her hair across her face without adjusting it. She stepped up to them, and then nudged her toe along Henry’s shoe. “So. You called Maggie?”

Henry looked up cautiously, then his eyes darted away. “Yeah.”

“Why’d you want to hear it again?”

He sighed and scooted over, leaving room on the bench that she gratefully took. He pulled at a thread on Graham’s sleeve, looking dejected. “I don’t know,” he mumbled.

“Yes, you do,” she pressed.

He pulled a face and looked down. “He didn’t tell me the first time. He made me think … he didn’t tell me.”

“Henry …,” she trailed off, not knowing what to say.

“He let me be mad at you, let me think you were the bad guy.” His voice hitched and cracked, his eyes finally filling up with unshed tears. “He was the bad guy! We could have been together always, but he sent you to jail and he didn’t even feel sorry!”

Her heart broke, her breath shaky as she exhaled. She cupped his face in her hands. “He did feel sorry, Henry. He apologized,” she reassured. Even if he had mostly explained away his actions, there had been apologies made. And at least the last one hadn’t seemed so hollow.

Henry said nothing, only turned away sharply. He wiped his nose with his sleeve, looking indignant.

She looked up to catch Graham’s hard gaze. He looked barely held together, trying to remain calm to allow them this chance to talk. She brushed her fingers against his in appreciation before turning back to her son. “Henry … you and I … we did get to be together.”

He sniffed. “Just in this life. And he still took the money and left you behind, told the cops where you were. And I never—I never—”

“You never got to ask him about it?” she finished gently.

He nodded jerkily. “I never got to be angry with him,” he said, his face screwing up as he let out a sharp sob. “I didn’t even really know him! And he promised, mom, he promised!”

“I’ll see both of you again.

Emma looked away, feeling the creep of heat up her spine. Desperately, she tried to bury it down. “Henry … it wasn’t his fault he didn’t get the chance to see you again.”
“He had time,” Henry said stubbornly.

Emma pulled him into a hug, letting him rest against her. She brushed her hands through the short strands of his hair, bringing as much comfort as she could into the action.

She remembered the anger in Neal as he walked away from her days ago, the dark look that had come when he heard Henry calling Graham ‘dad.’ The opportunity had slipped from him because of his own envy, of his inability to see what a good thing it was for her kid.

Henry was right. He could have had time.

She debated answering for a moment. “He did. But he was still living in Gold, fighting against the price.” It didn’t feel like a whole explanation, and she knew it wasn’t one. Still, it at least would be something that could placate his emotion.

“It’s not fair. I want to be mad at him, mom. I want to yell at him, I want him to understand. But I can’t. He never let me, and now he’s gone and I’m not supposed to be mad at him.”

She still felt the frustration bubbling for her own self, her own unfinished business with Neal. She was angry, and the fact that he had hurt Henry in the process made the feeling worsen.

“You’re right. It’s not fair,” she whispered against his hairline. “I’m mad, too. It’s okay to be mad about it. It’s even okay to be mad at him. But know he was trying to be a better person, too, okay? I know if he had a choice, he would’ve wanted to be there for you.”

Henry visibly swallowed, and he didn’t react other than to make absent patterns over Graham’s sleeve. “I’ll try to believe that,” he finally whispered.

She felt Graham grip her hand, and she looked up at him. His lips were pressed into a tight line, and she knew he was trying hard to believe that, too. He had never known Neal, so he only understood the hurt he’d inflicted on her and Henry, both directly and inadvertently. Their one encounter hadn’t helped his views on him.

But that was one thing that she did believe. Neal wanted to be a father to Henry, and he could have learned to be a good one. For all the missteps he’d made, he certainly had tried with Henry.

Her son still looked solemn. “He just gave up,” he said sourly.

“No, kid, he didn’t. He died so he could let us know who the Wicked Witch is, remember? So now she doesn’t have all the advantage,” she reminded.

Henry sunk further into Graham, his eyes darkly shaded.

“So you see,” Emma pressed, “he wasn’t a bad guy. Not really.”

Graham stroked his hair gently. “You don’t have to see it today. Just keep it in mind, okay?” he murmured.

She wondered fleetingly if Graham’s advice was the same one he was giving himself. She gave a short nod when Henry’s eyes lifted to catch her reaction. She tapped his wrist, a gentle prod to change the topic. “I don’t really feel like mingling with everyone. What about you?”

Henry shook his head. “Can we just … go away? Just for a little?”
Her heart almost broke at the small plea, and she wished she could grant him that one gift. “We need to stick close for now. We’ll go back to our room, sneak through the back. If anyone asks, we can blame your sister, okay?”

Henry nodded, and pressed his palms over her stomach. The baby shifted and rolled under his touch, active for her brother. Finally, a small little smile settled over his features. “We can look through the book?”

“Of course. Anything you want,” she assured. If he wanted to distract himself with name ideas for his sibling instead of lingering on thoughts of Neal before he was ready, she wasn’t going to force the issue. He needed to come to terms with it in his own time.

As they rose, there was a twitch in Graham’s eye, a slight inclination of his head. She felt the later almost as if it had actually slipped off his tongue.

She swallowed thickly, recognizing that the bead of anger and fear was not extinguished in her belly, and that she still needed to vent her frustrations. She just wouldn’t do that in front of Henry. Her kid didn’t need to hear it, didn’t need a reason to see more of the bad when there wasn’t enough time for the good to balance out his memories.

She nodded to Graham and grabbed his hand, smoothing her index finger across his ring. She glanced back at the cemetery, remembering the little plot nearest the tree line that she’d visited only twice and now was empty. She leaned her head into his shoulder, placing a soft kiss. “You stay safe,” she commanded in a rough whisper.

His eyebrows rose, his expression serious. “You know that has to be mutual,” he replied just as lowly. “Besides, it’s not just you anymore.” His palm covered her stomach to remind her.

Her eyes shaded and she used the other hand to grip Henry’s. Graham’s dark blue eyes softened, worried but gentle.

Now that the danger was far more concrete, she knew they’d protect each other even more fiercely than ever. Henry had always been the priority, but now she had an incentive to keep herself safe as well, for both of her kids.

It stung something inside her, the realization that came with the thought of keeping her son safe. She knew that Neal would’ve defended Henry to the death. He’d shown that in Neverland. She wished he had lived for her to see that protectiveness bleed into a real relationship with her son.

It was easy to blame Zelena, to shift those dark feelings to the Wicked Witch. The choice would never have been presented had it not been for her.

So, she would keep herself safe for her children, for Graham. But she would also make sure Zelena wouldn’t hurt anyone else in Henry’s life.
Date Night vs Family Nights

Chapter Summary

Their friends are all meddlers and even Henry joins in.

Chapter Notes

Back to NY for a bit of a break from the angst. Two prompts, one from BossLady “they have probably never had a normal first date experience. I could imagine them never going on dates the first couple of months because they want to spend time together with Henry as a family or with their friends or are working. Once their friends or Henry realize this, they probably trick them into going on their first date. Just because Graham and Emma don’t seem like the type of people to plan date nights.” and one from @skagengiirl “Henry tells Graham that he wants him to adopt him.”

“Are you used to being back at work yet?”

Graham gave Simmons a knowing look before answering Andie’s question. “Same old, same old.”

“Please. I know you are back at it. I was asking wifey,” she said with a snort.

The title made something pleasant buzz through him and he leaned down to press a soft kiss to Emma’s lips. She smirked into it, then leaned forward. She shrugged, munching around one of the crackers from the appetizer plate before settling back against his chest. “I mean, it’s work. Easy pickup yesterday, and a couple successful loan repayments. I haven’t had any hard calls in the past week.”

Andie lazed into Simmons’ side, holding her glass by the stem. “Good to ease back into it, Missus Married. Junior doing okay?”

He could practically feel her roll her eyes. “‘Junior’ is barely making himself known.”

His arm twisted around Emma, palm pressing against her abdomen. Her pants were a little tight at her waist, but there wasn’t enough of a swell there yet for their friends to see.

Ritu poured another glass and gestured. “Morning sickness hit yet?”

“Not really. A couple times I’ve thought I was going to, but it kind of wears off. Calm before the storm, I guess.” She glanced up at him, and he met her gaze softly, brushing a hand down her side. He was not anxious to see her feeling the discomforts of pregnancy, as she was well aware.

“You know how well Emma’ll handle that,” Andie teased.
She grimaced. “I just don’t like being sick. Who does?”

Andie hummed an agreement. “Besides, we know Daddy Humbert will be over-anxious and flustered the whole time.”

“Hey!” he exclaimed. Emma looked up at him pointedly. He sighed. “Well, I don’t like seeing her sick.”

“Oh!” Gia spoke up, swinging her glass around in an arc. “I know! Before you get there, let us take Henry over for a bit. You’ll need a good date night in before you get to that stage.”

“Hey!” he exclaimed. Emma looked up at him pointedly. He sighed. “Well, I don’t like seeing her sick.”

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Emma entwined their hands, clicking her ring against his. “We just had our honeymoon,” she reminded.

“Yes, with kid attached,” Sam pipped in from beside Ritu.

Graham frowned at the slightly judgmental inference. “We’re starting a family. We wanted him with us, since we’re getting settled.”

“Which isn’t a honeymoon, in the most traditional sense,” Andie pointed out. She held out a hand to stop any protests from him or Emma. “Now, I get it. You did this the quick way, and Henry’s getting used to all the new.”

“And I wanted my son with me,” Emma said stubbornly.

“Oh, darling, we’re not trying to pass judgment,” Gia said. “But you two will need a night alone. Once the ‘fun’ part of pregnancy hits, it will be nice to have a reminder of just how you got yourself there. Besides, when’s the last time you went on a date?”

Graham gestured to the full living room. Sam and Ritu and Gia were on one end of the couch, Andie and Leo taking over the chair. Food and drinks littered the coffee table, games tucked right under for later. “Doesn’t this count?”

Andie pointed at him. “A couples date is not a date, Mister Married, and you should know better. Besides, the kids are in the bedroom. You need something just you two.”

“Emma, Graham,” Ritu said, cocking her head to the side. “Wait … what was your first date?”

Emma huffed. “You’ve even seen us! We go to the bar all the time.”

“Oh, sweetie,” Gia said. “As lovely as Andie is, we all know that bar is just on this end of divey. It is not exactly ‘date night’ appropriate.”

Simmons snorted into his beer. “It’s completely divey.”

“Divey but clean! And I take no offense to that,” Andie said with a grin.

Emma groaned and threw her head back against Graham’s chest with a soft thud. “Why is this so important?”

“It’s not! I just want to know,” Andie replied with a grin.

Emma looked up at him in question, and he could only offer a small shrug. “Movies?”

“That was here,” Emma reminded.
He thoughtfully looked away, fingertips making absent patterns on her skin. He supposed that they hadn’t had anything that their friends would consider a “real” date. “I don’t know. We always go where we’re comfortable, and that’s here, or the station, or the bar.”

Andie tossed a throw pillow at them and he caught it easily in one hand. She trilled out a blast of Vietnamese. “You two, I swear. The station does not have romantic date appeal.”

Emma snuggled into him. “It’s not like I feel like we’ve been missing out. We get our alone time.” She raised an eyebrow and pressed her hand over his where it lingered on her stomach. “Obviously.”

“Even that was on a business trip,” Andie grumbled.

“You told them that?” Graham asked, surprise and amusement coloring his voice.

“Well …,” Emma replied simply, and looked over their friends. She shook her head. “It’s them. You really think I could have kept it secret?”

“Point made,” he said. He raised his eyes to the woman opposite them. “I guess I should be more surprised that Andie didn’t try to dig it out of me.”

“Oh, just you wait, Humbert,” Simmons said with a chuckle. “Take the fact that she hasn’t asked yet as a warning sign.”

He shrugged in concession. He was prepared for Andie trying to weasel out details in that way she did. It would be easier to remain tight-lipped since he wasn’t drinking anymore, though. He didn’t have any illusions that she would let him off easy, but he could at least keep some things private.

Gia sat up, clicking through her phone purposefully. After a minute, she made a noise of delight. “I can get you reservations at no less than eight different high-end spots as soon as tomorrow. Make your choice. I’m sure Georg won’t mind if we let the boys have a sleepover.”

“I really don’t think the lack of ‘high end’ was our deterrent,” Graham said dryly.

Ritu pushed Sam back and leaned over to look at Gia’s phone. “You know she’s good about finding the classy places that somehow still suit your taste,” she reminded. “They all have some outdoor element to them. And since you two are prone to late Fall outdoor excursions ….”

Graham groaned. “We will never live that down, will we?”

“Your kid was made in the middle of a forest, Graham. It’ll follow you around forever,” Sam replied.

Emma looked up at him sheepishly. “Sorry?”

“Your idea, your fault,” he teased good-naturedly.

“So, what type of food are you craving?” Gia asked.

“Emma craves all food,” Graham replied, then inclined his head to press a kiss to the crown of her head.

Emma could only nod, shifting against him with a sigh.
“Oh, dancing, they should go dancing after!” Ritu exclaimed.

“Nah, they need somewhere that’s quiet,” Simmons argued.

“Like a museum with lots of dark corners,” Andie offered.

Emma looked up at Graham in amusement. “Well, it looks like we won’t have to plan.”

He kept his eyes on hers and flicked quickly from the group to her in silent question. She bit down on her lip, chewing thoughtfully for a moment before she gave a small smile and nodded. Knowing she wanted this made it easier to agree to it all. “Saves time,” he murmured back, watching the others pose suggestions back and forth. There would be no protesting it, he knew. Once Gia got an idea in her head, it was happening. The fact that the others were on her side just made it all the more inevitable.

He didn’t mind as long as Emma was okay with it. Even if it sounded a bit ridiculous, it was just another excuse to be with her. There were far worse things.

He heard a shuffling behind them and glanced back, finding Henry. He was staring at the group curiously. “Hey, kid, need something?”

Henry met his eye, but he seemed distracted by the other adults arguing over locations. Finally, he nodded. “Yeah, the guys want to know how long before the pizza gets here.”

Emma glanced at the clock on the wall. “About another fifteen. Can you hold out that long?”

Henry nodded. “Yeah, and I got the plates and stuff ready.”

“Good,” she said with a nod.

Graham reached out with one hand and tugged on his sleeve. “It looks like you might be headed for an actual sleepover with Damon and Matt tomorrow night. That okay?”

He nodded. “Haven’t been over in a while.”

“Okay, so I think we got it,” Gia declared. “Dinner, then an exhibit at the west end of the park, then off to the latin bar on 78th.”

“Latin bar?” Emma questioned, flitting a hand over her stomach.

“You can do virgin drinks, but there’s a good dance floor there. No real first date means we are cramming all first date experiences into one,” Andie said with a cheshire smile.

“The exhibit even has a little film!” Ritu exclaimed. “Dinner, museum, movies, dancing all in one!”

“Kinda overdoing it, isn’t it?” Graham asked, slightly bewildered at the rapid planning.

Emma’s eyebrow rose and she nodded her agreement. “Please remember that pregnant equals exhausted most of the time,” she reminded.

A frown tugged on his face, and he worriedly pulled her closer. She hadn’t shown signs of fatigue yet tonight, but she was right: a jam-packed late evening planned to the inch would not be in her best interest. It was the one side effect she had definitely experienced, and thus it would be the date neither of them would have picked.
“If you don’t get to them all, you don’t get to them all. At least get to some,” Gia insisted.

He glanced back to catch Henry’s confused expression and gave a smile with a roll of his eyes at their antics. He gestured to Henry’s room. “Go ask your friends what they want to drink. I’ll get it ready.”

He started to nod, but then stopped. “You guys never went on a first date?”

Emma huffed. “See? Confuse my kid, why don’t you. This is why I don’t have you guys over more often.” She turned in Graham’s arms to look at her son. “Of course we’ve gone on a first date. And second. And third, and so on. They just weren’t up to Gia Standards.”

Graham chuckled in agreement. “She doesn’t think our video game nights count.”

Henry frowned. “They don’t. I’m there.”

“See? He’s on our side!” Andie exclaimed.

Graham shook his head. “We’ve had alone nights, too. But sometimes date nights are family nights,” he protested.

“You guys should do Gia’s suggestion,” Henry insisted.

Emma sighed. “I guess we’re out-numbered.”

He brought her wrist to his lips and then curled his thumb under the shoelace. “I don’t think we ever stood a chance.”

It was later, once the door shut behind the last two to leave, when the house was finally quieting down, that Henry padded back into the kitchen.

“Hey, kid. Still not tired?” Emma asked around a yawn.

“Kinda,” he said, and sat on one of the bar stools. “But not ready to sleep.”

Her eyelids drooped slightly, trying to balance her chin on her hand. “Lucky.”

“I’ll get him there, but you’ve got to get some sleep if we’re going to do half of the things the group’s making us do tomorrow.” Graham pushed her in the direction of the bedroom. She made a small sound of protest before sleepily stumbling into it.

After, he directed his focus to the kid. “Need some water before bed?” he asked.

Henry shrugged. “Sure.”

He pulled down two glasses and rummaged through the freezer to pull out the thin mints in the back. He pushed them to Henry along with a full glass. “Are Matt and Damon excited about the sleepover?”

Henry nodded. “Yeah, everyone’s coming. I think Gia’s getting the theater room set up for us.”

Graham shook his head with a grin. Gia and Georg’s place was huge, with plenty of extra rooms for hobbies and entertainment. It was one of the reasons theirs was often the home of choice for the boys’ sleepovers. “Friends in high places,” he commented.
Henry cocked his head to the side, smiling. “It’s kinda fun to have the opposite, y’know? Last life, I lived in a big mansion and had no friends. Now, I have a lot of friends and just enough space for myself.”

Talk of past lives usually put him on edge, and Graham swallowed as he pieced through the comparison. “Are you worried about when the baby comes, that you won’t have your space?”

Henry shook his head quickly. “No, I don’t mean like that. I mean, it was so big last time that it felt … I don’t know, empty. When the baby comes, it’ll be crowded at first, but we always make things work. I’m excited for my sibling, honest.” He grinned, eyes sparkling in proof.

Graham wet his lips nervously and nodded. “Okay. As long as you’re being honest.”

“I swear. Thanks for making sure, though,” he replied.

Graham leaned over and ruffled his hair playfully. “Always, kid.”

Henry scrapped his chair forward, his expression unclear. Finally, he played with the opening on the box, shying away from his eyes. “You do always do that. You always care.”

Graham sat down opposite his stool. “Of course.”

Henry glanced up at him shyly. “Even before.”

He smiled and opened the packaging for him. “Even before,” he agreed.

“I think I wanna sign the papers.”

He froze. “Wha-What?” Graham stuttered, eyes widening as he took in the information. Henry tossed one shoulder up, rolling a cookie between his fingers. “I mean, if you still want to.”

Graham let out a low breath. “Henry … of course I still want to. I told you that it’s something important to me, and that hasn’t changed. I would … I would be honored, kid. Are you … are you sure? No one’s forcing you to make the decision this soon.”

“I know,” he said, his eyes bright. “You told me to take my time. And I have, really. You married mom, and you still make sure I’m included with everything. We all fit. I want to have it legal, too.”

Graham felt his eyes sting, and he reached over to give his shoulder a squeeze. He held himself together, trying to be cautious even as he wanted to scoop him close. “So, you want to do this? You’re not feeling pressured?”

Henry’s eyebrows knotted. “Pressured? No. You and mom have told me it’s my choice about a million times. I know we’re a family either way. You and mom haven’t even gone on a real first date because you want us to all be together all the time.”

Graham felt part of his soul lighten in cautious optimism, even as he laughed hard. He was glad that his and Emma’s reassurances had stuck. “Hey, you still get your sleepover nights. But that’s right, we all fit together. And we don’t have to have the piece of paper to make it real, not if it makes you uncomfortable in any way.”

Henry nodded. “You’ve always cared about me, even in the first life. You and mom are
gonna have the baby and … and I want you to adopt me.”

A strange mix of anticipation and relief washed over him as the words rushed out. He felt a tear roll down his face even as he beamed at Henry. “The baby … he or she will just add to the family. You will always be our first kid, Henry, for Emma and for me. Thank you for agreeing to this.”

Henry shook his head at the gratitude. “Graham … I want you to be my dad. You basically already are. Thanks for wanting me back.”

He tugged him into a tight hug, pulling him close in to his chest. “I love you. Always.”

Henry was holding him just as tight, yet somehow felt relaxed. After a beat, he pulled back, eyes dancing. “Let’s wait to tell mom after your date.”

Graham’s eyebrows shot up. “You think I can hold out that long?”

Henry grinned. “You should go on a first date before having two kids, don’t you think?”

Graham shook his head, chuckling. “I don’t think it matters too much; we already have them,” he replied, resting his hand on the kid’s head in gentle acknowledgment.

Henry took a deep breath, looking at him closely with a small smile. “Yeah, I guess you do.”

Graham couldn’t help grinning back, staring over at the boy in awe. Henry wanted him to be his dad. He wanted him. “After the date,” he promised. A small price to pay for the gift he was receiving.

Henry shrugged. “It’s okay if you cave,” he swore. “I know you don’t like to keep secrets from mom, and that’s okay.”

“It wouldn’t be a secret, more of a surprise,” he replied. “But I think she’ll know something’s up as soon as she sees me.”

“You’re excited,” he stated, though it was said more in wonder.

Graham nodded, leaning forward to press a kiss to his forehead. Formality shouldn’t matter much, but something about having it in paper and law made it concrete. Seeing the ring and the certificate with Emma proved that, even if what they felt meant so much more.

Henry smiled widely. “I love you, too, Graham. And I’m excited, too. It’s my choice.”

Graham pressed his lips together, letting the words wash over him. “Always, Henry.” He didn’t understand why the words meant so much in this life when they hadn’t in the first. But something about them added structure to what he already knew from interaction. Maybe he was just insecure and needed the reassurance, he didn’t know.

All he knew was that it was strange to feel how his heart thrashed to make room for all the emotions that came from them.

“I think we can make room for another family night on Sunday, don’t you?”

Henry rolled his eyes. “You act like that would be something new.” He sighed in mock distress, while his face showed plain delight. “But sure. Family nights are good, too.”
Graham nodded eagerly. He wasn’t sure if he was looking forward to a night alone with Emma or a night with just their little family all together more. Both were important to him, though perhaps one thing was missing. “Next week, just you and me. We’ll do something to celebrate.”

Henry looked startled, then it tempered into awe. “Yeah. Yeah, that sounds good. Just us two.”
Prepping for an Overnight

Chapter Summary

Emma’s leaving for a trip in the morning, and Graham’s making sure she only stays away one night.

Chapter Notes

Tina’s prompt: “maybe something about celebrating Graham’s birthday? Also they don’t know the exact date and maybe Emma needs to make it up? Does he even want to celebrate his birthday?”

I know I need to get back to SB, but this got written much more quickly than the other in my drafts.

She came back into the bedroom, drink in hand. The button-up she had thrown on brushed against her upper thighs as she reached up to click the hall light back off. When she made her way back to the bed, Graham was sitting up with an arm crossed behind his head, an appreciative look plain on his face.

“What?” she asked with a smile.

He grinned, dark gaze flicking over her. “I like the look,” he murmured. He reached out for her, tugging her forward by the hem.

The water almost toppled onto the sheets as she fell onto his lap, and she couldn’t help the laugh that escaped her. She felt lighthearted and playful as she leaned in to press her lips to his.

“It’s your shirt,” she reminded.

Graham trailed kisses across her jaw and down her neck. “Exactly,” he said, his accent low and rumbly against her pulse.

“Is that your territoriality thing, Detective?” she teased, tilting her head to give him better access. “A leftover lesson from your brothers?”

He smiled into her skin and his fingers dug into her hips to pull her closer. “Could be,” he replied.

She sighed pleasantly and curled her arms around his neck, the cool glass resting against his bare shoulders. He shivered slightly at the touch but didn’t move otherwise. The lazy way he dragged his lips against her collarbone, like he had all the time in the world, was heady.

“Maybe I’ll steal a couple for tomorrow,” she suggested. “They’re pretty comfortable, too.”

“I’m going to miss you,” he growled lowly as he plucked the buttons open.
“Just an overnight,” she reminded. “And this is definitely encouraging me not to stay longer.”

He chuckled and brought twinkling eyes up to meet hers. “You’re on to my plan, then.”

“Jersey is not where I was planning to spend my Saturday,” she assured, then paused to take a long sip of her drink.

“He’s not too bright. I’m sure you’ll find him quickly,” he said with a shrug. He took the glass from her hands and placed it on the nightstand, and then shrugged the shirt down her shoulders.

She helped him, with another kiss for good measure. “I thought you liked it on me?” she laughed.

His thumbs swirled across her hipbones. “I do. It’s nice off, too,” he observed.

“I’ll keep that in mind come Christmas,” she said with a smirk.

“Just consider it my birthday gift,” he teased back.

She paused, cocking her head to the side. “When is your birthday?” she asked, semi-seriously.

He glanced at the clock behind them and her eyes followed his. It was just after one. “About an hour ago.”

She jerked back in surprise. “What?”

He smiled, dimpling his barely stubbled cheeks. “Well, according to these memories, at least.”

“Wait, I missed your birthday?” she asked incredulously.

His brow raised. “Not exactly what I’d call ‘missing it,’” he said, and he captured her around the waist again, hands splaying across her lower back.

She frowned, not giving into his suggestive hold. “No, I mean … you and Henry had this huge party for me on my birthday, and … this was just a regular day!”

He nudged his forehead into her hairline. “I don’t need a big party, Em. I had breakfast with you and Henry, went in late to work and still caught another bad guy, the guys went and got a cake—“

“Wait, the 20th knew and I didn’t?” she exclaimed, mouth dropping open.

He smiled sheepishly. “Well, they have my personnel files,” he said.

“God, and we had leftovers for dinner and Henry’s off at Michael’s this weekend for the project—”

“And I get to have this really amazing family that I love, and we have this amazing life together, Emma. I really don’t see how I should feel like I’m missing out, here,” he assured as he brushed his hands across her sides.

She leaned in to kiss him thoroughly, intent on letting him know how lucky she felt in
turn. When they parted, she kept close in his space. “Did your other memories give different
birthdays?” she asked, pouting her lip a little. Maybe she could celebrate the others to make up for
this one.

His brow furrowed as he considered. “I’m sure the last one gave me one, but I really
don’t remember. Maybe it was the same?” he said, shaking his head. “I guess she determined it
wasn’t important. First one … well, it wasn’t easy to keep track. It was anyone’s best guess how
old I was.”

She leaned in, resting her cheek against his chest. She felt the ire at herself brew deep
inside the pit of her stomach. “November 30, November 30, November 30,” she repeated over
and over. Shouldn’t a girlfriend just know these things?

His smile went into her hair; somehow she could feel it. “I know we love each other,
and I don’t need to have you making some big ordeal over an arbitrary date to make it official.”

She pulled back to look into his eye, blowing out a puff of air. She frowned a little
deeper. “The only thing I’ve always had is my name and my birthday. It’s important to me, those
facts. It’s not okay to me that we didn’t acknowledge yours,” she protested.

His lips pressed together, thoughtful as he looked at her. “I never had a name or a
birthday in my first life, Emma. And the only time either of those things were important to me was
when I was with you and Henry in this one. The fact that we spent even part of yesterday with
each other? That’s enough for me.”

She didn’t feel like it was enough. Her birthday had felt special because Henry and
Graham and their friends had made it so. She wanted to help make his feel that way, too. “Come
with me,” she blurted out.

The silver in his cobalt irises sparkled as he looked her over in awe. “I wouldn’t say no
to that. But I don’t want you feeling like you have to do this, either.”

She shook her head. “No, I want you with me. Come to Hewitt. Sterling Forest is right
there … we can make it a vacation.”

Something changed behind his gaze, a wistfulness that made her heart leap that she had
chosen the right point to highlight. “A forest?”

She smiled brightly. “It’s still going to be warm for the next few days. The little cabin I
rented … we can upgrade it, make it a long weekend instead. I mean, I’ll have to catch the jumper
and drop him off with the local police in the middle of it, but, like you said, he’s not so smart. It’ll
be quick, and we can get some time to ourselves. You can show me what it was like before: show
off your skills.”

He hummed slightly in agreement, calloused fingertips tripping over her stomach.
“Yeah, that could work,” he murmured. “Obviously, you need the help of the salaried detective.”

She swatted at his arm, scowling. “You can do your thing by helping me drink coffee as
we stalk his regular table.”

He nodded, then kissed along her shoulder again as his hands trailed upward. “That’s
settled. Can we get back to where we were headed, now?”

She started to nod, but then let out a short, sharp laugh as she realized something.
“Sagittarius. Of course you’d be the archer.”
He huffed a sigh and twisted them so she was on her back. She gave a short yelp, but grinned as he settled over her. He curved his hands around her ribs, just enough to tingle across her nerves. “Em, your younger boyfriend would like your attention to be focused _slightly_ elsewhere,” he teased.

She rolled her eyes. “Only by a month, and only in this life, buddy.” She closed her eyes as he breathed along her skin, her body igniting at the brush of warm air. “But I guess I could indulge you. As a birthday favor.”

“Good,” he said and used his fingertips to paint upwards. “Because I have a few more ideas to accomplish before this weekend.”

She brushed her hands through his curls, letting one more thought before she allowed herself to be swept back into it. “Happy twenty-nine, Graham.”

“Thank you,” he replied simply, leaning into her and hovering just above her lips.

She pressed forward, leaving a hairsbreadth between them, noses bumping before she angled closer. “Expect a party for thirty,” she warned. “I get to spoil you, too, you know.”

He smiled, the action skimming his lips to hers. “As long as you and Henry are there, it’s enough for me.”

She believed him, she thought as he kissed her soundly. But she also was glad she had a year to prepare for a day to show him how much he meant to her.

In the meantime, there was an easier way.
At dusk, she and David had finally given up the search. There was no sign of Gold or Neal, and part of her wondered if maybe they were hiding together.

Either way, they weren’t going to be found today.

She ached to be upstairs. She was tired and hungry, but also feeling more at peace than she had in the last couple days. The talk with David had been liberating, in a way. It would all resonate once she was with her family, though, and had the time to process the feelings in that protective bubble.

When Emma walked into Granny’s, there was a stillness to the air. It was mostly empty of people, but those that remained seemed tense and on edge. Her brow furrowed as she made her way to the counter, wanting something quick to eat before going upstairs. “Ruby,” she called. She slumped into a stool, feeling only then how her energy had sapped somewhere in the search.

The brunette gave a stiff smile and walked up to her. “Emma. Do you need something? I could get it sent up to the room,” she said. She seemed hesitant, eyes bouncing around warily.

“Are you okay?”

Emma stiffened, and didn’t bother to look at the woman she felt at her side. Instead, she clenched a napkin in her fist, trying hard to remain stoic. “I’m fine. Ruby, can I just get a grilled cheese to go?”

Ruby nodded and walked off, and Emma felt a curl of annoyance shoot through her that she hadn’t thought that one through. The redhead shifted, sitting beside her at the counter. She folded her hands, her look mostly sympathetic. Still, Emma was on edge. “You’re looking rather pale, dear. I should get you some water. It’s not good for the child for you to be this run down.”

Emma turned her head only a fraction. “We’re fine,” she said, clipped and short. She covered her stomach with her palm, as if in a feeble attempt to hide the bump from the woman.

While she hadn’t announced her pregnancy to anyone other than her parents, the town had caught on quite quickly. She didn’t think she had been showing that much, but she hadn’t
been trying to hide it from anyone in New York, either. Apparently, it was more obvious than she and Graham had first assumed.

It would have been fine. She wasn’t ashamed of her pregnancy; she wanted and loved her child. However, it had made the midwife all the more attentive.

“You don’t understand how … important you both are. To the kingdom, I mean,” she said, a swift smile crossing her lips. She pushed a glass of water to her, one Emma hadn’t seen previously. “I wouldn’t be a particularly good midwife if I didn’t at least offer my help, now would I?”

Emma looked at the glass with some disdain. “It’s fine.” The redhead’s hand shot out, resting over her stomach. The baby twisted, almost pulling away from her touch just as Emma did the same. “Don’t touch me,” she growled.

She smiled, and didn’t look especially apologetic. “You’re carrying high. I’m guessing a girl, then?”

“My doctor,” she emphasized, “said it means I’m in shape.” She didn’t offer any other comments: that she didn’t know, that it was a boy day, none of it. She itched to be upstairs even more, and wondered how fast that grilled cheese would be done.

“Well, of course you are. It’s good that you are having a healthy pregnancy. But all this stress … you need to slow down, my pretty. This investigation’s getting to you.”

Her choice of endearment made her brows knit; she had heard that term before, hadn’t she? It rang familiar, and it made her inch further away. She didn’t want to even begin her protests: that the investigation was fine, that she needed her parents protected, that she wanted to find the Big Bad and be done with it already. She didn’t want to encourage her to speak any more.

Ruby walked back to her just before she imploded, paper bag in hand. The brunette looked uneasy still, and more towards something ambiguous than the woman beside her. “Need anything else?” she asked.

Emma started to shake her head, but then paused to look her over. “What’s going on?”

Ruby looked startled and stepped back a pace. “Have you talked to them yet?”

She didn’t have to ask who she meant, and she glanced to the ceiling. “No, I had just gotten back from the search. What is it? Why does everyone seem so …?”

“Terrified?” Ruby finished, a little bitterly. She sighed. “There was an incident early, and now everyone’s afraid of what … what the queen will do.”

Emma’s eyes narrowed, her jaw clenching as her muscles stiffened. “What?” she asked lowly.

Ruby leaned her elbows on the counter and shoved her hands through her dark hair. “She was here, and Henry rejected her. Publicly. The diner cleared out pretty quickly when she showed up, but there was a fight. When she went after —” She cut herself off, holding her hands up as she seemed to notice Emma begin to hyperventilate. “They’re okay, though! I just had some sandwiches sent up to them just an hour ago.”

Emma swallowed thickly, a dizzying tremor starting at the base of her spine as she thought of her family exposed to the woman.
“Oh, my, Regina really is making things difficult for you all.”

Emma shivered. There was something pleasant in the redhead’s tone, even pleased. She shook her head vigorously, and snatched the bag out of Ruby’s hands. “I’m going upstairs,” she said gruffly, and didn’t bother to say goodbye to either.

“Watch out for that child, Emma.”

Emma froze at the doorway to the inn, but when she turned back, the redhead was gone. She shivered again, the unease piquing in her nerves.

Her instincts said to be wary, and she had gotten used to trusting them. But then there was David and Mary Margaret. They trusted her with their child. As much as she wanted to insist she was in the right, another part more quietly echoed that maybe it was just her reaction to a woman her parents trusted. She was too helpful, and lacked awareness, but that didn’t necessarily mean she was bad. Despite rationalization, her heart rate increased, adrenaline spiking her blood whenever she was around.

She twisted on her heel, trying not to think about it for now, then determinedly took the stairs two at a time.

Regina was one subject she knew absolutely she was not overreacting to.

When she entered their room, Graham and Henry were sharing the big bed. Their heads were together as they spoke in low tones, the room holding a somber energy. Graham raised his head to give a half smile to her in greeting, his eyes shaded and holding his true temperament. Although it was warm out and he wore a T-shirt, a scarf was wrapped around his neck. She frowned at him briefly, then turned to her son.

Henry sat up. His cheeks were pale, dark circles smeared under his eyes, hair messy. He shrugged to her inventorying look, and she rushed forward. With cupped hands, she gently took his face. She brushed her thumbs across his cheeks, looking him over for external and internal harm. She was just able to keep herself from shaking in worry. “What did she do?” she demanded.

“Nothing,” he said simply, but then his eyes trailed over to Graham.

Her mouth set in a firm line. “Henry,” she said pointedly, willing her voice to be even. “Nothing?”

His gaze lowered. “Okay, something,” he mumbled. He blew out a low breath. “She tried to see me. I told her I didn’t want her around.”

Her eyes fluttered closed and she tugged him to her. She sighed heavily, feeling every ounce of frustration and anger eating away at her. “Are you okay? Did she touch you?”

He shook his head. “She tried to hug me, but I ran away. Hook helped me lock myself in the bathroom until Dad got there.”

She nodded and kissed his head, trying to make her movements soothing instead of frantic. “I’m so sorry, Henry. We’ve been lucky so far.” She paused, thinking over his words. “Wait, why wasn’t Graham with you?”

Graham and Henry shared a look that looked more like an exchange of winces. Graham gritted his teeth and then slowly reached out to brush against her arm. “She told her sob story and got … someone … on her side. But it’s okay; that person knows now how Henry feels, and so does the rest of the town. No one’s going to help her see him anymore.”
She stared at him, her eyes hardening. Her jaw clenched; she knew there was only one person that would be on Regina’s side. She turned back to Henry, and her focus was back to protectiveness. “I’m so sorry, Henry. Did she say anything? Do anything?”

Henry peeked over at Graham again. “We need you to heal Dad.”

Emma whiplashed back to her husband, her mouth dropping open. “She touched you?” she asked in shock. She held Henry closer and reached out to Graham. Disgust and fear and fury was mixing in her gut, but she wanted to make sure they were okay before moving forward with any emotion.

Graham gave Henry a look and he sighed heavily. He took her hand and only kissed her palm, reassuring her without words. “We weren’t supposed to spring it on you like that,” he said, his tone slightly reproachful.

Henry shrugged. “I want you to be okay,” he replied in a small voice.

“Graham,” she said, and she could feel the tears collecting in her throat. “Where …?”

He pulled the scarf, and she sucked in a sharp inhale at the tracks that colored his neck. “Looks worse than it is,” he insisted.

She shook her head. Despite his words and the fact that otherwise he seemed physically unaffected by the injuries, there was leftover fear in his dark blue eyes. “She used,” she swallowed back her nausea, “she used her magic?”

“She almost took his heart.”

Henry’s words seized her, and she fought not to crackle with her own energy. Graham’s eyes narrowed in response; he had seen enough to know when she was holding back. But she couldn’t let it out, not when he had been hurt by magic again. She buried her face in Henry’s hair to hide her tears as she shook, and felt her son’s own collect on her shirt.

After a moment, Graham began extracting her from her kid and held her wrists in his hands so her palms were up. “Em, stop. I’m okay. It’s still there. I don’t want you sick again,” he said.

She kept her wet eyes on his as he released her slowly, and she blew out a low breath as she reluctantly let the energy spark the lights dim and then off.

Henry was staring up at the lamp in the corner, his expression solemn. “You can use it to heal him, mom,” Henry added quietly.

She shook her head furiously, backing away. “No. I won’t use it on you.”

“Henry asked earlier,” Graham said, his voice keeping a soft cadence. “I think it’s a good idea.”

“Graham,” she said, her voice cracking. “I can’t.”

She was terrified of it, of touching her magic to him. She had always been so consciously and subconsciously careful about that. Earlier that day she had seen how her magic on outside forces still caused his body to tense, how the past still clung to him despite the months of opposite. She couldn’t fathom trying to use her unstable power directly on him.
He took her hand again and placed it on his neck, his other coming to rest over her stomach. He kept direct eye contact, never breaking. He looked determined, but then he softened to something gentler. Loving.

“I trust you,” he said seriously. “I know you can do it.”

Her eyes burned and she looked back at Henry. He rested his head on her shoulder, wide eyes set on her. “Please, mom?”

She felt Henry’s plea, and wondered if he thought it would right the situation: good magic clearing the bad. He had always been so optimistic, and part of her understood that seeing white magic would be restorative to his worldview.

“I don’t know how,” she admitted finally. She had only ever harnessed it for little things: turning off lights, turning on radios, bending trajectories. She didn’t know the first thing about healing bruises and whatever other injuries Regina’s anger had caused.

Graham took her by the shoulders and she followed his movements so she was laying down on her side. Henry sat next to them, watching raptly, as she settled against the pillow. She let herself relax as he laid on the opposite pillow. His eyes shut as he caught her hands again and rested them against his throat. She tensed automatically. “Take a deep breath,” he said soothingly.

She did so, trying not to focus on the indentations she could feel against her fingertips. She still wanted to rage at Regina, but she pushed the feeling down as she tried to center.

“I believe in you,” Henry spoke softly. He had scooted to the end of the bed, giving them space, but he still never took his eyes from them.

She tried to focus on their support, and took one hand off him and placed it on her stomach, as if drawing strength from the other being there as well. Graham did the same, and the baby shifted slightly as if acknowledging his parents. A warm hand encompassed her ankle, Henry’s clammy fingers closing the circle.

Everything else, every problem and danger, flew to the wayside as she enveloped herself in feelings of family.

She blew out a breath and tried to picture Graham’s skin made whole and clear again. She paused as the power grew in her belly, and she raised her eyes to his again. “Are you sure?”

He leaned in and brushed his lips across hers delicately. “I think it’ll help,” he murmured back.

She nodded, and tried to think of it as their magic, all four of theirs. It helped the light begin at her elbows, creeping upwards at a pace that matched her hesitation. His eyes didn’t follow it, but instead were locked on hers. She saw the unease there, but also the trust despite it. With a final exhale, she let it out.

She broke eye contact to watch as the white light traveled across the dark blue-black veining, cross-hatching back and forth. With it, she felt just how deep those injuries went, how much she needed to heal. It only took seconds, only enough to encompass her rhythmic inhale, and then it was done.

He leaned in to kiss her again, and even though it was soft she felt his urge to deepen it. “See?” he said, and his lips quirked up.

“You did it,” Henry breathed. She turned just in time to catch his beaming smile. “You
made it right.”

She tried to smile back, tried to match their happiness, but let out a short sob instead. She shook her head, and Graham pulled her closer. She collapsed against his chest, shaking as she listened to his heart. She tried to dampen the rage and fright and nausea that was increasing exponentially.


He tucked his arm under her legs and picked her up. She continued to cry, hard ugly tears that she couldn’t stop. She was unable to do anything else but tuck her head against him. He brought her on the edge of the tub in the adjoining bathroom, and shut the door behind them.

She buried her face in her hands, trying to stop the jab of emotion.

“Emma.”

She shook her head, swallowing hard. “I want to kill her,” she hissed out, quiet enough to not reach Henry’s ears. Her nails bit into her palms. She raised her red eyes to his, trying to get across her seriousness. “I want her gone.”

“I know,” he said simply, and sat across from her.

“She hurt you. She hurt Henry. She … she never stops.” She almost felt faint with the want, the fierce protection over her family pushing out every other moral center she thought she had. She suddenly realized just how he must’ve felt before, in that other land.

He clenched his jaw, but then nodded. “In this world, we’re law enforcement, Em,” he reminded with a tap to her knee. “We’ll figure something out.”

“Now,” she insisted. Her hand darted forward and she clung to his shirt, tears streaming down her face doing nothing to hinder her vehemence. “Now.”

“Restraining orders. Formal ordinances. She breaks them … then we’ll do something.”

She shook her head. “Graham, she has enough war crimes and murders to warrant something right now, immediately. I don’t want her just walking around, living free, where Henry is.”

Graham dragged his hands through his hair, sighing. His eyes were bloodshot, she noticed, and there was a fatigue to his posture that she hadn’t noted previously. “We’d need your parents on our side for this. And you know that her past wrongs aren’t enough to make them do something. Let’s set definite rules, okay? Ones they know she can’t violate.”

She frowned. “Why are you so calm about this?” she asked. “You were almost … she almost ….”

Graham was silent a long moment, looking down at his hands. “With as many years as I’ve waited, I want it to be foolproof. Her attacking me is something I can ignore. Henry, though ….”

She turned her head away. “I can’t ignore it. You know I can’t. For either of you.”

He took that in a moment. “If it makes you feel better, I reacted first.”

Her head shot up. “What?”
He shrugged. “Pinned her to the wall by the throat. Got her to see I was serious, at least.”

A perverse sort of pleasure tingled through her, and she tried not to dwell on how that made her feel. “Good.”

“I wanted her anger directed at me. After Henry called … I wanted it all at me. I provoked her until I got exactly that.” He entangled his hand with hers, digits flitting across her knuckles.

She wanted to tell him exactly how not okay she was with that course of action, but she knew by his touch that he was already admitting to knowing. She also knew that he wouldn’t stop, not if it meant protecting Henry or herself. “There are better ways,” she finally said.

His mouth parted, and then his lashes flicked across his cheeks. He grimaced. “Not that I could think of at the time.”

She sighed and cupped his jaw to bring him in for a demanding kiss. He tasted clean, no trace of metallics or ash. It was somehow both reassuring and disconcerting; it was like she had wiped his slate with her magic. When they parted, she shuddered. “I used my power on you,” she said in a small voice.

“You healed me.” The awe tingeing his words did nothing to hinder the feelings of unease.

She sniffed back her remaining tears. “She did so much more damage than I thought.”

“More than that,” he agreed. “But you helped more than you know, Em.”

She felt a whimper curdle in her throat, souring into a graver sound. He pulled her in again, and she collapsed against him. “I hate it here,” she spat. “I don’t want to wait around for her to hurt someone else before putting her away.”

He tangled his hand in her hair. “We don’t have to wait for her to hurt someone. We just have to wait for her to get within 1000 feet of Henry.”

“Or you,” she said, brushing her hand over his stubbled jaw. “I don’t want her near you at all.”

She expected protest, but he nodded easily. “Okay. How about for all of us?”

“Better,” she agreed. She scrubbed her face with her fingers then rose. She unclicked the door, and Henry was sitting silent on the bed. She pulled him close, and he slowly wrapped his arms around her. “Sorry, kid.”

He nodded. “I get it. It’s overwhelming,” he replied. He gave a half smile. “But you did it. I knew you could.”

In some ways, it made her tense that he considered her the Savior still, but in other ways it helped. In this life, she knew she was Mom first to him, and that made it easier. She leaned down to kiss his forehead. “Thanks for believing in me. We’re trying to make this place safer for you. I promise.”

“But not forever, right?” Henry asked worriedly. “We don’t have to stay forever.”

She shook her head. “Not forever. But we’ll figure something out.”
“Can I text Michael?”

She nodded. “Just don’t tell him about Storybrooke. But you can text all your friends, talk with them.” It would probably make him feel a little better, anyway. Balancing this town with their real life would help.

She felt Graham come up behind her, and he sunk into her. His arms circled her waist, and he brushed his hands up her arms. “You’re tired,” he noted. “Eat your food, then get some rest. I’ll call David, okay?”

She sighed. She turned and reached out to touch his chest. She gripped his shoulder in her opposite hand, preventing him from moving away. He let her take her time, and she focused on counting the even beats beneath her palm for a long moment. Finally, she nodded. “At least we have a plan.”

He took her wrist and kissed along her knuckles, keeping careful eye contact. “It’s a better plan,” he agreed.

Not the best, but definitely better. They were implementing measures to protect their family, and that was all she could ask for at that point. Now they needed a way to break the curse and flush out the baddie.

But that could be done after regrouping and healing with her little family.
Chapter Summary

The morning after Irving’s retirement party, Graham and Emma are a little too loud for their guest's tastes.

Chapter Notes

Post Safety Measures. I posted this yesterday on Tumblr, so no, it's not an April Fool's Day joke. Prompted by anon: "I was thinking if you could do a chapter where Graham and/or Emma accidentally slips up about something from their past in Storybrooke while in the presence of their NY friends?"

She woke to the sound of low murmurs, gentle words spoken, though not meant for her ears. She squinted her eyes open, trying not to let on that she was no longer asleep.

Graham’s arm was around her waist, palm splayed over the gentle swell of her stomach. His pitch was low, just enough for her to hear but not enough for her to discern the words he was speaking to their child. She pressed her lips together, feigning sleep for a while longer as he finished his newest morning ritual.

After a few minutes, she deliberately began to stir. Casually, he drifted back to his pillow, dark blue eyes watching as she blinked awake. She smiled at him immediately, shifting close to press a kiss. “Good morning.”

She could feel the smile against her lips, parting slowly. “Morning.”

She sighed pleasantly, using a hand to brush through his hair. It was getting longer, the strands curling at the ends in a familiar way. He closed his eyes at the touch, and her movements slowed, scratching along his scalp languidly. It was warm in his arms, though there was a chill in the air. She breathed deeper, taking the time to come awake by the smell of him.

Her heart was still swelling dramatically at the new secret routine he had each morning, but she didn’t bring it up. “I think Irving liked his send-off,” she said instead, referring to the party the night before.

He hummed his agreement, lips catching the pulse in her wrist. “I’m sure he enjoyed twenty of the drunkest attendees singing only the chorus of We Are the Champions three times in a row.”

She giggled. “It’s definitely more amusing from the sober side of things.”

He grinned widely and his hand curled at her abdomen. “Best reason to stay on the sober side, too.”

She cocked her head to the side, smiling. “I don’t think the newbie would be affected by
you getting a drink, Detective.”

He gave a shrug. “Why would I do it if you can’t?”

“I know, I know,” she said. She still thought it was silly, his choice, but another part was glad she didn’t have to taste the liquor or coffee on his tongue when she was denied it. And oh, could she do with a really strong cup right now.

“Besides, I might not have remembered Strode’s dance well enough to mock him about it this week,” he teased.

She groaned, ending in a barely covered laugh. After five shots, the coroner decided that the retired chief deserved a lap dance. From him. “Oh, Strode. He could have blinded half of us, and we were all at least five feet away. Poor Irving.”

“Hey, he made twenty bucks off it,” he reminded. “Irving’s generous that way.”

She laughed, pulling her arms around him to get closer in his space. “Which reminds me: did you hear Henry’s newest suggestion?”

Graham sighed heavily. “Icabod?”

Emma shook her head. Seeing Chief Tony Irving had Henry all sorts of excited for Sleepy Hollow name ideas for his sibling. “I think that may have been the worst of the bunch. And he’s come up with some interesting names.”

“Says the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming,” he quipped.

She rolled her eyes. “Mary Margaret and David,” she corrected. “And I’d probably have to growl to get your original name right.”

He grinned, chest vibrating with a laugh. “Not as simple as that, but nice try.”

“You guys are loud.”

Emma’s head whiplashed to the door. Maggie was covered in the blanket she had been using on the couch, her dark eyes and messy curls the only thing visible as she flopped onto the edge of their bed. Emma shot Graham a look, wondering how much she heard.

Somehow, they’d managed not to slip up much about other lives in front of their friends. Absent phrases about living in the woods, or different upbringings, or even magical resurrection could be laughed off and brushed aside. Especially since it was usually said in front of inebriated friends.

Maggie was different.

She knew Emma too well. She had known her for more than a decade, and practically lived with her and Henry during the first few years. She knew their quirks and experiences … anything more detailed couldn’t be written off as easily as it had been with the others.

“Sorry, Maggie,” Graham said simply, scooting his legs to be out of her way and keeping eye contact with Emma. He was trying to communicate without words that she shouldn’t panic until they knew more.

The lump of blankets, in the meantime, only huffed off the apology tiredly.
Emma fiddled with the edge of the sheets, trying to find an outlet for the nervous energy. “Were name ideas getting too loud?” she tried weakly.

Maggie scoffed. “Name ideas? Really?” She shook her head. “Trying to make up names for Junior or for your deadbeat parents?”

Emma winced, swallowing a rebuttal that would make no sense to the brunette. Graham’s hand pressed onto her lower back, soothingly rolling slow circles. She took some comfort in his silent apology. His tone managed to not be offended as he addressed her friend. “We need to tell the new kid something about our parents,” he offered.

“Ah, I see. I forgot you were on the same orphan boat, Humbert,” Maggie said with a slow stretch. “So you chose fairytale characters, huh? Though I don’t know of a Mary Margaret. Doesn’t exactly sound like an epic choice for Junior’s grandparents.” She paused thoughtfully. “Though Snow White ….”

“Not going to be a junior,” Emma countered immediately. She bit down on her lip, shying away from her gaze. “It was just an idea. We need to give the kid some stories.”

Maggie pulled back the corner of the blanket, looking at her dubiously. “Weird stories,” she said, a hint of disbelief in there. Emma felt herself tense slightly before Maggie shook her head. “But that was not what I meant, anyway.”

“What did you mean?” She wasn’t sure what else she could logically explain.

Maggie raised a single brow. “That wasn’t why I was complaining about when I said you were loud.”

A rush of relief filled her, and the hand grasping Graham’s stretched out. The subject change was definitely a welcome one. “How were we too loud, then?”

Maggie’s eyes narrowed. She looked between them both accusingly. After a beat, she bounced on the end of the bed, the springs rhythmically squeaking in response. “I mean that.”

A rush of heat filled her cheeks, and she squirmed into herself. She continued to blush furiously, but another part couldn’t help the hysterical laughter that left her. She couldn’t stop, rolling onto her pillow to continue the inescapable giggles, the bed shaking with the effort. After all that worry, all that buildup … that was her issue?

Maggie let out a low whine of protest at the noise, covering her head with the blanket again.

“Whoops?” Graham offered beside her, and Emma looked up to find his eyes crinkled in mirth as well.

“You two,” Maggie huffed, muffled from the material. “I swear. Andie’s heard it in her bar, Ritu’s practically seen it … was I just next on the list?”

“Hey! We were in our own home this time!” Emma protested, wiping away the tears that had escaped down her cheeks from the release.

Maggie snorted. “Seriously, you guys. Loud. You’re already pregnant and it hasn’t slowed you down one bit.”

Emma sat up and her hands curled at her waist. “Makes me worse, really,” Emma said
with a wicked grin.

Graham leaned into her, hiding a smile into her hair before addressing the other woman again. “We thought you would have had enough tequila to sleep through it,” he reasoned.

“Maybe. If I didn’t have to wake up, not once but twice, to your name, Humbert,” she grumbled.

“Well, that’s her fault, then,” he replied cheekily.

“Well …,” Emma trailed off, biting down on her lip as she looked at him pointedly. He gave a guileless smile back.

“I should tell Henry to thank his lucky stars that he doesn’t share a wall with you two,” Maggie deadpanned. “He gets to sleep in.”

Emma reached out and pulled on one of her curls. “Better feed that hangover, Mags. We’re hosting the sleepover this weekend,” she sing-songed.

Maggie groaned dramatically, bringing a slim hand to cover her face. “I thought I was done having to deal with all that.”

Graham rose up, rubbing his eyes, and as he did a thin trail of skin peeked out from between the waistband of his sweats and the tee. He leaned down to give a gentle kiss, and Emma tried not to let her hormones take over again. “I’ll get some breakfast going.”

“And coffee!” Maggie whined.

“You’re going to make me smell coffee again? When I can’t have any?” Emma said with a pout.

“Yep. Your punishment,” she countered.

Graham waved off the statement, but padded to the kitchen anyway.

Maggie flopped back down on the bed. “Hormonal woman,” she teased, poking her in the belly.

Emma pretended not to know what she was talking about, and rolled onto her back so their heads were together in the center of the bed. “I missed you,” she said, nudging her with an elbow.

“Your fault. You’re the one that moved,” Maggie grumbled.

“Yeah, yeah,” she muttered back.

Maggie hooked an arm around her, making her tuck her head into her neck. She was quiet a beat. “I thought you’d made your peace with the parent thing.”

Emma blew out a low breath, that uneasiness creeping back as she returned to the original worry. “I have,” she lied. Mary Margaret face, the last time she’d seen her, flashed through her mind’s eye. She remembered the tears in her eyes, the kiss she’d pressed to her forehead, and her heart ached. Emma gave a tight smile. “Just thought it’d be fun to give the kid a backstory.”

Maggie was basically hugging her head at this point, and she used the other hand to pet
down her hair. “How about the story about how a young girl beat all odds to succeed in life and find happiness with a brave little boy at her side?”

Emma blinked back a sudden, sharp swell of tears. Her throat felt caved in, breath caught in her chest. There was so much more than that, so much the original teenage Emma was so sure she couldn’t do. It almost felt like a cheat, a lie, for Maggie to pride her for it now.

“And, of course, the awe-inspiring real-life fairy godmother that was the social worker that saved Christmas.”

Emma snorted loudly, breaking half out of the self-pity. “Please. You nearly burnt the kitchen down every year.”

Maggie conked their heads together gently. “The reality’s better than the stories, babe.”

She looked away, remembering David fighting for Henry in Neverland, of Mary Margaret demanding the giant to back off … she wished she could share it. “I know the reality’s better.”

She nodded. “Good,” she said simply. “Daddy’s got some stories, too, I’d assume.”

Emma let a slow smile cross her face. “Yeah, a few.”

“No need for Disney characters, then,” she pressed.

Emma wanted to tell her, then. She wanted to spill out everything from the past year and past life, to cry on her shoulder, to have her understand. This was her best friend, the one that stuck by when no one else did. It didn’t feel right lying, even if it was mostly by omission.

But this wasn’t just her secret. This was Henry’s life, and Graham’s life. She couldn’t bring Maggie in on a whim.

“Come. Find me some Advil.”

Emma sighed, and nodded. She took the hand that Maggie offered, and was helped to her feet. “Let’s have hubby feed us. You can let me know which stories are the best ones for my kid.”

“Sounds like a plan. As long as your voice doesn’t go up any more octaves.”

“Your own fault,” she said.

“Just like it’s yours why you can’t have coffee,” she countered. She hugged her swiftly. “Get me normal before you have the pack of pre-teen boys file in, okay?”

She bumped into her as they headed to the kitchen. “Seems fair.”

Maybe, someday, there’d be a way.
The Fallout

Chapter Summary

Post The Funeral. She doesn’t want to break the calm they’ve finally found after the funeral.

Chapter Notes

Jumping around the timeline again, just a bit. Prompts from ograndebatata (Killian post-funeral), and a little bit from lessawildmoon (I think it was an actual prompt, or else she just helped with plotting). Also for cuppatea13 who loves a certain character almost as much as I do.

Distraction had proven to work.

In the hours since the funeral, her small family had barricaded themselves into room five of Granny’s. They’d been able to avoid anything external, and focused on only each other.

Now, they were in comfortable silence, each doing their own thing. They were still together and still sublimating, but the room was quiet. Emma’s book had lost her attention, though, and the feelings from before were starting to bubble and pop in the back of her mind.

Emma’s stomach growled, and she sighed as she leaned into Graham. The baby was rolling back and forth, restless inside her. Graham pulled her close while brushing his hand soothingly across her belly, even if his focus was on his cell at the moment. One hand steadily clicked through what she knew were texts to Leo, as he kept up on his work even through this little sabbatical of sorts. Henry was still pouring through the little paperback of names from his bed, but he had only expressed a couple choices that day.

Her hand itched, wanting to press her palm against his chest, to feel those soothing beats. Another part knew it would break the quiet, calm atmosphere to do so. The air didn’t feel near as heavy since they had recharged, and she didn’t want to darken the mood with the return of her anxieties.

“Anyone else hungry?” she asked. They had called down around lunchtime after returning, but they hadn’t gotten any dinner yet.

Henry’s head popped up. His eyes were still a little red despite everything, but he no longer had that weight on his shoulders. “I could eat.”

Graham stopped working, and leaned over to grab the rotary phone from the desk. “I’ll call down. What do you want?”

Henry rolled onto his side, thumb firmly holding his page. “Burger.”

“No pickles, with mustard,” Graham rattled off knowingly.
Emma rested her head on his shoulder, breathing him in deeply as she tried to rebuild the barrier that was blocking the pain. “Feels like a pastrami day.”

He pressed a kiss in her hair and immediately she realized that he knew just how tightly she was clinging to her walls. He shifted slightly so she was readjusted, and his heart was against her cheek. He didn’t make a big deal about the action, feigning that it was just in the act of picking up the handset. It made her glance at Henry at the corner of her eye, wanting to be sure he didn’t pick up on her internal conflict.

She could hear the ringing on the other side of the phone, but it only continued to ring. And ring. Finally, he hung up. “Must be busy down there. I’ll go.”

Emma shook her head and grabbed his shoulder. “No, it’s fine. I need to stretch my legs a bit,” she said. Maybe that would clear her mind.

“You sure?” Graham asked, a slight frown on his lips.

She nodded, knowing he was concerned about the people she might run in to more than anything else. By now, hours later, most should have dissipated. “Yeah. Newbie’s restless, so I think walking around will help.”

He was already rising, shifting to put on his shoes while giving a stern look. “We can go together.”

“No,” she insisted. She gave a look over to Henry. “Keep an eye on the kid.”

Graham’s eyes changed, and she watched as the realization click in. She barely nodded to his silent question; she wanted to keep her son separate from whatever stragglers might still be lingering.

“Simmons’ll want the update, anyway,” she teased.

A slight blush crept up his cheeks. “He got stuck when a piece of DNA evidence came back. We usually work through theory changes together. Good distraction,” he finally explained.

She gave a tight smile and nodded. Their New York life felt like an escape from everything going on in Storybrooke, and she couldn’t begrudge him trying to find a moment’s peace. The week had been all-consuming, and their breaks were few and far between. She felt a conversation was coming, sometime late when the kid was sleeping. She knew he’d need it just as much as she would.

She kissed him softly, and he returned it in kind, hand seeking out her stomach almost unconsciously. “Same?” He nodded. “I’ll be right back.”

“Fries, mom?” Henry asked.

“Of course. Who do you think I am?” she replied with a grin.

When the door shut, the smile slipped off her face. The buzz of the lamps and the darkness of the staircase had an ominous feel to it, one that didn’t quite fit the setting. She didn’t feel as shielded from her fears and worries outside of the room, and she hastened her stride.

She pulled her hair back into a ponytail as she descended the staircase, wanting to get in and out of the diner as quickly as possible. The door swung open to a low buzz, the kind where there are many people murmuring to each other. She swallowed thickly, feeling a pit of dread fall
in her stomach at the crowd.

Granny’s was completely full.

She didn’t understand. Everyone was all dressed in black, quietly conversing in small groups. There were even tears in some of their eyes. None of these people knew Neal well enough for this kind of emotion. It didn’t make sense.

She squeezed her hands into fists, trying to process the confusion, her insides knotting. Neither Ruby nor Granny were around, and she hated that she’d have to wait to even order. The glares of pity she was getting from the ones that noticed her entrance was enough to make her skin itch.

She turned abruptly and decided to wait at the counter. Only one figure seemed to be alone, apart from everyone else. He was looking into his drink as if it had all the answers, the bottle half-empty in front of him. It would be her best choice.

She huffed and sat next to him. “Drinking yourself to death won’t solve anything,” she said without preamble.

Killian looked up at her sharply. His blue eyes were rebellious, and he looked down at his drink with a shrug. “Not exactly an unappealing idea,” he murmured, and swallowed back the rest. He quickly poured the tumbler full once more.

She looked around the parties again, uneasiness stiffening her spine. “At least you mourning makes sense.”

“I think you and I are the only ones mourning Baelfire. The others are taking the opportunity to have a wake for ones they lost before,” he replied.

Baelfire. Internally, she flinched at the name choice. Her lashes flicked across her cheeks, and then she peered at the crowd once more. She wasn’t sure if it felt better or worse to know that they weren’t acknowledging Neal. “I see,” she said at length.

He reached to fill his glass again, and she pulled the bottle away, resting it on the opposite side. He looked up with exasperation. “Hard to drown my sorrows without the drowning, Swan,” he spat.

“I can’t have you comatose when you’ve actually been useful,” she chided. She would concede that Killian was actually useful more of the time, but that was beside the point. She blew out a short breath, meeting his eye carefully. “And … and you’re the only one that knows … knew him.”

He sighed wearily. “The only one here, at least.”

She tore at a napkin in front of her, shredding it into bits. “And knew him before everything, so – I don’t know, you have a different perspective.”

He was quiet a long moment. “I could have loved him like a son. I almost did, and given the chance I would have forever. But there were oceans between that boy and the man you met.”

Emma bit down on her lip and looked away. Maybe that’s why she was seeking him out now, to piece together who Neal really was. “You’re right,” she said. It felt exhausting to admit. “I feel like I didn’t know him at all.”
He waited a beat, until she finally met his eye. “Some people don’t want the world to see them.”

She scowled and went back to ripping the napkin. “I know we weren’t right, me and him. We couldn’t be. But back then … I wanted us to be. The fact that he didn’t try is what makes me feel the most … cheated,” she admitted lowly.

He took the last swallow in his glass. “I wish there was more to say.”

Ruby finally appeared from the kitchen, eyebrows knitting together and a frown on her face. She smiled tightly to see her. “Emma. How are you?”

The pity in the woman’s voice was grating. There was something in it, like the brunette assumed she’d break down at any mere mention of the man who died. Her nails dug into her palms. “Fine. Can I order some food to bring upstairs?”

“And I’ll pay.”

“Of course,” she said, and flicked out her pad. “On the house, with our sympathies.”

She winced, but otherwise didn’t acknowledge the words. “Two pastramis, burger with mustard and no pickles, and three fries.”

Ruby nodded. “Sorry it’s been so slow. Everyone’s a little on edge.” Her eyes widened. “I mean, not because of that. Not that people aren’t scared because of that. I mean—”

“Ruby, it’s fine,” she cut in, her tone harsh.

She looked sheepish. Then she turned to the window and the glint of the wolf sparked in her bright eyes. “Someone saw a car out by the town line. We’re worried about outsiders.”

She bit down on the inside of her cheek, hating the care with which Ruby was speaking. She shook her head. “Was it Leroy? I think he called every week after the Greg incident with the same story. I wouldn’t be too worried.”

Ruby nodded. “I’m sure you’re right. I’ll get your order in.” She disappeared behind the double doors, taking the pitying face with her.

She looked back to find Killian watching her expression closely. “They don’t have anyone else to give their condolences to,” he said slowly. “They don’t know what to do with it.”

She ducked her head, hair curtaining her face. The last person to die was, who, Johanna? Before that it had been Graham. Her heart squeezed uncomfortably, and her hand wrapped around the shoelace to ground herself. “They still shouldn’t be coming to me with it.”

He sighed and leaned back in his seat. “He loved you, Swan. Just like everyone else that meets you.”

She narrowed her eyes briefly, but he was busy twirling the glass in his hand. While she knew from Graham that he was still sorting through his feelings for her, he had been careful not to mention them in her presence. Mirroring that, she ignored the implication and pressed on.

She looked toward the back mirror, staring at herself. Her hair was messy, clothes a little wrinkled, but she looked normal. Her color was healthy, her eyes clear. She looked miles from what she had been the night before, and knew that was due to her family’s support.

Still, she saw something else, something behind her eyes, that darkened her
countenance. “I’m happy now. But things would have been easier if he’d been honest,” she said, just above a whisper.

Cold metal hit the side of her wrist, and she looked up at his prompting. “He wasn’t a saint. Anger’s about the most normal reaction you could have.”

Tears caught at her throat, sudden and sharp. Something about getting the perspective of someone who would have had Neal’s side, even fractionally, and still getting support felt good. Like it made her actions and feelings more correct, somehow. She brushed her hair behind her ear, nodding jerkily. “You had unfinished business with him, too. What would you tell him?”

“My regrets are all in apologies, Swan. I would assume much different from your needs,” he said, eyebrows quirking thoughtfully.

“Still apologies,” she countered. She rested her palms over her belly; she was twisting, elbowing out and making herself known as if to pull her focus. The memory flashed behind her eyes, of her stomach swollen with a different child, of blue scrubs where her black blouse was. “Just from him instead of to him. Mostly.”

He was quiet a long moment, his hand scrunching and relaxing at intervals, and she wondered if she pressed too hard.

“You’re not hell-bent on a new revenge, are you?” she asked, and was surprised at the tightening of her throat around the half-misplaced joke.

He only chuckled, not noticing the strain. “Aye, not exactly the best plan but one I am good at. Any help you need I will provide.”

She swallowed. She beat her fingers around the counter, the shelves blurring in front of her. “I killed him,” she blurted out.

He stared at her, wide eyed. “Swan—“

She shook her head violently. She had been keeping that in, those blunt words. David, when he had found her after, had been quick to tell her that she wasn’t responsible. But there was something inside of her that still coiled onto that fact, that she had been the one to deal his final blow at his insistence. “No, you don’t understand!” she hissed through her teeth. “I could have told him no. I could have found another way. But I did it. He asked me, and I did it.” She couldn’t form tears, not yet, but the build of horror and anger was enough to curdle her blood.

“He shouldn’t have put that on you,” Killian murmured lowly. “I’m sorry, Emma.”

She shook her head, looking away sharply. He didn’t understand, didn’t seem to realize why she was seeking the outsider’s opinion. That’s all she had heard from this town: I’m sorry, Emma, so sorry it happened, so sorry you lost him. They didn’t understand, and it made her head throb in frustration.

The bell on the door jangled, and the room hushed automatically. Killian tensed visibly, hook twitching. All eyes turned to the entrance, and Emma whiplashed to the door, fearing the worst.

The first thing the saw was the black moto jacket, cropped fashionably and draped over a lithe frame. She looked up to find the black curls pulled tightly back and the aviators, dark and mirrored, perched on a sloped nose. Lips curled downwards, surveying the diner with zeroed in focus, before landing on her. The shades flicked up, revealing what she had been too pessimistic to believe.
“This place is hard to find.”

She practically leapt from her seat, pulling the woman hard into her arms.

“Hey, slow down. You’re going to squish Junior,” Maggie said, but she was gripping her just as tight.

Her shoulders shook and she couldn’t help the sob that escaped her. “You found us?” she choked out, the question strained through the tears.

Her body vibrated in a laugh and she pulled back to show gleaming teeth. “Babe, trying to throw me off never stopped me, did it?”

She pressed her lips together, shaking and teary and smiling. “Silly of me to try,” she replied. All she could think was safe: Maggie was safe, Maggie would understand.

Maggie held her squeezed her upper arms, and Emma gave up on trying to act strong. She didn’t have to be the ex-girlfriend, she didn’t have to be in mourning, and she certainly didn’t have to be the Savior.

She had her friend.
Baking

Chapter Summary

Pre-married. After work kitchen escapades.

Chapter Notes

Prompt from anon on tumblr: "gremma baking? And can we get, like, a Henry-free chapter?" A bit of fluff to invigorate the muse.

Graham walked in the front door, and set his keys and paperwork on the side table. He smiled at the sound of the music coming from the kitchen, and he shrugged off his jacket and pulled off his tie as he turned the corner.

“Hey, what’s—“

He cut off, catching Emma’s wide eyes. She was frozen, hand in mind action above a mixing bowl.

He quickly held out a single finger. “No.”

She stuck out the spoon as a barrier, flinging chocolate in his direction in the process. She scooped up the bowl and slowly backed up. “Now, wait—“

“No,” he repeated, and stepped forward. “I want our kitchen not to explode.”

She huffed and quickly darted to avoid his outstretched hand. “Why would you automatically assume there would be chaos?”

He looked pointedly to his left. Flour and sugar dusted the entirety of the far counters. “Because I know you,” he said wryly.

“I can cook!” she insisted, backing up as he stepped forward.

He slipped slightly and stumbled to regain his footing. He grimaced down at the batter splattered across the floor. “Cook? Yeah, sure. When you don’t need a recipe, things actually can turn out pretty well,” he agreed. “But baking?”

She pursed her lips, pouting slightly. “You don’t have faith in my kitchen skills?”

He took another step closer. “When there’s a cook book open? Let’s just say there is past precedence.”

He could tell almost instantly when she decided to change tactics. She stretched her arm, holding the spoon out for him. “You could have some, too?”
He ignored the utensil and grabbed her forearm. She squeaked as he twisted her into his hold, wrenching the bowl from her grip. She giggled even as she struggled. She yanked it back, getting gobs of chocolate in both her hair and his shirt in the process as she darted away.

She ran to the other side of the kitchen island, her eyes flashing. “You have to catch me first.”

He felt a flush of heat at the idea, grin twitching at his lips. “You forget,” he reminded, undoing the first few buttons on his top. “I never miss.”

She smirked, and her gaze trailed downward. “Play fair,” she warned, watching as he flung his ruined shirt onto the nearest chair.

He pounced, just barely grazing her waist as she twisted away, the contents of the bowl sloshing over the edge once more. She managed to get to the back counter, pouring a third of its contents into the pan before he caught her again.

Emma threw out a hip to back him away, and batted his hand with the spoon as she ran the opposite direction with the rest of her mix. She kept the barrier of the counter in between them, sea-colored eyes glittering in blatant challenge.

He readied himself, shifting on his toes as he determined the best way to catch her. He finally made for the left, watching her bolt before he changed tactics and ran her direction. She caught on quick, and leapt aside, but managed to slip on the chocolate dropped somewhere along the way. She fell on her side, groaning as she did. She rolled onto her back before splaying with her hands out in defeat.

He kneeled beside her, clicking his tongue. He knew her pride was more injured that she was, but he picked up her elbow to inspect the forming redness. He pressed his lips to the injured area. “I think this means I win.”

She snorted and caught him around the neck, pulling him down for a kiss. He complied easily, catching the sugar off her lips. Her tongue swept his mouth before she pulled back abruptly, sighing. “One day, I’ll win.”

He tucked a strand of cocoa-streaked hair behind her ear, smiling. “Sure, Em.”

She pouted, pulling a leg around his waist. “I’ll get off early enough and make all sorts of confections, just you wait.”

He chuckled and grazed his teeth right behind her ear. “And I’d come home to find the fire department washing away the burnt remains.”

She hooked her fingers into his belt loops. “I’ll prove I can bake.”

Just as she said it, the smoke alarm began shrieking behind them. He raised a single brow. “You were saying, princess?”

She sighed and laid back. “Fine. You do it.”

He shook his head and pushed to his feet, inspecting the sugar granules burning on the grates of the preheated oven. He clicked off the dial and turned on the overhead fan. “Why do I think that was your evil plan?”

“Well,” she said, drawing the word out. “We could always just order something. And you can join me down here for a bit.”
He checked to make sure nothing was on fire, and then kneeled back on the floor. He kept a playful distance, eyebrows quirking. “Why should I do that?”

“Let’s see,” she said, and scooted closer, into his space. He leaned down further, to where he could smell the sweetness of the batter on her skin. She bit down on her lip and drifted into his space. Her eyes half-mast, she leaned down to his ear. “Because I win.”

With that, she turned the rest of the bowl on his head. He sat in shock for a second, feeling gobs of lumpy butter and chocolate drip down his face as she threw back her head in peals of laughter. He swept it off his head and pinned her down in one quick motion. “Now you’re going to get it.”

“That was my plan all along,” she attested huskily.

He took great care in making sure every inch of her was chocolate-free before even thinking about the state of the kitchen.
It was well past midnight and Emma was almost asleep when she heard the gentle knock on the door.

Graham stirred first, coming awake easily to the small noise. He pulled her closer, pressing a kiss to her hair before disentangling himself from her.

“Wait,” she murmured.

He paused, legs swung over the side of the bed as he looked at her in confusion. She shook her head and held out a hand, needing his help to rise. He gave it freely, though his eyebrows knit together.

“I’ll get it, okay? Just let me do this,” she pressed. She placed her hand over his throat, where the injuries no longer lay.

He placed his own hand on top, his dark eyes flitting over her. “I’ll be here,” he assured, and made no move to return to his side of the bed.

She nodded and got up from the sheets, pulling her hands through her long hair as she padded to the door. She chanced a quick look at Henry, but he was fast asleep on the pullout twin.

She unlocked the bolt and cracked an opening, meeting worried green eyes. Emma sighed and pulled the door open wider. “Mary Margaret,” she greeted tautly, her spine straightening in defense.

Mary Margaret wrung her hands in front of her, gaze shadowed. “Sorry, I know it’s late.”

Emma gritted her teeth, and nodded rigidly. “It is.”

She planted her feet, shifting her weight side to side. “I just wanted—“
“I don’t want to hear it,” Emma said sharply.

Mary Margaret looked struck, the expression so clearly read in her bright eyes. She took a shaky breath and nodded. “David … he told me about the restraining order.”

“I’m not taking it back,” she said, cradling her stomach defensively. She felt a hand on the small of her back, and she shifted to lean against Graham’s chest. There wasn’t any surprise at all that he would offer his presence at the sound of the clipped tones she was using.

She shook her head, glancing between the two. “No, I wasn’t—that’s not why I’m here. I wouldn’t argue it, not after what happened.”

Emma squared her shoulders, the need to be stern still coursing through her. The edge of a fight still lingered in the air. She didn’t want it, but she was prepared for it. “Good.”

Mary peered up at Graham, eyes bouncing across him. “Are you okay?”

Emma grabbed his hand and looked up at him, watching as he nodded. “I’m fine, thank you, Snow.”

His words were a little stiff, a little placed, and she knew he was trying to keep the peace.

Mary Margaret wrung her hands again, twisting them uncomfortably in front of her large stomach. “I didn’t think she would …,” she trailed off, and then swallowed. “I thought she would be better if she saw him.”

Emma gripped Graham’s hand harder, trying hard not to explode with Henry sleeping. At length, she turned to face her again. “I don’t think you understand just what she did to him.”

“I didn’t. I don’t quite … I don’t understand it all. But after today, I know that seeing her is not what’s right for him.”

Emma was silent a moment, trailing her fingers along her husband’s. Finally, she turned. “Give us a minute?”

Graham traced her with his eyes, then brushed his hand across her belly, a subtle reminder to be careful. “Of course.”

Emma leaned up to kiss him softly, a promise to do just that. Then she stepped into the hall and closed the door behind them. There was a gentle fondness to Mary Margaret’s expression, but she couldn’t focus on that. “I need to know that you won’t do this again. Ever.”

She shook her head rapidly. “Oh, Emma, of course not. I thought it would be better if I was there, too, and she seemed so sad, but I know it’s not my place—”

“No, it’s not,” she said firmly. “And I don’t just mean letting Regina see him. I mean going behind my and Graham’s back when it comes to our kids.”

Mary Margaret’s mouth dropped, a protest or shock or something catching in her throat. After a moment, her teeth clacked shut. Her eyes were misty with tears, clouded with something. “I didn’t mean it like that, Emma. Henry … well, he’s her son, too.”

Emma felt exhaustion, more than any other emotion, deep within her bones at that. There it was, the denial that still lingered in her mother despite her words. She was so sick of this, so sick of Regina.
She knew she couldn’t let it slide.

“No,” Emma said, as clearly as she was able. “Not anymore, not in the way that counts. Legally, me and Graham are the only ones that can claim him. Henry, he would include a few select others that we are more than willing to acknowledge. But not her. He doesn’t want her in his life anymore, and we need to respect that.”

“It doesn’t seem fair, Emma,” Mary Margaret murmured. “She raised him.”

Emma shook her head, nails biting into her palms as she struggled to keep calm. “Yes, she brought him to this town, knowing he’d never have a normal life. She decided to shield him from every other person that might give him attention for fear that she wouldn’t have all of his. She manipulated and intimidated anyone that did manage to get close into staying away. She decided to convince Henry he was insane when he started to question this town, made him question his mental state. Do you know what that does to a kid, Mary Margaret?”

Mary Margaret leaned against the wall, her face made even paler as she took in the information. She let out a small, muffled sob, her body trembling with the effort.

Emma’s hands balled into fists, trying to ignore the tears that had started trailing down her own cheeks as she ticked off the ways Regina hurt her son. The light was flickering in the hallway, tremoring with the waves of her magic. “Does he have good memories, occasionally? Sure, of course he does. But it isn’t near enough to cancel out the bad, the abuse he endured. When you abuse a child, your rights are taken away. End of story.”

Mary scrubbed her cheeks with her hands, but the tears were still coming full-force. “I don’t understand her,” she said through them. “I don’t understand why she’s not trying to be better for him.”

She blew out a sharp breath, ignoring her own tears. “It’s not your responsibility to make her try. It’s mine and Graham’s and David’s responsibility to stop her if she tries to go near him again.”

She gave a jerky nod. “It’s my fault. I knew you were a family, Emma, but I didn’t get it. Regina was … she was my stepmother once. You are my daughter. I just couldn’t make it fit in my head that you were the authority, and not her.”

She shook her head. “No, not me. Well … I mean … on this, Henry has the decision. It’s always his choice, Mary Margaret; that’s what you need to know. Me and Graham can help guide him and support him, but it’s his choice.”

Mary was quiet a beat. “What if he wanted to see her?”
Emma thought about that, wondering how she would have reacted if Henry wanted her in his life after all she’d done. “Supervised visits. Limited interaction until she’d prove that she wouldn’t hurt him, but never alone with him again. It couldn’t be a ‘Henry forgave her, so it’s all better’ situation. Not after how she hurt him. But it’s moot, Mary.”

“I don’t think I realized,” she started, and she swallowed. “I don’t think I realized how important Graham is to him.”

Emma gave a small shrug, and twisted her ring. “They love each other, just as much as Henry and I love each other. They always had that potential, and now it’s just … allowed, I guess.”

She nodded. “He called him ‘dad.’ I don’t know why that took me by surprise. I didn’t even pause to think about it, to think of him as a parent. I should have stopped then.”

“Stop,” she said shortly. “Stop going over what you did wrong. You know what you did wrong. Just focus on not doing it again.”

“I’m so sorry, Emma,” she said, her voice hushed and hoarse.

Emma crossed her arms in front of her, her eyes squeezing shut. She nodded jerkily.

“I know why you want to go back.”

Emma looked up, surprise coloring her expression. “You—you do?”

She nodded, even though it appeared it pained her. “After today, I can see why you were avoiding this town. The way Henry reacted, the look on Graham’s face when she used her magic … I get it now.”

Emma felt herself deflate, the tear tracks growing cold on her cheeks. “I—thank you.”

“I just want our family together,” she said, her voice small.

“I know,” Emma said thickly. Something in her arms trembled, a need that she couldn’t express. Emma bit down on her lip, ducking her head. If things were better between them, she might have hugged her mother. She could have taken comfort in the support they could offer each other. But there was this chasm between them, even now, even when walls were shed.

There was nothing more to be said, not tonight, but they stood in the dark hall in a heavy silence, making no move to leave.

The baby was twisting, making herself known, and Emma thought about the brother that would be just months older than this child. It wasn’t fair, the cards they were dealt.

“Your father said … he said you don’t know whether the baby’s a boy or a girl?” she asked, breaking the silence.

Emma nodded, taking the chance to change the subject. “Trading off, day by day. She’s a girl today,” she offered.

Mary Margaret smiled hesitantly, and dug around her pockets. Finally, she pulled out a silver locket, proudly holding it out. “Would you like to know for sure?”

Emma stared at the necklace. Instantly, she knew exactly what it was. Henry had been adamant about telling the newbie all sorts of stories, and the one with her grandmother and the
locket was one that stood out in her mind. A part of her wanted to, to share something with her mother that would link their lives. After a moment, she shook her head. “No.”

Mary’s face fell.

“No, it’s—I just don’t want magic yet. And we’ve tried to find out, but I think—she wants to be a surprise, and I want to wait,” she explained.

Mary Margaret looked embarrassed, stuffing the chain back in her pocket. “Sorry, it was just an idea.”

Emma felt a wave of guilt. She knew the necklace was a peace offering, something to help connect them again. It was just the wrong thing to use at this time. “Maybe … I’ll need another check up in a couple weeks. If we’re still here, you could … come?”

She beamed up at her. “Emma, of course. I’m sure Zelena would be happy to meet with you.”

Internally, Emma winced. She forced a tight smile. “Well, we’ll see.”

This time, the silence was more awkward than full of unsaid things. Mary Margaret finally took a step back, deeper down the hall. “I’m going to go home. Get some sleep. You should, too, Emma.”

Emma’s eyes darted away, and she knew she couldn’t let her know just how much insomnia was plaguing her since arriving. “Yeah, sure.”

She hesitated, her arm stretching out slightly before she pulled it back. “Sleep well. All of you.”

The corners of her lips turned up. “Night.”

As soon as Snow met the middle of the staircase, the door to her room clicked open. She turned, meeting Graham’s eye. He didn’t say a word, just extended his hand to her. She took it gratefully, squeezing with tears blurring her vision. “It’ll be okay,” he said softly as he brought her side to rest against his chest.

She shuddered, leaning into him and absently wishing they could be chest-to-chest again despite the way he was able to accommodate embracing her. “I think she understands now. She apologized, and I think she understands.”

She felt his nod. “Good,” he said. “She’ll need to tell Henry at some point.”

Emma nodded, burying her face into him. “Yeah, but at least she sees why she has to. And she won’t put Regina over him, not anymore.”

His lashes touched his cheeks. “Then maybe we can get back to the reason we came.”

She sighed. “Yeah,” she murmured. She leaned up on tip toes to press their lips together, a little more demandingly than she thought she intended.

He matched her smoothly, then pulled back to leave a hairsbreadth between them. “We’ll figure out something, Em.”

A lash of pain swiped across her, realizing he was speaking about her parents and not the curse. She bit down hard on her lip, and decided not to voice the doubts she had. Instead, she
kissed him again, slower this time, and tried not to think about the things they had left to do.

Including leaving.
Shower Gifts

Chapter Summary

They decide to go through the first round of gifts before the party.

Chapter Notes

Prompted from 2 anons (same anon?), asking for Graham’s reaction to Emma in glasses. Set maybe a week or so before Outside Looking In.

* 

“So,” Emma began, holding up the baseball mitt. “Who gave this one?”

Graham looked at the item in her hand, a smirk crossing his face. He fell onto the end of the bed, his eyes lit up with mirth. “Garcia. He also got a mini jersey.”

She gave a chuckle, assessing the size of the thing. “He knows the kid’s the size of an eggplant, right?”

“‘Never too young to be a Yankee’ was his excuse,” he replied. “I didn’t want to break his heart by telling him we’re not baseball fans.”

“Speak for yourself,” Emma said, plopping onto the bed next to him. “I used to watch games.”

“‘Used to’ being the operative phrase,” he said wryly.

She giggled and placed the mitt on top of the pile of gifts.

The shower that she hadn’t actually asked for was in a few hours still, but the presents from those that wouldn’t attend were already waiting in the corner of their room. They had decided earlier to go through those beforehand, knowing at least she would be too exhausted to open them after.
The pile had gotten big over the last week, as work friends and acquaintances sent little things. Something inside of her was warmed at the idea of so many people being excited for their little one, showing support in the mountain of personalized gifts they had already received.

Henry wanted to be surprised later, so he was going to go through the open packages when he got home tomorrow. She had no doubt it would be just as fun to see her son’s excitement over the tiny things. She also knew full well that he’d want to have a family shopping trip to pick out the rest of the items they’d need. The thought of how excited Henry was for his sibling made her heart pull in all sorts of directions.

She picked out a manila folder next, the one she’d gotten in the mail. “Should we dare guess what Mags bought?”

“That would take longer than necessary.” Graham took the package and tore a side. A small oblong box fell out of the opening.

“ Seriously?” Emma sighed, and grabbed the box. She cracked it open, a grin crossing her face regardless. “Okay, they’re kinda cute.”

“What is it?” Graham asked.

She turned the case to him so he could view the tiny black frames that would be comically large on a newborn. “She’s teasing.”

Graham took the case, head cocked to the side. He had a small, confused smile on his face. “They will no doubt be impractically adorable, but … I don’t get it?”

Emma walked to the nightstand and rummaged to the back for her own case. “It’s because she remembers these,” she said, and placed her glasses on her face. She grimaced at the blurred image he made and immediately took them off to place on top of her head.

Graham looked appropriately amused. “Well, why don’t you wear those more often?” he asked, his accent drawling.

Emma snorted. “I got Lasik. Now they just give me a headache,” she said. “But I didn’t get that until three years ago, at least in this timeline.”

Graham’s gaze didn’t stray from the frames on her head, his smile stretching wide as he walked to her. He placed his hands on her hips, bringing her close until her distended belly hit his stomach. “I like them,” he said simply.

She breathed him in, lips edging up as she brushed her hands just under the pale blue shirt he was wearing, lingering along his ribs. “How much?”

He plucked them off her head, and broke from the embrace. She pouted slightly, but watched him with her head cocked to the side. He turned to the counter and carefully took out the lenses. He then turned to proudly place them back on her face. “There. Now you can match the eggplant.”

Her nose wrinkled as she grinned. “You’re a dork.”

“Hey, now,” he protested. “You’re the one in the hipster glasses.”

She leaned forward to brush her nose against his. “You like them, then?”

He nodded. “Matches mine.”
“You have glasses?” she asked skeptically. She had never seen any on him, and had never seen him struggle beyond the crease that formed between his brows when he was really piecing out a report.

He nodded. “I had them prescribed, you know, just for reading. But I always forget to wear them.”

She fell back onto the bed with a groan, her arms splayed out. “So, you’re saying our kid will definitely need the Maggie-purchase?”

He shrugged, and then joined her, head propped on his hand as he stared down at her with twinkling eyes. He used his other hand to rest on her stomach, the disbelief just barely hinted behind his gaze. The breath in her chest tightened slightly, tears catching the back of her throat to see how awed he still was. “Guess so.”

“Anything else I should know?” she asked, blinking back the hormonal display. “Things that may pass on to the eggplant?”

He shrugged. “Animal affinity is going to probably factor in,” he said with a laugh.

She hummed and came closer, kissing him sweetly before lying back, holding her stomach over where the baby was stirring. “Does that mean Andie’s gift will contain something pertaining to that?”

“Either that or tiny liquor bottles,” he joked.

She tried to hold back a laugh. “Yeah, that I can see. And Leo’d probably encourage it.”

“Likely,” he agreed.

She reached forward to pull her hands through the thickness of his beard. “Time to shave again, I think.”

She could just barely see the dimpling of his cheeks beneath the scruff. “I’ll do it before they get here.”

She liked hiding his razor every once in a while, just to be reminded visually that he was the same person she knew, that it wasn’t a trick. When she felt comfortable enough, that fear dripping back to its hiding place, she let it appear back among the other things on his side of the sink. She had let it go longer this time, to the point where his beard was much thicker than it had been before. She wasn’t completely sure if she knew the reason why, beyond the way her hormones had peaked.

He brought his fingers to trail along her cheek before resting on the arm of the glasses. “It’s good to see the past sometimes.”

She nodded and leaned in to rest her forehead on his. “Yeah. But the future’s good, too. That’s why I’ll have to see those glasses on you at some point.”

“I’ll get Grandma Emma’s sweater out of the closet, too,” he teased.

She buried her face in his chest, trying not to laugh at his lame in-joke. “Shush, you.” She sealed their lips together to prevent any further words.

She’d have to thank Maggie for the glasses later.
One night in early December, Henry sneaks into their room.

Graham felt the bed shift, and blinked awake almost immediately.

He was fully not expecting to see an eleven year old sneaking into the barest space between him and Emma.

His brow creased, but Henry said nothing, eyes shaded as he yanked the blanket he brought over himself. Emma didn’t even wake, but she shifted unconsciously to tug her son close. She had been sleeping heavier these past few days, and it seemed tonight was no exception.

Graham leaned back, catching a glance to the clock. It was almost midnight. They had had a long evening, Henry begging for “just one more” of everything they did: round of cards, movie, video game. There had been a strange sort of desperation in the asking, one that Emma and he had been grudging to deny since it was a Tuesday, after all.

Even so, Graham would have thought that the busy night would have left the lad well and truly exhausted.

And he did look like he’d pass out at any moment, but there was an almost unreadable fear as he plucked at a thread at the top of the sheets.

“You okay, kid?” Graham murmured, sleep thickening his voice. The boy had never snuck into their room like this before.

He looked at him with big eyes. “I didn’t finish my homework,” he admitted quietly.

He leaned up. “Henry … you lied?” he asked. The boy said he was done hours ago, the reason Emma and he had decided to forgo work stuff to focus on family time. There had been no reason to doubt him, as Henry was typically good about staying on top of school work and wasn’t hesitant to ask if he needed help. This was almost wildly unusual for the kid that generally liked to learn.

Henry looked away sharply from Graham’s scrutiny. “I couldn’t concentrate.”

Graham sighed and rubbed his face tiredly. “Okay, what’s due?” Once he shook off the sleep, he was sure he could get his mindset on math and science or whatever he needed.

Henry furrowed his brow, eyes hard and focused on the bedsheets. “I don’t know,” he mumbled.

Graham raised an eyebrow. “Really,” he said at length. “We should check your folder, then.”

Henry’s chin quivered, and he buried himself into the blanket more.

A pang of alarm went through him to see it, and carefully he pushed back the lad’s hair.
“Or maybe we should talk about why you can’t concentrate.”

Henry blew out a low breath, and wetness collected at his lash line. “Do you feel okay?”

Dumbfounded, Graham cocked his head to the side. “Uh, Me?” he asked ineloquently. He frowned. “Yeah?”

“You don’t have a fever? You don’t feel dizzy?” he asked, words almost on top of each other in the rush.

“Henry, all I’m feeling right now is tired and confused,” he said, then grasped his shoulder. “What does how I’m feeling have to do with your homework?”

The boy scooted back, further into Emma’s sleepy grasp. “We still don’t know.”

“What don’t we know?” he coaxed.

Henry grimaced. “How you’re alive.”

A sharp pang hit him. “I thought we talked about that,” he said slowly.

He shrugged, pulling himself in closer. “I guess.”

Graham has a split second of worry that this was part of his own inexperience as a parental figure. That this was what both Gia and Sam on separate occasions had warned him of, of good kids going through “stages” to test boundaries. It would be easy to be distracted by what they all knew was an easy topic to get pulled in to. But the idea disappeared just as quickly, because Henry’s face has nothing of guilt and all of intense concern.

They were always concerned for each other, he thought wryly.

“Henry,” he began, and leaned down. “I’m okay. I don’t know how or why, but I swear I’m okay.”

“This is the day, y’know,” he mumbled.

Graham was about to ask what day he meant, when a sudden chill washed over him. He shuddered, letting the morbid feeling pass as quickly as it was able. He counted back in his mind, grimacing as he verified. “A year ago today, huh?”

Henry swallowed audibly, a pallor overtaking him. “What if … what if you can’t stay past when you died?”

Graham pushed back the same sharp fear and grabbed Henry’s hand in his own. “It’s almost midnight. You can stay up with me until then, and then we’ll know I’m around for good, okay?” It felt simplistic, and obviously they didn’t know what magic brought him back so which could take him away, but if it made Henry feel better he didn’t mind.

He looked wary, but curled his clammy fingers around his own and nodded. “And you’ll … you’ll let me stay?”

Graham nodded seriously. “No one’s kicking you out, kid.”

Henry watched him closely, a raptness to his attention that was close to desperate. He took a stuttering breath and squeezed his hand.
They both jumped when Emma’s phone vibrated. Emma sighed and woke, eyes widening to see Henry there. She gave a smile, kissed the crown of his head, and then turned to shut off her phone. When she settled back, hugging Henry to her, he noticed that her gaze hadn’t strayed from his.

“An alarm?” he asked softly.

She nodded over Henry’s head, swallowing audibly. She gave a small shrug. “Just needed to see.”

He let out a low breath, realizing that she knew exactly what day it was. It made something in him ache, that he was the cause for their worry. He never wanted that, never wanted to be such a burden. He was almost angry at himself for it.

Emma’s hand rested gently on top of Henry and his stacked ones, and something in her expression made him relax. She didn’t look as fearful as Henry; she just looked determined. He remembered her words from months back, the “I’ll protect you right back,” and he felt a spark of something more akin to awe at her.

He looked back down at Henry, and his heart tugged with the sudden wistful feeling that rose within him.

He knew when midnight passed when Henry released a held breath and rested his head over his chest. Emma’s eyes were closed, fingers trailing up and down his pulse. Even as the small tendrils of his own fear trickled out of him, he couldn’t believe how much love he felt for these two people.

He decided that, in a few hours, he’d call them all in sick. He needed a day with his family, and Henry would need to catch up on that homework, anyway.
Her boys were already awake by the time Emma finally blinked her eyes open the morning after.

Her throat was scratchy, the leftover tears from the conversation with her mother still cloying in her chest. Somehow it was the half-resolution that had her heart the most conflicted. Everything else sparked the old instinct to run: Neal, Regina, the very real danger. But the possibility of a better relationship with her mother, of Mary Margaret beginning to understand … it was the only thing that kept her focus.

It must’ve still been early, but she couldn’t seem to cling to sleep in this town. It wasn’t as bad as Graham’s insomnia; he had always struggled with staying asleep and the recent events and relocation had only made that worse. Henry’s, however, was new and it made her ache to see it.

He and Graham were talking quietly in the window seat. Henry was resting on Graham’s chest, his face solemn and pale as they watched the sun on the horizon. Her mouth tightened to a firm line, and she didn’t ask what they were discussing. Yesterday had left too much on her son’s shoulders and if he was even getting half of it off with Graham, it was progress that she didn’t want to disturb.

“Did grandpa already make it?” The first audible phrase from her son had her spine straightening.

Graham nodded, his chin mussing the boy’s hair as he did so. “Yeah, she’ll get it this morning, he said.”

Emma felt a wash of pure relief, recognizing what they were saying. The restraining order. That beacon of hope that perhaps her parents would see reason when it came to Regina. Mary Margaret’s reaction was encouraging earlier, but there was still much that would need to be changed for her to really see it.

“Good,” Henry said simply, then cocked his head to look up at Graham. “So we won’t have to see her again?”

“With a little luck,” Graham replied, his words mostly wistful.

“Maybe we shouldn’t eat downstairs today,” Emma spoke up. “Just until it’s in place.”
Graham and Henry turned to her, expressions relaxed and even despite the topic. Henry gave a small smile. “Dad and I never got to the ice cream place yesterday …,” he edged.

Emma twisted, her arm cradling her belly as she pretended to think about it. “I guess your sister would be okay with that. What do you say, Graham? Ice cream for breakfast?”


Henry’s eyes widened innocently. “Banana splits are a thing. And bananas are breakfast foods.”

“Darn,” Graham said, holding the kid in a loose headlock as he stood. “Guess you’ve convinced me.”

Henry giggled, throwing his arm around Graham’s waist to keep up. He looked so much brighter at the idea, and Emma was trying not to beam back at him. This was her kid, and this was what she wanted for him. Not the scared, grave child that had been coming through more and more since passing the town line. She was in danger of giving in to anything that made the kid smile like that while they were here.

Graham broke her focus as he helped haul her up with his free hand. A kiss was pressed to the crown of her head before he pushed her gently in the direction of the bathroom, and she scoffed slightly. “Two minutes.”

It didn’t take long for them all to get ready. It was still early morning and there was no real need to dress up for a dessert breakfast. They bypassed the usual exit through the diner and took the long way towards the ice cream shop half a block down.

“I think I want cherry vanilla,” Henry said, practically skipping ahead of them.

Graham chuckled. “Why, because it counts as fruit?”

“Dad,” he said, elongating the word. “It’s practically health food.”

Emma laughed, catching a glimpse of Graham’s amused look as he stepped ahead to whisper something in their kid’s ear. She started to comment on the secret-keeping when she felt a sharp pang deep inside her. She stopped abruptly, hand flitting over her stomach as she tried to discern what she had felt.

Graham stopped a few paces ahead, turning to look at her curiously. “Everything okay?” Henry hung onto his hand, twisting to look back, too.

Emma frowned. “Yeah, don’t know what that was.” She shrugged and resumed her pace when she felt it again. She winced deeply, and she grabbed onto the stucco of the building to brace herself.

Graham and Henry were by her side immediately. “Mom!”

“What is it?” Graham asked, his palm on her belly, looking completely helpless.

Emma shook her head. “I don’t know. Just a weird twinge. We’re okay, kid.” She didn’t want to scare him or Graham, even if the beginnings of alarm were starting within her.

“Did you need some help, dear?”
Emma swallowed back a groan. “I’m fine,” she said through clenched teeth. Of course the redhead would have found her when she was like this.

Zelena’s look was sympathetic, but it seemed false. “Well, we should check, just to be sure.” She balanced her basket on her arm, the other reaching for her belly.

Emma immediately recoiled, but it was Graham that grabbed her wrist before she was able to reach her again. “Won’t be necessary,” he said abruptly, and there was something dark in his tone.

Emma grabbed Henry’s shoulder and stalked deliberately down the street. Her kid stumbled over the first step, but hurried along to match her pace. “False alarm. I’m okay,” she gritted out.

“Oh, but you should be sure. We wouldn’t want anything to happen to this magical child, now would we?” Zelena insisted, hustling in her heels to follow them down the sidewalk.

Graham seemed more rigid than even she was, which was saying something. Henry just looked puzzled.

“I’m fine,” Emma said more forcefully. Why this woman wasn’t adhering to her not-so-subtle demands was beyond her. She pushed open the door to the building and ducked inside, Graham and Henry right behind her. Unfortunately, the midwife was just a step behind.

“If you are feeling out of sorts, then you should have it checked out! You don’t want to put the child in danger, now would you?” she pressed.

“I’ll take her down to General if it gets worse,” Graham shot out, blocking her with his body. The rush to protect wasn’t unusual, but Emma pressed a hand to his shoulder, squeezing gently to temper his reaction.

She was trying to remind herself that Zelena had been nothing but helpful to her mother and father. She tried to remember that she had been overbearing but harmless throughout the last couple days. Of all the people in Storybrooke, the midwife was the least of their worries.

She took a deep breath, but squared her shoulders. “It was just a twinge. I am perfectly all right, but I promise I will seek help if it comes again.” Emma said, her tone clipped and overly formal. The baby rolled and then kicked out at that moment, as if making her point.

Zelena’s grin deepened, something in her eyes shading. “Of course you would,” she said soothingly. “But really we should have a look before it becomes a problem, don’t you agree?”

“I believe she has said ‘no’ to your requests.”

Emma turned to the new voice. The shop owner had stepped out from behind the counter, her words firm but gentle. Her blonde hair was swept back, aproned outfit pressed and clean. There was a certain regality to her appearance despite the trade, and it made Emma wonder just who she might have been. She was … familiar, in a way. Strangely so.

Zelena’s eyes narrowed fractionally, barely a glimmer there. “Of course you would,” she said soothingly. “But really we should have a look before it becomes a problem, don’t you agree?”

“I believe she has said ‘no’ to your requests.”

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Zelena’s eyes narrowed fractionally, barely a glimmer there. “I am only looking out for our newest prince or princess, of course.”

Graham’s eye twitched, and he moved forward protectively. But it was the owner that stepped forward more purposefully, head held high as she got into the other woman’s space.
The shopkeep gave a smile that was as genteel as it was dismissive. “And while I’m sure you have the best of intentions, I believe the mother would have the best instincts when it comes to her child. Don’t you agree?”

The redhead raised one brow, her lips pursing in a way that reminded her a little too much of Regina. Finally, she relaxed and smiled widely. “Why, of course that’s true, Sarah.” She turned to Emma next, her long hair swinging. “I just know how bad all this stress is, dear. And I know it helped your mother to have a little help. She said she could stop panicking. I guess I was hoping to be that for you, too.”

Emma deflated slightly, leaning against Graham. He was still rigid; he was a lot slower to trust anyone outside their group and the coil of tense muscles wouldn’t loosen until they had a chance to recharge. But the woman was right, wasn’t she? Mary Margaret raved about this woman all the time. Maybe Emma was just overreacting.

But then Henry grasped her hand, and she felt his uncertainty, too. “Thanks, but I did just have my checkup. I’m fine for now.”

The other woman, Sarah, stepped closer to the redhead. Her expression was placid but icy. “You are such a help, but as you see, you aren’t needed here.”

Emma could only feel vaguely amused at her tone. She was so soft-spoken, but her whole demeanor seemed to demand a sort of cool respect.

Zelena gave a queer sort of smile as she turned to Emma. “You will come to me if it gets worse?” she murmured.

Graham’s lips pressed together and squeezed hard on her hand. Emma sighed at her husband’s nonverbal refusal, though she didn’t fully disagree. “I’ll get help when it’s needed,” she said, careful to not commit to her help.

Zelena nodded. She exited with one final glance to her belly, bright eyes alight with something that made her stomach churn.

Graham let out a low breath, and then turned to her. His brow was furrowed and he made a slight nod to her bump. She shook her head and shrugged. There was no more twinges, no strange feeling acting up, and the baby was active.

Henry pushed into her side, peering up at her with a frown. Emma smiled and mouthed an ‘okay’ to him.

“It’s quite early for ice cream, isn’t it?” Sarah asked, returning to her place behind the counter.

Emma turned, placing a hand on Henry’s shoulder to steady herself. “Never too early,” she replied.

Sarah gave a muffled laugh, her lashes on her cheeks as she scooped through the flavors. “I suppose that’s true.” She held out a cone to her son, which he took eagerly.

“Cherry vanilla? How’d you know?” he asked as he took a bite.

“It’s my secret,” she replied with a wink.

“Henry,” Graham said, nudging him.
Henry blushed slightly at the reminder. “Thank you,” he chirped up at the woman. The color was melting back into him, and Emma felt herself relax at that. If she kept Henry away from Regina, perhaps Henry’d get through this unscathed.

The blonde smiled fondly, then looked up. “Sheriff, I had heard you were back. It is good to see you well.”

Graham shifted uncomfortably before placing a hand at the small of her back. Emma leaned into his chest, feeling how he needed her to ground him. Easily, he molded into her and then wrapped an arm around her belly. “Thank you,” he finally replied.

“Such a beautiful family,” Sarah murmured absently. She grabbed cups and filled them with flavors that seemed curiously right to their tastes. Her lips twisted up, demure and sweet but somehow sad. “You look happy, Emma.”

She swallowed, trying to stop the alarm that raised her heart beat. She reasoned that she had been the sheriff, the savior, the princess whatever and that she was probably more closely watched in this town than she had first assumed. Despite everything, she knew she was miles beyond the girl that left Storybrooke a year ago. The fact that people she didn’t know could notice that was somewhat disconcerting, like maybe she’d never been able to hide how lonely she’d been before. Finally, she nodded. “Yeah, I am. Thank you, Sarah.”

“Please,” she said, holding out a hand. “That was my cursed name. Call me Ingrid.”
Lessons

Chapter Summary

December is finally cold, so that means winter traditions must be upheld, and Graham has to learn.

Chapter Notes

Prompt from anon on Tumblr: "Gremma iceskating, alone, Emma is skillful, Graham is not." I know you said alone, anon, but muse decided a side character had to be there for a bit to make things more difficult. No Henry this time, though. Set after Anniversary.

“This looks dangerous.”

Emma looked up from her laces, smirking at her boyfriend. “It can be,” she teased. “Try not to smack your head on the ice.”

Graham looked indignant, eyes narrowing as he stood unsteadily on the thin skates. “Who ever thought of walking over a frozen lake with only two razor blades to hold you up?” he grumbled.

Emma grinned, and took his hands to pick herself up. Though his brow was lined in his determined effort, he still wobbled as he supported her weight and balance. “I’d like you to at least have a crash course before we drag the kid out here,” she reminded, pulling him slightly towards the rink.

Ever since the rinks had opened all around the city in November, Henry had begged to go. Emma and he had gone once or twice to the one in Central Park once the air finally had a bit of chill to it last week. The kid wanted a family outing, though, and had turned big eyes on Graham and her to plead for a day out this coming weekend. The fact that Graham had never been ice skating before, in any of his memories, had made Emma resist. Especially since Henry had his heart set on the ever-touristy Rockefeller Center. Today, a Tuesday, had made the Lasker rink at least slightly less crowded for their instruction.

Emma had a feeling that they’d need the room.

Graham stumbled forward awkwardly, and she tried not to laugh outright. He could be so confident, his steps so light and careful as he moved through the streets and the forest. He had needed to be quick and quiet in his first life, and he carried over those traits with him now. She had never seen him this clumsy; she had always gained that title. She couldn’t help being amused to see the turn of character.

She pulled him close at the edge of one of the partitions, her lips grazing his in reassurance. He sighed, and wrapped his arms around her waist. He was still resting most of his
weight against the half-wall, so she dragged him off of it and finally onto the ice.

Almost immediately, one knee hit the ground. He looked up at her, frustration pronounced as he huffed out a puff of cold air. “This is unnatural,” he protested.

She skated in an arc to his other side and helped him stand against the partition again. “Get your balance first,” she said.

He brushed the flakes off of his knee and muttered something under his breath.

She grinned at that, but then pulled a straight face when he squinted up at her. “C’mon, I’ll show you.”

He stood once more, then looked out at the others skating around the circuit.

Emma joined him for a second of people watching. There were mostly families out this morning, a few tourists and kids too young to be in school yet. In the center, there were even a few teens doing simple tricks, little hops and spins and generally showing off as they likely played hooky. Emma pointed to a three year old between his parents. “See? Even toddlers can do it,” she teased.

“Closer to the ground,” he grumbled, but pushed off. He hesitated, gaining his balance but not moving his feet. “How do I do this?”

She scooted forward to meet him the couple inches onto the ice. “Just whatever feels most comfortable. I didn’t learn the right way; I like to keep one foot planted. But when you look around, you can see that most people move both feet.”

“Well, that’s not confusing,” he drawled.

She skated along the edge, quickly back and forth to demonstrate her modified technique. “See?” It was what worked for her, even if it wasn’t technically right. It wasn’t like she had gotten any formal instruction.

Her first trip on the ice was when she was nine. It was one of the events that had been put on locally for the foster kids. She, however, had basically been forgotten amidst the younger kids, and the rest of the older ones already knew how to skate. She had stubbornly skipped the quick lesson provided by the event coordinator, and went about falling a considerable amount of times before she got the hang of her own balance. She never could break the habit she had created that day, and didn’t mind since she could still enjoy her time on the ice.

Henry did the “correct” way of skating, even though in this life she had taught him. Regina hadn’t let him in his first one, so instead it was Maggie that he had imitated. Maggie had always teased that the kid thought she was more graceful. Emma couldn’t exactly disagree on that.

She shook off the memory and looked up. Graham’s dark blue eyes were sharply focused on her feet, his face twisted in befuddlement. “Why is this enjoyable?” he asked, then tried to mimic her. His feet slid, and he awkwardly scooted forward without picking the blades up.

“Okay, that’s good,” she coaxed, ignoring his grumpiness. “Now try to balance on one foot so you can actually move. You’ll feel more stable.”

He gave her an incredulous look. “I’ll feel more stable on only one of the tiny pieces of metal?”

She laughed. “I mean, once you get the hang of swinging back and forth with your legs,
going with the curve rather than trying to stay flat. Just know you’re going to fall again.”

“That’s comforting,” he said sardonically. His mouth parted, and his eyebrows stitched together as he tried, lurching back and forth as he struggled to remain upright.

She blew out a breath and grabbed his hands, helping him glide. She clicked her tongue. “Henry’s going to skate circles around us if you keep this up.”

“I think he will anyway,” he replied. “Especially if you’re staying behind with me.”

Suddenly, a sharp hiss of blades screeched in front of them, ice flicking up against Graham who huffed in exasperation. The skater tossed back one of her dark pigtails and snorted loudly. “I see we’ve made progress.”

Andie had called earlier that day, complaining about taking inventory and the lack of patrons. When Emma had been in the middle of explaining what they were doing, Andie just gave an abrupt “meet you there.” Of course her entrance had to be signaled with such drama.

Emma bit down at her lip in an attempt to hide her smirk. “He’s still getting a hang of it.”

Andie wrinkled her nose. “I came out here because I was bored at the bar. I don’t want to come all the way out here just to be bored somewhere else. This is not entertaining for me, and we all know that’s the most important thing.”

“Don’t rush me,” Graham bit out grudgingly, legs swaying as he tried to skate.

Andie said something sharp in Vietnamese and pulled her cap over her ears. “It’s too cold to be waiting over here. Get moving, Humbert. You’ll warm up.”

“What she means is she’s impatiently waiting for me to fall,” Graham grumbled.

Emma didn’t doubt it, could see the way the brunette’s eyes snapped to him expectantly during her lap. “Your friend,” Emma quipped.

Graham looked up at her, lips tugging slightly. “Yeah, guess so.”

Emma reached out and took his hands to pull herself gently into his space, her eyes resting on his. Those cobalt depths were suddenly serene, pleased. She knew exactly how he was feeling at the moment; some days, remembering all the friends she had in this life was overwhelming for her, too.

He leaned in and bumped her cold nose with his. “I guess it’s not so bad.”

Andie swung by on her next loop, but this time her gloved hand grabbed Graham’s wrist and she dragged him out on the ice a couple feet before dropping it just as quickly. Emma just managed to keep upright as he was pulled away. “It’s supposed to be a lesson, lovebirds, not an excuse to make out in a corner. Come on, Humbert!”

Gracefully, she spun around the two in a figure eight, easily bypassing the other skaters making their circuits. She wore a bright grin despite the way her eyes rolled.

Emma giggled and caught her hand playfully. She spun her, and Andie laughed the whole way. She finished with flourish, pointed toe and a bow. “See? It’s easy!”
Graham’s brows were almost hidden by the curls covering his forehead. “Oh, yes, definitely easy,” he said and tried once more to glide.

He stumbled a little and Emma moved from the other girl to throw an arm around his waist. She peeked up at him from under his arm. “Do it for the kid,” she reminded.

He sighed and nodded, wobbling forward as he disentangled himself from her. He shot Andie a look. “Don’t you dare push me.”

Her face purposely dropped into a guileless blank. “I don’t know what you mean. Jeez, there’s no trust.”

“Because I know you,” he countered.

“I’m going to go around, just so you can see, okay?” Emma said.

Graham waved her off, eyes mostly directed on his own feet. Emma tried not to smile as she started a lap around.

There was something freeing in the long arc, the frost biting into her cheeks as she glided. She took a deep breath in, enjoying the cold sunshine. When she and Henry went it was similar, but there was something to be said about the lone circuit. The air smelled clean and fresh, faint wisps of coffee and peppermint and chocolate from the skaters she was passing. It was actually starting to feel like Christmastime now.

Emma cocked her head to the side as she made her way back. Graham was still at the same place, and he looked more like he was slipping along rather than consciously skating. She couldn’t help the shake of her head as she started forward.

She was just about ready to help his posture when Andie snuck up. The petite woman jabbed him in the side with her index finger and skated away just as quickly in a peal of laughter. Graham overcorrected with a sharp curse, and the sudden shock made him topple. Unfortunately, the closest thing to him was her, and she squeaked as he pulled her down with him.

She didn’t hear a thud as they both fell, luckily, as her nose collided with his chest. Her insides tingled, and she buried her face in his sweater as she collected herself. With a wince, she finally looked up at his face. There was something odd in his expression, a sudden catch behind his features. He brought a hand beneath his head, where it hovered above the ice. He swallowed visibly, and then grabbed her hand as her face twisted in confusion.

“I think you cushioned us,” he said softly, just above a whisper.

She hesitated, just then feeling the slightest crackle in the atmosphere, like the air just before a storm. “I—“ she cut herself off, blinking hard. Her magic.

“Oh, that was my bad.”

Emma looked up to Andie’s not-so-sorry face. She was sure she looked pale; her body felt colder and drained at the realization. Her fingers bunched into Graham’s sweater, and carefully she set about untangling their legs.

“How could I resist? He practically dared me!” she continued, then continued for a few beats in Vietnamese. She held out her hand and helped swing Emma up.

Emma swayed slightly, a slight nausea clinging to her. It didn’t happen often, her powers; she tried to keep them at bay as much as possible. Especially around Graham. It was
disconcerting that she hadn’t even thought about using them, that they just appeared.

Graham was getting himself up slowly. Emma started to reach for him but then pulled her hand back just as quick. Andie was still grinning as she yanked him up.

Graham gave Emma a short look, but only brushed the icicles off his pants. He swung his legs in a concerted effort to swing to her side, and clumsily made his way over. He rested a reassuring palm to her lower back before facing his friend. “This means, of course, that you’re buying lunch.”

Andie smirked. “Too cold, anyway. Race you there.” She pushed off, gliding toward the exit.

“I’m okay,” he murmured into her ear. Emma nodded jerkily, trying to believe it. “Hey. You kept us safe. You did good.”

Emma turned her face away. “I didn’t even mean to,” she admitted.

Graham tilted her face up with his fingers at her chin. He still had that something behind his gaze, but mostly his look was determined as he pressed his lips together. “It’s not because of you,” he reminded, and squeezed her hand with his free one. “It’s her that screwed me up for it, not anything you do or have. And what you have … it’s good, Emma. You’re good.”

She couldn’t shy away from his eyes like this, and her breath was hitched as she took that in. “I know you don’t really blame me,” she said, even if most of the time she forgets. “But I don’t like not having control of it.”

He nodded. “I know,” he said simply. He kissed her, slow and steady, reassuring. “You didn’t use it on me, Em. Just near me.”

She nodded with a sigh and tried to comfort herself with that, at least.

“Besides,” he said, and his voice was lighter. “Now I have back-up when we do this with the kid.”

“You’ll need it,” she said, struggling to match the teasing note in his voice. She leaned forward to peck his lips and then started them towards the exit. “You’re kinda hopeless out here.”

They got back to the benches and Graham sat heavily. He grabbed her around her waist and pulled her down on his lap, nuzzling into her hairline. “Maybe I’ll just hang onto the edge and watch you two,” he suggested.

She warmed as she felt him relax into her, and she let the tension release from her body. “C’mon. Let’s make Andie get us some soup and hot chocolate.”

“After that? I’m thinking a five-course meal,” Graham joked, then leaned over to unlace her skates.

“Hey,” she said, and he looked up at her. She chewed on her bottom lip. “Are you sure—”

“Yeah, Em,” he said clearly. “I love you.”

She held his gaze a long moment, and he kept his own steady as he let her check for the truth. She leaned in again and kissed him harder, and he returned it fervently.
“Gross, guys. C’mon, I want pizza at that place on 106th.”

Emma narrowed her eyes at the interruption. Playfully, she nodded and turned to Graham. “Yeah, I think that place has some nice, dark corners to sneak off to when we leave her with the check.”

“Or maybe somewhere outdoors,” she replied dryly.

“Nah,” Graham said, eyes twinkling. “Now I want pizza, too.”

Heavy moment gone, but still very aware of how suddenly her magic came through, Emma threaded her fingers with his and led him to return the skates so they could go eat.

She’d figure out what went wrong later.
Morning Sickness

Chapter Summary

They're just starting to get used to it.

Chapter Notes

I'm considering this the first time the morning sickness goes to one of the episodes. From farmgirlusa's askbox prompt "it could be worse." Also from skagengiirl's prompt: "Emma had one of her episodes (you know the magic ones during the pregnancy where she gets physically ill) and during this particular episode, she feels so ill and emotional that she actually asks if Graham can stay home from work."

“It could be worse.”

Graham raised a brow and sat beside her on the tile. She sighed as her head rested on the seat in order to face him, her eyes glassy. Carefully, he scooted as close as he dared. “I guess,” he said uncertainly, reaching to smooth a curl behind her ear.

It had finally started two weeks ago, the illness sending her to the bathroom early in the days and sometimes in the late evening. They were still getting used to it, and she still had banned him from being present during her actual bouts of sickness. At the very least he was now aware enough to come at the end of them, so he wasn’t kicked out anymore.

She coughed slightly and turned from him to face the bowl once more. “You don’t have to be here,” she grumbled under her breath and then spit into the toilet. “It’s bad enough you had to hear it.”

He shook his head. “Hey, I’m at least half the reason you’re on this floor. Let me help.”

She blew out a sharp breath, her lashes fluttering. “Not much you can do. You have work in an hour.”

“I don’t have to go to work, Em,” he said stubbornly. “I have 27 days of vacation and unlimited sick leave. Benefits of being a detective.” He’d gotten Henry off to the bus stop already this morning, but without a new case there was no reason to be at the precinct before nine. It would probably be the best time to take a day off, when it was between cases like this. In his head, he was already half-way through the call to Miller.

Emma gave him a look. “And this is going to be happening for months. You can’t stay home every time I get morning sickness, Graham,” she countered.

“Months?” he asked with a wince.

She chuckled and then groaned as she leaned forward. She took a deep breath, and he worriedly hovered over her. After a few beats, she nodded. “Yeah, months. Kid’s making a nest
and my stomach needs time to get used to it.”

“Yeah,” he murmured. Cautiously, he tapped her side before he pulled her head down to his lap. He leaned against the wall and let her settle. She swallowed and tried to relax, letting him run his hand through her hair, and he took that as a win. He looked down at her as he pressed his lips together. Her hairline was sweaty, face a little paler than normal and nose red. She nuzzled into him, arms hugging his leg, and he moved to better accommodate her, continuing the soothing motions through her blonde tresses. His other hand moved to cover her stomach almost unconsciously, the disbelief bubbling inside him once more. There was someone in there that they made. He blinked away the awe and finally refocused on her discomfort. “I’m sorry.”

A small smile tugged on her lips, even though her eyes were still closed. “Like you said, you’re only half the reason,” she teased. Her brow furrowed. “You need to get in the shower or else you’ll be late.”

He still had half a mind to call in, but if she was right and this would be happening for months, he supposed it would be a good idea to save those sick days. Even though they were unlimited, he’d need to get Emilia’s husband to write him a note. It wasn’t a favor he’d want to use often. “If you’re sure,” he said reluctantly.

She nodded. “Yeah. Help me up?”

“To bed?” he asked.

She shrugged. “Yeah, sounds good. I’ll get some rest, do some work in the afternoon.”

He slowly rose, pulling her into his arms with barely a protest on her part as he carried her. “You shouldn’t be doing any rundowns, Em.”

She rolled her eyes. “Those ‘rundowns’ paid for this apartment, buddy.”

“Emma,” he pressed.

She turned her head into his shoulder. “I wasn’t planning on going out. I have a couple cases actually repaying me, I’ll have you know.”

He pressed a firm kiss to the crown of her head and tightened his grip. “Well, good. I’ve gotten attached to this apartment.”

She swatted at him with a snort as he laid her in the center of the bed. “Go earn your keep, Detective.”

He brushed his fingertips across her bare stomach and grinned. “What, no sheriff today?” he teased, then made his way to the shower.

He had just stepped into the spray when he heard retching. He peeled back the corner of the shower curtain, finding Emma again over the bowl. He shut off the water and grabbed a towel so he wouldn’t drip. He leaned next to her, and she used one hand to try to bat him away as she heaved but, determinedly, he stayed close.

He could feel her whole body tense as it changed into a dry heave; it seemed like her stomach was out of content to emit. It seemed different this time, more violent and painful. The air seemed to crackle with energy, tight and expectant. He pulled her hair back and rubbed her shoulders, unsure what the best course of action would be but wanting to help in any way he could.
After what felt like hours, she was breathing heavily but no longer trying to expel anything. Tears were fresh on her cheeks, and she seemed unbothered or too exhausted to wipe them away. She shuddered, and emitted a low sob as she leaned back against his chest, panting as she caught her breath.

“Emma,” he said softly, brushing his hands across her body. “Water?”

She shook her head, and twisted to bury her head against his chest, squirming until her cheek was against his heart. She was shaking, body still tensing at strange intervals he couldn’t predict. He held her as gently as he was able, but alarm was building in the pit of his stomach and he had never felt so damn helpless. It wasn’t like he had never seen Emma cry before, but something about the rawness of her vulnerability was both humbling and downright scary.

“What can I do, Emma? Anything; just tell me what I can do,” he said roughly, scattering kisses into her hair.

She sniffed, hands fisting into the hair at the nape of his neck. “Please … stay?” she whispered.

He all but collapsed into her, pulling her tighter against him. “Of course,” he said hoarsely. “I wasn’t kidding.”

She whimpered softly, and he felt her lips over his pectoral. “I love you … so much.”

He cupped her jaw and tilted her head to meet her eye. His gaze scattered over her face, a slow unsure smile settling over his features. “Time for an again?”

She let out a short bark of a laugh that made his body relax in relief. “Yeah,” she said and sniffed. “Blame the hormones.”

“I love you,” he murmured against her lips. “And I love the newbie. But he’s gotta learn to settle down.”

“Mm,” she agreed, then stopped his movement with a firm hand. “Don’t kiss me, I taste like morning sickness.”

He grinned. “Well, we have all day for that,” he reminded. He made a mental note to call Simmons later to bring by the paperwork. “Let’s get you a bath instead?”

There was still something distressed behind her eyes. Her palm was pressed firm against his chest, and he worriedly placed his own on top. Finally she gave a quick flash of teeth. “Yeah, okay. Let’s get us a bath.”

He raised his brows and then nodded. “Done.” He nudged his chin into her temple. “I guess I have to get used to the mood swings, huh?”

She huffed, and he felt a pang that it still sounded a little watery. Her hand still hadn’t left its place, and a frown started to tug at his lips. After a moment she just rested her head again and didn’t have a quip to fire back at him. Mentally, he nodded. Staying home was the right thing for today.

“I’m right here, Em. I’m not going anywhere,” he assured.

Her breathing stuttered, and she nodded. “Thank you.” She swallowed audibly and finally peered up at him. “This’ll be the last time, though. Promise.”
He didn’t reply. It might be one of the rare instances where she would actually ask for something she wanted, but he wanted to remain in tune with her to know *before* she asked next time. Instead, he kissed her lips just to see her nose wrinkle in distaste. “I’ll start the water.”

“Dammit, Graham, give me my toothbrush if you’re going to start that!”
Reassurance

Chapter Summary

The new development has Graham feeling a little left out.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the wait on this! I had a bit of an emergency, but things are good now!

Prompt from tumblr "Wait a minute. Are you jealous?" This turned angsty pretty quick for what the premise.

“Wait a minute. Are you jealous?”

Graham couldn’t seem to tug his lips from their frown, and he shifted his palm again. Still, there was nothing but her warm skin, no flutter under the spot she’d said she had felt the slightest movement. “No,” he finally said, lip pouting ever so slightly.

Her own hand rested on his and he saw from the corner of his eye the laughter she was trying to bite down. She leaned forward slightly, and he met her forehead with his, emitting a soft sigh. “You know the newbie is only getting started, here. In a couple weeks, I’m sure he’ll be big enough for you to feel, too.”

“I know,” he said defensively, but couldn’t help the press of his hand once more. The swell there was amazing to find, but knowing that she could feel the first movements of their baby and he couldn’t made him feel a little left out, no matter how much logic he applied.

She bit down on her lip, her eyes alight. She looked away to hide her smile.

He tried to glare at her obvious amusement, but finally just sighed and leaned down to press an ear to her belly. “What does it feel like?” he finally asked.

Her fingers threaded in his hair, soothingly stroking against his scalp. She hummed. “Like … champagne bubbles. Or sometimes it’s more like a fish flicking its tail. It’s so subtle.”

He tried to take that in, running the pads of his fingertips across her skin. She shivered slightly, tugging gently at his curls. “It’s just that it’s still ….”

“Unbelievable?” she guessed.

He turned to look up at her, thinking about it a moment. “A little,” he agreed. He smiled down at the curve, delicately trailing over it. “Incredible might be more like it. But definitely surreal.”

“I don’t think feeling him will make it any less so,” she said with a grin. “Sure hasn’t for me.”
He chuckled slightly and then edged up to kiss her. “I don’t know if it will make it feel more real or just stranger, to be fair.”

She leaned into him, pecking at his lips teasingly before laying back against the pillows. “Well, you didn’t think it could happen, so I get that.”

He shrugged. Although it was true, that wasn’t what had him faltering when he thought about the tiny being taking shape inside her some days. “I found a new book.”

She groaned. “Another? They’re starting to get contradictory,” she said, rubbing her temples.

He smiled sheepishly. “Lazo recommended this one. It’s supposed to have some good info.”

“Graham,” she said, drawing out his name pointedly. “It’s going to be fine.”

“I know,” he said immediately, although a panicky bit of fear shot through him. “But it’ll be good to be prepared.”

She tilted her head, a small smile on her face. “We’re going to have to figure out what works best for us, not necessarily use the advice collected from twelve different parenting books.”

For all the conviction she put in her words, he could still see the slightest uncertainty behind her expression. This wouldn’t be the first time she raised a child, not really, but there was still such a newness to it that made her nervous. Raising Henry in this life was a gift she didn’t take lightly, but he knew she often felt like it wasn’t something she truly did.

But at least she had that, had those memories and Henry’s personality that reflected her parenting style. Graham felt like he was going in blind. Between all his memories, he’d never even had the inkling that this might happen to him, getting the chance to raise a family. It scared him more than he wanted to admit.

Maybe that’s why he wanted to be able to feel the newbie now. It had been sixteen weeks already, ten of them knowing about this new little person. Maybe he’d feel more … ready once he felt those slow stirrings.

“Well, I don’t exactly have anything for comparison. No good examples, at least. The books’ll help with that, I think,” he said finally. He leaned his head into her neck, pressing small kisses into her skin.

She was silent and didn’t relax into his touch as she usually did. When he looked up at her, he understood why. Her brow was creased, and she looked deep in thought. Curious, he cupped her jaw gently, getting her attention. She took a deep breath and finally pressed her lips together to give a strained smile. “When did you stop looking for your parents?”

His eyebrows shot up in surprise at the question. Finally he looked away, thinking about it. “I don’t know,” he said carefully. “I’m not sure if I ever really looked.”

“You weren’t curious?” she asked, gaze glazing over.

He sighed. “Of course I was curious. But the town near where I grew up … they didn’t have answers for me. None that they’d care to give, at least.”

She was quiet a moment, taking in his answer. “And you never got an answer, right?”
He nodded. “Right. But by the time I—well, I didn’t really care anymore after I lost Fionn.”

Her breath was stuttered, and she didn’t meet his eyes. “When I went to the forest, back when I was with Mary Margaret … I saw what it could have been like.”

He leaned up, keeping his focus on her direct. “If there wasn’t a curse.”

She nodded with a jerk. “Everything was there. A whole nursery that was supposed to be mine. I just—I could have had a good example.”

He gave a sad smile and brushed a hand through her curls. “I wish—“

She stopped him with a hand over his mouth. She shook her head. “No, don’t you dare. If it didn’t happen, then I wouldn’t have you. I wouldn’t have Henry. I wouldn’t have the newbie.”

His lips pressed together and his head bowed. Yes, that was true. But at the same time, he wished his beautiful, strong wife could have had the happy childhood her parents dreamed of for her.

And, if he was honest, there was part of him that believed he didn’t deserve her, especially when she could have had everything a princess deserved. In the end, Henry and the baby were the reasons to be grateful of the curse, more than anything else.

She blinked rapidly, lashes catching the tears that wouldn’t escape. “I stopped looking for my parents years ago. I hated them for leaving me, these faceless people I never met. Now, I know how much they cared, how much they must still care … Graham, am I selfish for not searching for a way back?”

“No,” he said firmly. “Emma, we don’t know the first thing about using magic to open portals to another land. Trying to blindly use your magic in a place that isn’t supposed to have any would put you and the baby at risk, at the very least. Even they wouldn’t want that.”

She stifled a sob. “But—“

“I’ve seen the kind of price that comes with using magic like that. I will not risk you. I would never be okay with that, and I can’t believe in any sort of condition that they would, either,” he said, and there was no surprise to him that his words were marked with a growl.

Suddenly her eyes were clear, and she reached out to trail her fingers along his jaw. His chin quivered, a tremor behind his protective anger that only she could coax out. “I would never risk the baby like that, Graham.”

His jaw set, noticing the omission in her avowal. “You, Emma. You, too.”

She hesitated, then finally gave a sad smile. “Yeah, okay. I won’t risk myself like that, either.”

He let out a long puff of air, surprised at how completely the promise made him weak with relief. A tear slipped down his face as he sunk to her lips, demanding a kiss that was returned just as fervently.

“You’ll protect me right back, right?” she whispered when he let her breathe again.

He nodded. His hands slipped under her waistband as he trailed his lips down her neck,
the almost urgent need to be skin to skin with her overwhelming. “I love you,” he said forcefully.

Her hips arched up, allowing him to rid her of her sweats just as easily. “You have nothing to worry about, Graham,” she said, twisting her legs around his waist to pull him close. She brushed her hands across his face, kissing him between her soothing motions. “We’ll be safe, all of us.”

He shuddered, and then dragged her blouse off. “Please.”

“And you’re going to be a great father,” she insisted.

He paused, hovering over her for a moment. His heart was jack-hammering, still in the throes of bright fear and doubt. This wasn’t the reassurance he was expecting.

“I mean it,” she said, then took the hem of his shirt in hand and pulled upward.

Once he was free of it, he reached down to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear, looking over her thoughtfully. He placed his hand over her belly again, the barely-there swell. He swallowed thickly, and tried not to shy away from her conviction. Finally, he nodded. “You’re a great mom, Em. I’ll just follow your lead.”

She pulled him back to her. “Thank you.”

And while her thanks were very clearly not just for the last statement, neither verbally acknowledged the weight of it. Instead, they focused on another sort of reassurance.
Keeping Watch

Chapter Summary

Graham takes the opportunity to confront Emma while Henry’s in the bathroom.

Chapter Notes

From the sentence prompt on tumblr. Set after Mementos, the first day back in SB. Anon asked for 22, and @farmgirlusa asked for 44. I am so sorry for the delay in chapters, and I apologize that this is so short, but finally getting my muse back.

“I’ve seen the way you look at me when you think I don’t notice.”

Emma sighed, pushing the mug of hot chocolate away from her as she met her husband’s eye. He looked serious, and had waited until Henry had left for the bathroom before saying anything. Judging by his expression, she hadn’t hid it very well. She could admit that she had been staring at him quite raptly all day, afraid that keeping him out of sight cause him to disappear. She used to do that, in the beginning. Now the old habit had reformed.

“Is it just because of the town?” he asked.

She slid her fingers across the table and tapped along the skin of his hand. “Mostly,” she acknowledged.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he assured, flipping his hand to catch hers.

Warm metal hit her, and she trailed along the band there. “It’s hard enough to be here and not knowing who set off this new curse. It’s another to see her traipsing around without a care in the world,” she said, her voice gravelly with anger.

They had spent the better part of the day researching while Henry stayed at Granny’s. While Regina hadn’t gotten close to her or her husband again, she had seen glimpses of her a few times as she spoke with Mary Margaret. That, more than anything, had likely ignited her determination to keep him within sight. Regina sparked a rage within her that she couldn’t temper, but she also created the cold grip of dread deep in her stomach.

His mouth slid into a firm line and his eyes closed. He gripped her tight, and she could feel the trickle of fear that he tried to hide most of the time. “I hate seeing her and being near her, too,” he admitted. “But just because she’s around doesn’t mean I’m going to disappear.”

“You did before,” she shot back. She startled at her own vehemence, and then shook her head. Regina had taken him before she could blink, right from her arms. She had been in the dark for months afterward, and Henry had been the only one who knew. Her eyes misted, and she wondered for a moment whether her reaction was purely based on her fear or if her hormones were mixing in to escalate things. “You died, Graham. I can’t … I need to know you’re going to be okay.”
She knows it’s something he can’t promise, but the warm smile on his face almost has her believing for a moment. “Well, I certainly have protection.”

She blew out a low breath. Yes, she’d protect him, but she also needed to know he’d fight. “If you die, I’m gonna kill you.”

His brows shot up, and he nodded, failing to hide his grin. “That’s a new ultimatum. Deal.”

She let out something that was half-sob, half-laugh. She pressed her opposite palm to cover her eyes, squeezing with the other. “God, Graham, I just—I’m sorry. I just need you, okay?”

He brought their hands to his mouth and kissed the side of her fist. “I need you, too. You know I wouldn’t leave willingly.”

Relief hit her like a wall, and she nodded compulsively. “Good,” she said simply. She grabbed her cocoa again and took a long sip. Part of her wanted to slip into the space next to him and hold him close, but she felt like they were already on display as it was. She didn’t want to bring more attention to themselves than was necessary.

Henry took that moment to come back, settling into the seat next to her. “Why are you guys so serious?” he asked bluntly.

Emma laughed and ruffled her son’s hair. She felt a bit of weight come off her with the action, and she pressed a kiss to the top of his head. “We were just talking about what we’re going to do tomorrow.”

“We’re going to see if Red or Granny can watch over you for a bit, because your mom and I are going to be busy again. I was just about to tell her that we’ll probably have to split up to get it all done.”

Henry bobbed his head and picked a cold fry off his mostly empty plate. He locked eyes with Graham. “Because mom’s been too worried to do things?”

Emma startled, and turned to him. “I have good reason to worry, kid,” she said softly.

He looked up. “I know. But the sooner we get this done, the sooner we can leave, right?” He sunk into her side, twirling the fry in front of his face.

She grimaced and pulled her arm around him. “Yeah, Henry. The sooner we can leave.”

When she looked up again, Graham was watching the boy. Worry was plain on his face, and she could practically feel how much he wished Henry didn’t have to be here.

They knew there wouldn’t be a way that he’d stay in Manhattan, away from them. He’d stolen a credit card to find her when he was even younger than he was now, and she couldn’t imagine his will to stay with the family would be any less. But the more he lingered in this town, the more he resembled the optimistic but deeply sad boy that lived here before.

“I guess if we split up, we can cover more ground,” she said reluctantly. She locked eyes with Graham. “But you need to charge your phone now.”

“Sounds reasonable,” he replied, smiling gently at her. He nodded to Henry. “You can
help, too. Help us build a wall for clues, just like at the precinct.”

The boy perked up, looking eager. “Really? I can help make one? Garcia was teaching me how you order them last week.”

Emma grimaced. “Was Garcia seriously showing you clues about old murders?”

Henry shook his head. “Nope. Old missing persons cases. And this is kinda like a missing persons case, isn’t it, Dad?”

“Close enough, Henry,” Graham replied, his expression amused. “We’ll grab a white board and some other supplies down at Clark’s once we’re finished, okay?”

Emma felt a spark of anticipation, but realized that it only struck her after Clark’s was mentioned. She pressed her lips together and leaned her cheek on top of her kid’s head. There was a strange twinge inside her, the effect of their separate lives mingling, and the lights immediately surrounding them dimmed ever so slightly. Luckily, her husband seemed to be distracted by Henry enough not to notice, and a tight breath released from her chest. “We can get a little organized. Make this quick,” she murmured.

“Then we go home?”

His hopeful tone shot a pang through her, and she looked up to Graham to see his reaction. He looked just as sympathetic. Part of her felt like once they were back she could breathe a little easier, that the worries would be quieted. At the same time, she thought about her parents and separating from them once again, and her heart splintered. Still, she nodded. “Guess so, kid.”

Maybe something else would be figured out, but for now the reassurance felt right. It was too early for firm decisions, but the idea wrapped around her like a cloak.

So long as her family was safe, everyone in her family, then everything would be okay.

She’d still covertly keep watch in the meantime.
Visitor

Chapter Summary

While Emma's gone, Graham's trying to focus on other things.

Chapter Notes

Post The Fallout (finally). Based on two sentence prompts from lessawildmoon and anon. Just a short little thing to move us forward.

Graham unzipped the suitcase on the chair, digging around the pockets before sighing. He could have sworn he’d put the casefile in there before leaving. A chime in the distance told him Simmons was still texting about the new lead, but without the papers to remind him of where Higgins had been in the days before he was found, he was at a loss.

Henry raised his head from the corner of the room. “Need help?”

Graham shook his head with a frown. “You didn’t see any files laying around, did you?”

Henry set his book down and took a glance around. “Nope.”

Graham raised a brow in amusement at the kid’s attempt to look. “It’s fine. I’d rather you not go looking for it, anyway. I could’ve sworn I packed it, though.”

“I saw you putting files in your bag when we left,” Henry said helpfully.

His head bobbed absently in agreement as he picked through his clothes. He needed this distraction, one Simmons had been easy to convince to give. He knew Emma and Henry were both tangled in emotion after Neal’s death, and he had been working to support them without allowing himself to fully feel his own frustration. When it was late, once Henry was asleep, he’d be able to talk about it with Emma quietly, to finally get a grip on his emotions and let her sort through hers. But hushed midnight talks were all they were allowed for now, in the stifling town. They didn’t need to burden Henry any more, but they also couldn’t let the boy out of their sight.

Especially now that the danger was so poignant.

The door rattled and a certain relief filled him. Emma had been gone longer than he would’ve liked in light of the situation. While his shoulders sagged, he lifted the comforter off the bed to check underneath. “Hey, have you seen the..? Oh.”

He blinked, trying to discern if his eyes were playing tricks on him. But no, when they opened, Emma was still grinning, bags of food in hand, beside Maggie. “Guess who came to surprise us,” Emma teased, her voice watery.

Henry was the first off his seat, flying into Maggie’s grip so hard that he heard her huff
as the air was knocked out of her lungs.

He rose to his feet cautiously, watching as the woman pushed back the hair on Henry’s forehead lovingly. “So, this means you missed me?”

Henry said nothing, just dug his face further into her shoulder. Graham tried to catch Emma’s eye, but she was focused on the pair, her gaze softened. It clicked inside him that Maggie was truly here. Their friend from Boston, the one that was like family. She was actually here. In Storybrooke.

He felt a creep of panic starting in his stomach, that realization that he’d have another person to protect. Zelena may feel threatened by exposure, may go after an innocent and ignorant outsider like Maggie. Keeping the secret of this place came second to these fears, as did the idea that more non-residents could make it into town, but that was building as well. “Maggie … how’d you get here?” he asked finally.

She tilted her head and pulled away from the kid. “You really think I wouldn’t be looking after such a bomb?” she asked.

Graham’s lip quirked, smiling despite himself. In truth, her dropping everything for Emma and Henry made perfect sense. “Must’ve been some trip,” he murmured.

She shrugged carelessly. “Fairly quick considering. This damn town is really off the reservation. How did you end up working here in the first place, Humbert?”

Graham grimaced and collapsed onto the foot of the bed. “Long story.”

She strode forward to embrace him, and the automatic reaction to hug her back was something so foreign. He’d been feeling so much closer to The Huntsman than Detective Humbert, especially in reaction to the danger, that sliding into that role again should have been much harder.

She ruffled his hair playfully like she would Henry, and he smirked down at her. She looked around, nose curling at the frilly interior of the room. “They weren’t kidding with the ‘Granny’s,’ were they,” she muttered. She turned to him again. “Was your last foster home around here?” she asked curiously.

Emma finally looked at him, her expression darkened slightly. She looked guilty, and the fingers of her right hand tightened into a fist as she turned. “Maggie … we’re just finishing up tying some loose ends. You really don’t have to stay.”

Graham shook his head. “You should stay the night, though,” he cut in. He knew that he was offering all the support he had to his wife, but he also knew there was no replacing the comfort her best friend would bring her. A night would be containable, small inconsistencies made insignificant once they returned to their lives.

Maggie was looking between them both, brow raised almost comically high. “Are you two really trying to play me like that?” She looked down at Henry. “Kid, you know how long I’m here for.”

Henry grinned. “Until you are damn well satisfied.”

“Henry,” Emma reprimanded, to which the boy only smiled sheepishly.

Maggie shrugged. “I taught the kid well.”
Graham swallowed, mind racing as he started through the possibilities of Maggie staying longer. The magical presence was bound to be heavier with Zelena now exposed, and thus harder to hide to an outsider. But he also knew that even giving a hint that she should leave would only make her dig her heels in. “We should get you a room,” he said thoughtfully.

Emma nodded, brushing her hands down her arms. “I’m sure there’s some available.”

Maggie looked up at her friend and then pulled Henry playfully in a headlock as he pulled his burger from the paper bag Emma was carrying. He giggled loudly when he realized he was stuck, half-heartedly trying to yank away. He looked so much younger with her, not as burdened. “Mind if I take the kid for the night?”

He felt a smile building at the question, at the subtle play Maggie was going for. Yes, he’d have to protect Maggie from the knowledge of this town, but having someone he trusted to help with Henry was truly a gift. “You sure? He’s kind of a handful,” he teased. A part of him was relaxing, Henry’s reaction curling the feeling deep within his stomach.

Emma swiped at her cheeks. “Only if the kid’s up to it.”

“I’m up to it,” he said, his voice muffled against the woman’s jacket. But his next words let Graham knew that the kid was being as cautious as ever. “We should get a garden view.”

Being that the options were usually forest or square, Graham knew the kid was trying to get the option that would be the least revealing in the event of a magical display. He leaned forward, squeezing the boy’s shoulder appreciatively. Henry looked up with a secretive smile, and his heart swelled. The lad needed this just as much as Emma did, but he also would be smart about it.

Maggie grinned. “Sounds good, little man. C’mon, let’s leave these guys and get me settled. I’ve got a bag in the car.”

“You mean you actually prepared?” Henry asked, trailing after her.

She turned before leaving, setting her dark eyes on him. “I’ll bring him back by breakfast. Then I’m going to steal my girl, okay?” she said.

Graham nodded in understanding. She was giving them some time alone, letting Henry process his feelings with her as he proved he needed with that phone call. But Maggie was also fully aware that Emma would need her friend’s unencumbered support as well.

Emma jumped forward one more time before the door closed, tossing her arms around the taller girl’s. Maggie leaned into her as best she could with Emma’s belly between them, petting through her light hair. “I’ll bring him back in one piece, I promise.”

Emma nodded hastily, pulling back almost as quick. “You better. I know he’ll keep you in line.”

“Damn straight,” she replied with a grin.

She shut the door behind them, and Emma turned to him. Her green eyes were sparkling, excited and worried all at once. She tugged her lip between her teeth, leaning heavily against the frame. “Thank you,” she said.

He shuffled forward. “So … Maggie’s here.”

Her jaw tightened slightly, hands cupping the swell of her stomach. “Yeah, she’s here,”
she replied, voice small.

He sighed, but a slow smile started on his face. He reached out, taking her hand between his palms. “I’m glad she’s here.”

He knew it was the right thing to say, because Emma absolutely beamed in response. She squeezed his hand and then tilted her head back with a contented expression. Her fear and sadness weren’t resolved, but she was miles beyond where she had been. “I know it will be hard but … me, too.”

He glanced around the suddenly empty room. His missing folder was in clear sight, haphazardly draped across the nightstand. His phone was still buzzing on the desk. He realized how little distraction from the outside mattered at this point when the tension was already draining out of him. Maggie’s unflinching support, while potentially dangerous, had caused a whirl of optimism within him.

After all they’d been through in the past few days, all the pain and terror and frustration, Maggie’s presence was something hopeful. They’d make it through this.

And now that they were alone, staring into her soft green eyes he knew she felt the same. With Henry safe and away, it meant they had a moment to … ground themselves again. He saw the moment their situation clicked in her mind, her eyes darkening as her lips curled up.

He strode forward, into her space, watching as her pupils dilated. She licked her lips, leaning closer. “What?” she asked playfully.

“You know,” he said, tone low and suggestive. “If you keep looking at me like that we won’t make it to a bed.”

She made a pleased noise and her hands curled into his collar, tugging him to her lips. “Sounds like a challenge.”

Time for talk could wait, because this was overdue.
Meetings

Chapter Summary

Emma learns some interesting news at breakfast with Maggie.

Chapter Notes

Farmgirlusa on Tumblr used the prompt: "YOU DID WHAT?" Post Visitor.
“YOU DID WHAT?!”

Maggie paused in blowing on her coffee, squinting up at her. “What’s the problem?”

Emma swallowed, fingers tensing around the mug in front of her. She worked on slowing her racing heart before finally looking up to her friend again. “Why would you go to the mayor’s office?” she asked lowly. Maggie had dropped off Henry early that morning, then asked to meet downstairs in an hour. She had no idea that her friend was going to be going to a different meeting.

Maggie in turn gave a simple shrug, her face betraying only boredom. “She’s a real piece of work, that one. Trying all she can to be intimidating. She claimed that the townspeople
were worried about an outsider, wanted to question me to put their minds at ease. I’m calling bull on that,” she said, the sipped her drink.

Emma agreed. She didn’t want to even think of what reasons Regina had to call Maggie to her office. At the very least, her friend had sense enough to drop Henry back with them before making her visit. Her stomach knotted, thinking about the restraining order that didn’t include Maggie. “We’ve had … problems with her before,” she said.

Maggie nodded. “I can see why. Poor Graham had to deal with her when he worked here, huh?”

A shiver ran up her spine; the nonchalant tone her friend took was absolutely understandable, but it made her stomach churn at reminder. “Yeah,” she said hollowly.

A clank sounded, and she looked up to see Maggie’s hardened eyes. “Are you going to tell me, or am I going to drag it out of you?”

She chewed on her lip, mind racing. Finally she took a napkin from the dispenser and began to shred it. “She’s … they’ve never been able to get anything to stick,” she said slowly, “but she’s suspected of numerous crimes.”

Maggie sat back into the booth, brow furrowed thoughtfully. “She’s an elected official, right?”

Emma nodded. “Uh … unchallenged. The people that live here … she scares them.” It was so one-dimensional, saying it that way. Edging around curses and magic felt like taking the real danger out of it, but there was no other way to explain things to Maggie. She just needed her to understand that Regina was Bad News, and to protect her friend from further interaction with her. At the very least Zelena was waiting to make her move, so the immediate threats were down to one.

Maggie’s brows rose, and she looked off into the busy dining room. “Graham doesn’t scare easy,” she mused with an air of suspicion.

“Believe me,” Emma growled, her grip hardening around the flimsy paper. Her stomach rolled, and the baby kicked out as if trying to comfort her. Even though she tried to focus, part of her was raging at Regina. She spat out the rest of her statement, bitterness rising within her. “What she did to him was enough to leave a lasting impression.”

Her head snapped to meet Emma’s eyes, face tightened. “Babe,” she started, and then stopped. Her mouth made a firm line, eyes flashing with the kind of anger you only get for someone else. “The first time I met him, what I asked—”

She held up a hand to pause her statement. She blew out a breath, processing.

She remembered that question that wasn’t really a question quite vividly. It was that first night Graham and Maggie got acquainted, the night of her birthday. As Maggie had watched Graham interact enthusiastically with the kids, then ever so slightly less so with the adults later, she had made an observation. She noted the grip he’d had on Emma while in the group, little tensions in his jaw. When she had Emma alone, she’d commented that his reactions were similar to a lot of her old clients: the ones that lived through abuse. Emma hadn’t really answered her, a quick brush of “not my story to tell” the only thing she’d said. Maggie hadn’t pressed, with her or with Graham. She had even apologized for her “drunken psychoanalyzing” the next day. It was probably the only time Maggie had backed down so easily, and probably only because she didn’t know Graham well enough at the time.
Now the same bit of fire was sparking in the depths of her brown eyes, that Mama Bear that lived in her best friend making its escape. Emma leaned forward and tapped her hand in way of bringing her to the present. “He’s not going to want to talk about it. But believe me when I say you shouldn’t mention your meeting around him. I’d rather not get him get into a fight unprepared again.”

Maggie pursed her lips, and she could practically see the vibrations of her stamping down follow-up questions.

“We have a restraining order. She can’t get within 100 yards.”

Maggie’s eye twitched. “You were able to argue burden of proof?”

Emma nodded, hand clenching under the table as she thought about it. David didn’t even have to ask for it; he knew enough what she was been like. “Definitely.”

Her friend looked concerned, brows pulling. Finally, she sighed. “Well, at least I can drop the pleasantries.”

Emma smirked, trying to play towards an easier conversation. “You? You had pleasantries?”

Maggie’s eyes were dancing as she brought her mug up. “I wasn’t openly hostile.”

She chuckled. She rolled her palms over her stomach as the baby seemed to offer his own amusement at the statement. She took the flimsy opportunity to change the subject, as far from Regina as possible. “Thanks for yesterday, by the way. We needed a little distraction.” That morning was comparatively heaven, knots eased from her shoulders and body humming in Graham’s warm arms. They needed it, more than either cared to admit before Maggie arrived.

She waved off her thanks. “How long is this trip going to be, anyway?”

Emma frowned. That was a harder question. “Hopefully not too much longer.”

Maggie nodded. “Stress can’t be good for Junior.”

Emma snorted, but couldn’t help agreeing. “Think we’ve got a lead, at least.”

“How can I help?”

Emma shook her head. “No, it’s fine. The … sheriff is helping.” The thought of referring to one of her parents in such general terms throbbed a bit.

Maggie leaned back, arms folded. “And now you have another law enforcement officer in your midst. Use my resources.”

She worried her lip. On one hand, she’d love the help, and knew Graham would be relieved by it. But there was only so much they could give her to do and also keep her safe and protected from the secret. “Maybe,” she said finally.

Maggie rolled her eyes. “Fine. Who else is helping?”

Emma looked around the diner. “Sheriff and his wife. The guy that works down at the docks. The librarian. One of the waitresses—“

“Sounds like quite the crack-shot team,” she deadpanned.
“Hey!” she replied, then thought over what she just described. “They’ve got Graham.”

“Sounds like the needed him,” she mused. “Though now I get why he transferred.”

Emma looked away, careful not to meet her eye. Maggie had always been very perceptive, though she was very good about not overtly talking about what she saw unless it was necessary. Thus, she didn’t have to worry about her coddling Graham or trying to corner him to talk.

But the more she thought about it, the more worried she became that Maggie might retaliate against Regina. In another situation, Emma would have stood by gleefully. But her friend would be too ill-prepared to take on that witch and all her magic.

Emma couldn’t begin to backpedal the situation, however; it would feel too much like making light of what both Graham and Henry went through. She’d just need to work on distraction.

“Emma.”

She looked up, meeting matching green eyes. Panic crept up her spine a fraction, and she swallowed. “Mary Margaret, hi.”

Maggie was drinking her coffee, watching the newcomer with an indifferent expression. Mary let her gaze float over her friend, but refocused on Emma. “I wanted to check in on you,” Mary Margaret said uncertainly.

“Uh ….” She hesitated. This was the first time she’d seen her since the funeral. She wasn’t ready for her mother to offer condolences, especially in front of Maggie. She grimaced slightly, and adjusted against the seat. “Mary Margaret, this is Maggie. Maggie, this is the sheriff’s wife.”

Her mother looked stung at the impersonal tone, but swallowed it back quickly to shake the other woman’s hand in greeting. “It’s nice to meet you. What’s brought you to Storybrooke?”

Maggie jerked her chin in Emma’s general direction as way of explaining to her as well. “I was able to weasel some time off by doing a trade with a buddy of mine. It’s been a busy couple of months, haven’t had a vacation in a while. A trip to the middle of nowhere sounded like just the thing,” she said, winking at Emma. Then she gave a more serious look. “I’m just helping out. Needed to check on the fam.”

Something in her eyes changed, and Mary Margaret looked at Emma with a startled expression. Slowly, an understanding clicked in her expression, and she managed a stiff smile. “Of course. You wanted to help your friend,” she said softly.

The air was thick with what was being unsaid. Maggie made no move to let her know she had caught on to it, but Emma had no expectations that she didn’t. “No different than the last eleven years,” Maggie replied.

“Eleven years,” Mary Margaret repeated to herself. She shook her head as if to clear the thought, and gave a watery smile. “I’m glad she has you, then.”

Emma pressed her lips together, looking up at Mary Margaret. At one time, she was her roommate, her best friend. The memory of it clings to her, the way they were before all hell broke loose. She missed it, so much.

And now she has Maggie, the friend that barged into her life with much less subtlety.
than her mother had, but stayed in her life so much longer. And yet…. Her eyes were misting, a lump in her throat forming as quickly as her attempts to quash it down. The lights around them flickered a bit, just enough for Maggie to notice. Emma blinked rapidly and nodded. “Maggie’s a big help,” she agreed, then added a playful, “when she wants to be.”

Maggie stopped regarding the electricity and nodded to her with a smirk. “Only then,” she teased. “And jerk-off landing in the middle of hubby’s investigation warrants a visit.”

Emma sighed just as Mary Margaret stiffened. “You know Henry’s dad died,” Mary Margaret said defensively, her voice tight.

Maggie’s eyes narrowed, tension in her spine. “No, his dad didn’t die. His biological father, the one that was seven years older than her, the one that landed my best friend pregnant and incarcerated at sixteen, died.”

“Mags,” Emma said warningly.

Maggie huffed and leaned back, crossing her arms in front of her chest as if to invite argument.

Mary Margaret’s brows were knitting together, large eyes swimming with tears. “He’s the reason you went to jail?” she asked, voice cracking. She could hear the rest of the statement, the one behind the words: he’s the reason you had to give up Henry?

“It’s not important.” Emma said firmly, directing it at both women. “We’re processing what happened at our own pace, and what’s done is done.”

Neither woman looked placated with her words. What concerned her, however, was her mother’s expression. She was trying so hard to make it fit in her head, to let this new piece of information settle, and it was written all over her face.

Emma drummed her fingers across the table, and whiplashed the conversation. “Do you have an update on the case?”

Her mother flitted her hands over her stomach, visibly trying to compose herself. She sniffed loudly and swiped at her cheeks. “No, nothing yet.”

“When did you last see her?” she asked.

“Zel—the midwife?” Mary Margaret shook her head. “Not since our last appointment.”

“She took a little too much interest in your pregnancy, Mary Margaret,” Emma said pointedly. Then, her brow furrowed and she leaned heavily back into her seat. “And mine.”

“Great, two pregnant women are on this case tracking down a psycho midwife,” Maggie muttered. She knew Maggie wouldn’t try to pull either of them off it, but it did indeed make things much more complicated for both. “How far along are you, anyway?”

Mary Margaret looked over to Emma, then back to her friend. “About thirty-eight weeks, now.” She turned worried eyes to Emma, widened slightly. “Emma … she said I was probably close to going into labor.”

Maggie hummed. “Em, let me help,” she said.

Emma winced. “Ask Graham. It’s his case,” she replied as a way of stalling.
“My husband’s the lead,” Mary Margaret added, shoulders squaring. Her tone was altogether dismissive. “I don’t know that he’ll want outside help.”

Emma clicked her tongue, the hostility in her mother a strange departure from her usual nature. “I’m sure David needs all hands on deck. I can get her researching with us.” It would keep her busy, but also help in the long run as well.

“Sounds fun,” Maggie muttered.

Emma kicked her under the table, but Maggie only smiled brightly. Oh, she would be trouble.

Mary Margaret hesitated. “If that’s what you want, Emma.”

She faced her so her expression would be clear. “I think it’s what’s best.”

This merging of her worlds was going to be difficult, but there was a different part of her that felt a flash of excitement. She wanted Maggie to know her mother, wanted her mother to know Maggie. Mary Margaret was just beginning to understand, and perhaps this would be the thing that would truly make her realize how important this life was to her.

And how important it was that she knew: she was happy, and had people looking out for her happiness.

And a glimmer started, one she almost didn’t want to acknowledge: maybe someday those two different worlds would coexist permanently.
Name Game

Chapter Summary

Henry's going through his new purchase.

Chapter Notes

Skagengiirl and anon both asked what names they were thinking for the baby. So, this is very early in the naming process. Henry's just gotten his book of baby names after The Shopping Trip. This kid is very likely not going to have a name until he or she is here.

“Hey, found your name.”

Graham looked up from his paperwork to Henry over on the couch. The lad was leaning into Emma, his nose stuck in the book he was getting very familiar with. “Oh, yeah?” she asked.

Henry nodded. Emma absently pet back his hair, still focused on the movie playing. It was a mellow evening, the first Friday in a long while where they had nothing planned. Tomorrow was dinner at the Simmons’, Sunday was a meeting at Gia’s for the next school event, then the next week was full of appointments and work and meetings. This was the calm before the storm.

Graham set the file to the side and leaned back into the armchair. “Well?”

“Whole or universal.’ Pretty cool,” he pronounced. “I still like mine better.”

Graham laughed, and he saw Emma grin. She grabbed the remote and paused the film. “Sure thing, ‘home ruler.’” She kissed his head and leaned over to read the page.

“Did your mom have a reason for calling you that in this life?” he asked. He knew perfectly well that Henry had been her father, the one she murdered for the curse. He remembered the old, frail man that would cower to his daughter, one he barely saw in the castle in any capacity but as her servant. He knew there had to be a reason in Emma’s memories for giving him the name.

Emma blushed a little as she admitted, “one of the nicknames is Harry.”

“As in Potter!” Henry surmised, and then collapsed into giggles.

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, kid. Just be glad you’re a boy, because you can guess where a seventeen year old’s head was at for girl’s names.”

“I could have been Hermione?” he asked, his face screwing up as he considered it.
She swatted at him and then pulled him closer. “Maybe. Maybe you’d have been Tonks.”

Henry snorted and turned the page.

“Are we going off story characters, now?” Graham asked, giving a fake sigh even as his face split into a wide smile. “Our next kid will be from a book?”

“You’re one to talk, you actual literal storybook character,” Emma teased.

He chuckled. He didn’t really have much of an opinion on names; as far as he was concerned they were mostly superfluous, being that he spent one life completely without one. He rather loved the feeling of working to find one for the new person all together, though. He directed his next question to Henry. “Well, what’s my name mean?” he asked.

Henry flipped through the pages. “Gravelly homestead.’ Look! We both have ‘home’ in our names! That’s kinda cool, Dad.”

“I think I’ll keep it then,” he joked. He rubbed his jaw thoughtfully, “it’s a boy day. What’s today’s suggestion?”

“Does that mean we’ve officially given up on the twin theory?” Emma asked hopefully.

“No,” Graham and Henry said together.

Emma rolled her eyes. “Sure. Don’t trust the ultrasound.”

Henry flicked through the pages rapidly, eyes bouncing all across. “If we match, Dad, maybe the baby should match mom? Emmett is the one that means the same.”

Emma scowled. “Kid, that’s the same thing as a junior, which I have already nixed. No, thank you.”

Henry’s eyes were alight, mischief sparkling in them. “C’mon, it’s not really your name.”

“No thanks, kid. On to the next one,” she insisted.

Graham got up from his chair and sat on one of the arms of the couch. He looked over the page and read through the definition. “I don’t know if it’s any better than Leroy, Henry.”

Henry hummed and skipped to the last third of the book. “If I’m a ruler, maybe the baby can be Ryan. Means ‘little king.’ And hey, it’s Irish … and English, but it could work.”

He ruffled the kid’s hair, but didn’t comment on how sweet he thought it was that the boy was trying to include a heritage that wasn’t truly his. He shook his head as if to clear the thought and reminded himself that he was in this timeline, that it was just as real.

“Better,” Emma decided. “But then we’d have to explain to Maggie why we’re using her brother’s name.”

Henry groaned. “We know too many people.”

“We have some time to find something, Henry. Don’t stress about it,” Graham reminded.

“I’m not stressed,” Henry said stubbornly, and flipped to the middle. “I want to help.”
Emma leaned her head on the top of his and used one hand to cover her stomach. “I love that you’re helping. Your opinion’s going to be just as important, you know. But like Graham said, we still have almost five months to decide.”

Henry huffed but nodded. “Okay. But I’m going to keep this, okay?”

“Of course. We got it mostly for you,” Graham said. He remembered their worries when Emma first told him, how they wanted to be sure Henry didn’t feel left out or replaced. So far, their fears were null; Henry was nothing if not excited, and he wanted to participate in every aspect.

“Good,” he said, then leaned down to rest his head on the bump, his voice hushed. “I promise I’ll find you the best name.”

Graham felt his heart tug, still so awed that Henry was so in love with his sibling.

“He’s going to have the greatest big brother,” Emma said, her voice thickened with tears that he knew better than to comment on.

He hugged his mother around the waist, and Graham watched them both with soft eyes. “Luckiest little thing,” he murmured, then reached out to take Emma’s offered hand. He squeezed it gently, and hovered over them until Henry deliberately scooted closer to allow him room to settle in.

Emma turned the movie back on, the low hum of noise simply a background. Quietly, they resumed their actions, Henry thumbing through the book, Emma watching, and he with his file again. But they remained crammed on one couch, curling around each other until they were comfortable.

There would be plenty of time to make final decisions, and he knew it would be one they’d make as a family.
Finding a date for the wedding is harder than she thought, but not for the reasons it should be.

Post Five Times Emma Thought About Getting Married, pre Plans for Home. Anon asked "In RH, did Emma ever have a pre-wedding freak-out? Did Graham?" I'm certain they both had more moments of nervousness, but here's one where they're actually talking about it.

It was dark out, moonlight slipping into the room from the open curtain. She felt boneless, draped over his chest. The sheets were tangled at her ankles and her skin was cool wherever his wasn’t firmly pressed, but she couldn’t bring herself to reach for the covers. He stroked her hair in long, slow movements, the other arm curling her to his body by her waist.

It was a holiday, the day after being presented the small band that was currently resting on her finger. It still felt like they were in this little bubble, the real world not infringing on the newness their life had taken. Tomorrow she’d store that ring in its box until they sorted out a ceremony to give it permanent placement, and they’d go back to work.

“I’ll need to call Maggie,” she said, her eyes slowly blinking as he threaded through her tresses. She was easily fatigued for the past month, and that didn’t really help things. But for now she was relaxed and lazy as she thought about what she had to do. “And get the girls together.”

He hummed a low sound of agreement but didn’t stop the languid caress. “I’ll start letting the precinct know tomorrow,” he agreed. “I’ll need a day off, and I’ll get a leave scheduled near the end.”

She propped her head up on her palm, staring down at him. He didn’t bother to shave yesterday or today and stubble was forming along his jaw and cheeks. His hair was damp at the scalp, curls twisting along his temples. His eyes were closed, but brow furrowed as he thought about what was left to do. Finally, her eyes darted down to his hand, the bare finger. “When do you want to get married?” she asked bluntly.

His lips curled up and he grabbed her left hand. With a thumb, he brushed across the metal on there. “Whenever you’re ready,” he said simply.

Her stomach bubbled, nervous energy popping through her. She gulped down a breath before cupping his jaw in her hand. “Preferably before morning sickness hits,” she said, half teasingly.

His smile grew into a grin and his eyes popped open. He leaned forward to capture her
in a brief kiss. “I could work with that.”

She leaned into him to press into a harder kiss, trying to squelch the sudden drop in her stomach. Holding on to him made her feel more secure, the tightness melting away if only for a moment. Heat slowly built within her again, and she sighed into his mouth as he met her seamlessly.

After a long moment, he deliberately separated them, keeping close but also making room for their conversation to continue. He was staring at her with that sheen in his eye, an awe that still felt so foreign. He bumped their noses. “We’re pregnant,” he whispered to himself, and his palm moved to cover her stomach.

The nerves perked up again, and she forced herself not to tense in his arms. She nodded swiftly, and dropped her cheek to his chest. She felt a little lightheaded, the idea of the two major milestones colliding in her head. It wasn’t bad, these things that were happening. She wanted them both.

But she didn’t feel pregnant. She didn’t feel engaged. Not yet.

“What about Friday?”

She tilted her head to look up at him. “What about Friday?”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “Wanna get married then?”

She pressed her lips together, ignoring the way her heart raced anxiously. “Okay,” she replied softly.

With a twist, he switched their positions so she was laying against the pillow. She sighed pleasantly as he settled over her, willing to sublimate so she could deal with her anxiety later. She wrapped her legs around his hips and her hands rolled up his back to keep him close. Carefully, he placed kisses along her collarbone and ascended her neck, lingering at the juncture of her jaw and ear. “Too quick?”

She felt a burst of relief; realizing just how well he knew her and would accommodate her was exhilarating. She took a moment to think about it, to consider if she did think it was too soon. Finally, she shook her head. “No, not really. I want to be married to you, Graham,” she asserted. It didn’t matter if it were months down the line or tomorrow; both filled her with the same emotions.

“But?” he prompted, lips brushing her cheekbone.

She closed her eyes and shook her head. She should have known he wouldn’t let her leave it at that. She took a deep breath and dug up her worries. “It’ll make it real.”

She can feel his smile on her skin. “Kind of the point.”

She let out a harsh exhale of a laugh. “Once we go out there tomorrow, once we start planning … it’ll be real. Not in a ‘this is one reality’ kind of way, like everything else is. It’ll just be us. It’ll make our lives, both versions … it’ll make them just one.”

He leaned back a fraction to look her in the eye. “Does that scare you?”

She played with the hair at the nape of his neck, thinking about the question for a long moment. “Yes. Because then it can be taken away more easily.”
His hand drifted down to her stomach again. “Me or the baby?”

“All of it.” There was the crux of her feelings. This baby was their lives, their pasts merging. It set this life in stone, the only reality for them. Something about the idea of their child, the mix of them that grew within her, made her startlingly aware of how quickly he had been taken from her in that first life. If she told people about the pregnancy and stood in front of a judge to tell the world just how much she cared for Graham ….

“Nothing’s promised, Emma, but making it real isn’t going to make it disappear,” he said delicately.

She nodded jerkily. Logically, she knew this. They’ve dealt with this idea before, back when he was in the hospital. They went over the ways to make it feel better, to have that courage to move forward. She couldn’t make herself calm with that knowledge, though. It was so much to lose, now. “Are you scared?” she finally asked.

He gave a wry smile. “Definitely.”

She blinked. “Really?”

He nodded. “Yeah, really.”

“You never seem it,” she mumbled.

He stared down at her belly for a long moment before his lashes flicked up. “I didn’t think I’d be able to do this for you. I didn’t think I’d be … I didn’t think fate would let me. And I still have so much of my past that hasn’t caught up with me yet, and I’m scared of that. And I was dead half a year ago, so there’s that, too.”

He said it was such casualness that she shivered involuntarily. She never pressed that idea before, but now she couldn’t help asking, “Do you remember it?”

He hesitated, and in that moment she saw such a stark vulnerability that her breath caught. “Not really,” he said slowly. “I just remember grey, and feeling alone. I’m sure there was more, but it’s not letting me remember.”

Her fingers tensed into his shoulder blades, brows stitching as she tried not to linger on it. “But you remember dying,” she said bluntly.

He nodded. “Yeah, I remember. I don’t like thinking about it, but I remember.”

She took that in. “Was it like it was with me and Henry? Did you just wake up here like it was a normal day?”

His brow wrinkled as he considered it. “Yeah, I suppose. Thinking back … I don’t think I can even tell when the first day was. It’s like it’s always been this way.”

“Yeah,” she murmured. She reviewed what he said in her mind, going back to the other things he feared. They’ve talked about the pregnancy, but not bluntly. She knew he was happy, and knew he was planning their future, but his ‘do this for you’ was standing in her mind and niggling its way to her doubts. “What do you really think about being a father, Graham?”

A slow smile crossed his face, cobalt eyes lighting up, telling her all she needed even before his mouth shaped words. One shoulder went up, and a flash of teeth sparked before he kissed her again. His lips still touched hers when he broke this kiss, dark eyes set on her. “I’m absolutely terrified.”
Her eyebrows rose. “Terrified?”

He nodded. “Terrified,” he reiterated. He kissed her again, and his palm flattened over her stomach. “I can’t wait, but I don’t know how to do this. I’m scared I’ll screw it all up, but I— I’m so excited that I get the chance to be a dad.”

“And Henry—“

“I hope he lets me be his dad, too,” he said and she can see the nervousness bubbling within him. “I don’t know how I got this lucky.”

She let out a long breath, tears pooling in her throat. “Exactly. That’s why I’m so scared.”

He nodded, and took her hand. He played with her fingers absently. “I’ve never been lucky. Not for one moment of that first life, at least. Meeting you in Storybrooke … well, for those months I could consider it working toward lucky. Nothing like this, though.”

She squeezed her eyes tight, trying not to think of his body’s drop in her arms, of losing him before they got a chance to experience what she knew even back then was love. She counted back in her head, over all the events of hope that were ripped from her … she could relate. “I was never lucky, either.”

He rested his forehead on hers. “I know. Maybe that’s why we’re getting this restart. So we can have our chance at luck.”

“It would mean embracing it,” she said with a nod. She looked into his dark eyes and brushed her hands over his face. Absently, she found the things she loved about him that she hoped to find on their child’s face. She could admit it, now. She did feel lucky. And she wanted that feeling to continue, as much as it frightened her. “Friday sounds like a good place to start.”

He smiled. “Yeah?”

Her hands wandered down his back, eyes darkening as she grinned. “Yeah. Now show me how lucky I am.”

Later, after she’d gotten her breath back and was feeling like she could take on the world, she called Maggie. If she was going to make this real, starting with her best friend seemed like the thing to do.

“Hello?”

“Mags. Think you can use those miles to come out for Friday?”

“Did he finally ask?”

She blinked. “You knew?”

“Please. He was prying for your ring size back in October.”

Her mouth dropped open. “October?” She turned to the bed to see him grinning smugly from the pillow.

“Yeah. What made him finally think you’re ready?”

She sat on the edge of the bed, beaming down at him. “October,” she chastised
playfully with a shake of her head. He shrugged and then leaned up to nuzzle into her neck.

She bit her lip, feeling her worries smooth away. For all the reasons her stomach had been in knots before, it was strange that this fact released many of them. It wasn’t because she was pregnant, or because it was the right thing to do. He asked her to marry him because he wanted to be married to her.

“You stuck on that? Honestly, I’m surprised it took this long, too.” Her friend’s voice was teasing.

She pressed the phone to her ear, but gazed lovingly at him. She mouthed a simple ‘I love you,’ to which he responded by embracing her more fully.

“It’s not a necessity, but it’s something I want,” he reiterated, and her heart tugged all the more. Her grip on the phone slackened, and she kissed him again.

“Hello? Can we discuss how this came to be, or am I going to have to call back after you jump your new fiancé?”

She snorted and pulled away. “Can you come Friday?”

“Of course. Actually, make it Thursday. I’ll help you get ready.”

“Good. Then I can make sure you’re not still freaking out that I’m pregnant, too.”

“Wait, what?”
Chapter Summary

It’s nice to have someone else have your back.

Chapter Notes

Post Meetings. Not a specific prompt being used, just an amalgam of people’s reaction to Maggie in SB.

“Hey there, stranger.”

Graham looked up and smiled tiredly at Maggie. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the few patrons left of the lunch crowd at Granny’s were milling out because of the newcomer’s presence. He knew the outsider made everyone nervous, and honestly he felt more at ease as the crowd dispersed. One of the many reasons he enjoyed Maggie’s presence, as scary as it could be. “Hey. Is Emma back, too?”

She shrugged. “She stayed behind with the Sheriff’s wife. Who, by the way, is a real pain.”

Graham gave a tight smile and pushed his plate away.
His feelings on Snow were mixed, to say the least. He remembered how much he respected her once, and wondered at how much it had chipped away over the years. It had perhaps begun with the time Regina had come back to the palace with her tail between her legs, when she had punished him and the rest of her slaves in the castle for her troubles. When it became clear that they were expendable in the royal’s eyes. At least then he had expected it somewhat, had known for quite some time just how little he meant.

But the way Snow had treated Emma and Henry in the ups and downs since returning … he just couldn’t feel that same confidence he’d once had for the young princess.

He couldn’t go about explaining all that to Maggie, though, so he settled on, “She’s a little overprotective, I suppose,” he said noncommittally.

Maggie scoffed. “Overprotective? No, I think she’s a little more than that,” she contested. “She’s got something on Em, for sure.”

He leaned back, feeling exhausted with it. “Yeah.”

Maggie grabbed a fry from his plate and dipped it in the ketchup. “Where’s the kid?”

Graham gestured upwards with his chin. “He wanted to have some time to himself for a bit. He’s on a video call with Gia’s kids.” Of course, he didn’t mention the fact that there was a baby monitor at his hip, low enough to keep the kid’s privacy but loud enough for his ears to pick up on anything unusual. The two floors separating them was the most distance he’d allow at this point.

She looked to the ceiling, her expression thoughtful. “It’s good he’s got friends to talk to,” she mused. She met his eye pointedly. “He’s really confused at this point.”

“I know,” Graham murmured, feeling pain shoot through him at the reminder. “We talked a little about it today, but I think it’s going to take a lot more time before he fully copes with what happened.”

“I’m not going to say I don’t sympathize; of course I do. I love that kid, and I hate that he had to go through this. But he’s better off,” Maggie said darkly.

Graham winced. “Henry’s lost a lot in his life,” he started, and then shook his head. Anything in that sort of explanation wouldn’t make sense to her. Slowly, he corrected himself, “I mean, he’s missed a lot. I can’t say that I’ll miss the guy, but Henry deserved a chance to get to know him.”

Maggie stubbornly crossed her arms, brow furrowed deeply. “I don’t agree.”

“Henry deserved to have his questions answered,” Graham coaxed.

Finally, Maggie sighed. “Yeah, you’re right. Especially with all this shit that’s going on.”

“Exactly.”

Maggie tsked. “I hate to see you all like this. You need to get this midwife kidnapper or whatever she is and get the hell outta dodge.”

“Yeah. If only things were that easy,” he muttered. It would be a fight even after Zelena was defeated, he was sure. Not only was there still another witch with ill intent, there was Snow and David to compromise with. It wouldn’t be simple to leave this town.
She leaned back in her seat. “I’m surprised you came this far. You never talk about Maine. Didn’t think you had any ties left over here.”

Graham almost laughed, could feel the strange burst of humorless laughter bubble up within him. His chest tightened slightly, and he glanced to the back of the diner, where the dart board used to reside. There were a lot of memories here, and most of them bad. “I didn’t think I’d ever want to see this place again,” he admitted. “But David and Mary Margaret … well, they needed the help.” Emma deserved to see them.

She leaned forward to grab his mug, taking a sip of the tea there. “Good Samaritan?” she asked, a smile in her voice.

He chuckled, knowing that even she knew better. He would do anything for Emma, and that was the main reason he was back in this town. But something else had been fraying on his nerves, a new realization. “This … this woman. If we didn’t take the fight here, she would have brought it to us.”

She hummed a response, thinking that over. “And you’re sure of that?” she asked.

Graham nodded, feeling the truth of it turn his stomach. For some reason, Zelena was targeting Snow’s family. He didn’t have any illusions that she would have left them safe in New York, especially with the way she had stared at Emma’s stomach like their child was her prize. “Yeah, I’m sure. It’s all been connected somehow. I just don’t know her reasons.”

She twisted the small sliver hoop in her ear absently. “Not all criminals have reasons, Graham, no matter how much we’d like to think so.”

He let out a low breath, and listened to the steady drone of Henry’s garbled conversation as he processed that. He tried not to think of a weight on his chest and a sharp command that would follow. “Yeah, I know,” he said darkly.

“You do, don’t you?” There was something on Maggie’s face, something curiously knowledgeable. It wasn’t pitying, but it was similar enough to pull his spine straight.

“We should all have dinner tonight,” he said abruptly. “I know Henry’d like that.”

She blinked, and then nodded. The look that had set him on edge was gone in an instant, replaced by something more pleased. She smiled over the lip of the mug. “Of course the kid’ll like it. He’s Emma’s, and it’s food.”

Graham snickered, and gestured to her. “Go ahead and order something. I’ll text Em. Her cravings have been all over the place lately.”

“Yeah, I remember,” she said dryly. “And they’re not always for food and they don’t always care if other people are around to hear it.”

Graham’s brow raised. He tried to hide his smile as he began texting. “Your own fault for not planning ahead.”

“Why would I get a room when your couch is always available,” she said simply. She rose, menu in hand. She swatted him with it before pressing it to her chest. “Doesn’t mean I want to hear the result of all those cravings. It’s why I got Henry and me a room on the floor up from you.”

He grinned, not bothering to look up from his phone. “See, you can be taught!”
“Shut up,” she muttered, but then grinned as she turned to the counter. Immediately, she bumped into the person that had covertly imposed.

The dark haired woman looked as poised as ever, sweeping her gaze across the diner before zeroing on him with a scowl. “Well, I see you are still keeping a keen eye on Henry.”

The scathing tone was nothing new, and Graham barely lifted his head to acknowledge the woman.

Maggie, however, had gone from laughing to utter fire in barely a second. “Violations of restraining orders equal jail time, you know.” Though there was mockery in her words, her voice was thick with anger.

Regina’s dark gaze flicked over Maggie, and her lips curled into a hard sneer. “A piece of paper is nothing.”

Maggie’s expression flashed with challenge. The menu dropped to the floor as she planted her feet in a readied stance. “Oh, really?”

“Maggie,” Graham said shortly, stepping up to hold her back by the forearm. Maggie gave him a onceover, looking very much like she wanted to rip away and tear into Regina. As much as he’d like to oblige, Maggie would be no match. After steadying her, he turned his gaze to the other woman. “As you know, you’re not welcome, Regina.”

She sniffed, the snarled at him. “You need to take better care of Henry. Zelena made it clear that she will go after him.”

A sharp touch of fear shot down his spine, but he examined her warily. If this was some scheme to get close to his son …. “And why would that be?”

Her eyes narrowed, and glanced over at Maggie again. Maggie was barely holding herself together, every muscle poised to jump in at any moment. For now, the older woman seemed to be weighing her options, finding the use of her magic a poor choice against the outsider at this time. Regina’s lips pursed, and she darted her eyes back to him. “Because she’s my sister,” she admitted finally.

Graham just held from rolling his eyes at the utter absurdity. “Of course she is. What has this got to do with Henry?”

She raised her chin. “She wants to destroy anything I own.”

A growl began in the depths of his stomach, rolling outwards as he took a threatening step closer. “You do not own Henry,” he said, and the heat itched through his arms.

Maggie stepped to flank him, hands fisting at her side. “I don’t know where you think you get the right to violate the law and try to lay claim over my godson, but you better step back before I end this,” she threatened darkly.

Regina almost looked amused, and it chilled something to his very core. Carefully, he moved to cover Maggie. “It was good that you gave us the warning. We can take over from here,” he said neutrally.

Her eyes hardened. “I certainly don’t trust you to keep him safe. Let me see my son.”

“Excuse you?” Maggie demanded, utter shock coloring her tone. “What in the hell is wrong with you, lady?”
Graham ignored her. “You know he doesn’t want to see you. If you try, you won’t get far,” he warned.

Her eyes were glassy but hard as she squared her shoulders. “You think you could stop me? We know what trying did for you before.”

Before he could respond, Maggie was in her face. “You do not get to threaten my family, Madame Mayor. And there isn’t a chance in hell that you’re getting near Henry.” She pulled her phone out to show a text on the screen. “Looks like the sheriff’s on his way. You had better leave now before I beat you to the ground while we wait for him.”

He wished he could revel in Maggie’s actions, but fear was the winning factor in this case. He yanked her back, something Maggie had not been prepared for. She ripped out of his grip, stunned. She almost looked appalled. “Not now,” he demanded lowly. “Go to Henry.”

Maggie shook her head, her eyes hard. “I don’t trust this bitch around you, either.”

Graham felt panic at her insistence. He didn’t want to be near her, either, but he needed to be the one between Regina and the people he cared about. He felt dizzy as he sought the words that would get Maggie far away, preferably helping Henry upstairs and creating another barrier between the witch and him.

Regina huffed as if in indignation. “I don’t care about you two. Zelena is after Henry, don’t you understand? And she doesn’t get him,” she hissed.

“And he doesn’t need your brand of protection,” he shot back.

She sneered. “I will go through you if need be, Huntsman. Like I said, I don’t care about you or any of the other peasants you can scrape together to defy me. I will crush you. Your lives mean nothing.”

He heard a click to his right. Maggie had pulled her gun out of the holster, aiming at center mass. “Back. Off.”

Graham felt the energy change in the air, the stir of magic coming in waves from the dark witch. He knew he needed to stop this from escalating further. He couldn’t risk Maggie like this. He took a step between the two women. “If Zelena is after you, then you are the threat to Henry,” he said lowly, intoned with hatred he couldn’t pretend to hide.

He could see her debating with herself, wanting to use her power to slice through him and Maggie both, then fight her way to Henry. As much as she claimed it was about protecting him, he could see the triumph behind her eye, the idea that this would bring them together. He had no doubt that the gun in Maggie’s hand would do nothing against her, and his mind was scrambling.

“We’re waiting on the cuffs,” Maggie reminded. Her aim was steady, even with the block Graham had tried to create. “If you make any sudden move, I’ll put a bullet in your shoulder.”

Regina glowered at her, and her palm began to spark ever so slightly. “You are dangerously arrogant, Miss Hodge.”

He felt the urgency within him grow, ready to pounce before she could even begin to think of touching his family.
“Regina!”

Graham looked back, internally deflating at the sight of David. His heart was hammering in his chest, adrenaline drumming through him. As much as he loved Maggie here, David was best right now. David knew, and David could defuse this.

The blond was slightly out of breath, hands out as he tried to determine what was going on. The cruiser was still idling in the street, the rush he’d taken clear. His eyes bounced back and forth over the three, worry coloring his countenance.

“Sheriff. Nice to meet you. You’re just in time,” Maggie said smoothly, and pushed the safety back on her gun. “We have a restraining order violation, and a whole new host of threats from this one.”

“Maggie, go to Henry,” Graham demanded.

She looked like she was going to protest again, defiance all through her stance. But after a long beat, she glanced back at David and then to the ceiling. She nodded once. “You’re up there in five or I’m coming back down.”

He knew the chance to check on the lad would win over her wish to protect him, at least now that there was someone else that had his back. He didn’t let himself relax, though, and instead pinned Regina with his gaze. “Fine,” he said simply.

Maggie took the chance to shoulder check Regina on her way out, to which Regina snarled darkly. His eyes fluttered shut. This would not bode well if that would continue.

“Do you really think I’m going to let you arrest me, Charming?” she asked mockingly once Maggie was gone.

Graham shook his head. “He’ll come around,” he insisted, but straightened her jacket and strode to the exit. She paused at the door and turned to David. “You better tell your daughter to brush up on her magic, or else Zelena will make quick work of you all.” David turned his eyes on Graham for a moment, and there was an uncertainty there. His tone changed to a mutter. “It was supposed to extend to you as well.”

Graham ignored it. “Do we understand each other?”

Regina looked between them. “He’ll come around,” she insisted, but straightened her jacket and strode to the exit. She paused at the door and turned to David. “You better tell your daughter to brush up on her magic, or else Zelena will make quick work of you all.” Something seemed to occur to her then, and a small smile touched her lips. “Then Henry will truly only have me.” She sauntered out the door before either could reply.

“I don’t like how frequently I’ve had to walk into these things, Graham,” David commented.

Graham leaned against the table and nodded, feeling exhaustion begin in the depths of his bones. “Me neither.” There was more than a small part of him that wanted to chase Regina down the street, weapon in hand. It was only the newer part of him that tempered that impulse; even the slave that knew exactly what she was capable of wanted to tear her limb from limb for threatening his family. He felt barely held together, but at least he knew he had others on his side.
“It’s a good thing she messaged me,” David said quietly.

He grimaced, but nodded. “She’s sharp like that.”

He nodded, and his thumb brushed against his badge. “She’s a good friend to have,” he declared. “Especially when you’ve unilaterally decided to place yourself last.”

Graham blew out a low breath. “Yeah, well.”

David only gave him a look; he didn’t bother to reprimand him. “I’ll have to thank her one day … for being that kind of friend for you and Emma and Henry.”

He glanced away, not sure how to respond. This was that strange bridge, the old and the new not knowing how to mix. He himself felt torn, somewhere between the loving detective and the wild huntsman. It was unsettling to have them try to merge, at least without Emma around.

“Go check on Henry. I’ll keep watch down here, make sure Snow and Emma get back safe.”

Graham hesitated a beat, and leaned forward to squeeze his arm. “Thank you, David.”

He gave a smile, in a way that he never knew matched Emma’s so well. “Of course, Graham. You’re all part of our family.”
There’s some preparation to be done before they can get to Storybrooke.

For oncer4life11 on FFnet, who really wanted some Swan Believer.

“Mom?”

Emma turned to the open door from her stack of paperwork and smiled at her son. “Hey, kid. Ritu back home?”

He nodded, dropping his bag by the door and sitting heavily on the couch beside her. “I said bye to Avery and Aamer. Avery showed me a new gaming app, so I can still play him while we’re there,” he said, but there was something low in his tone.

She was quiet a moment, watching his bowed head. “That’s good,” she said simply, not pressing for now.

He nodded. “Ritu said she’s making her lentil stew, if we wanna come over. She said even ‘the creepy guy’ is invited if we think he can handle it.”

She chuckled. “That could be awkward. I’ll ask what they think.”

He looked around the room. “Where’s Dad and Hook?”

She sighed and leaned back. “Graham’s at the precinct. He’s letting them know he’s taking a leave to work on an investigation at his old town,” she said.

Henry’s nose wrinkled. “Is that what we’re saying?”

She nodded. “Yeah. I know it’s ... well, kinda lame, but it’s the best we’ve got.”

“And Hook?”

“He’s helping sell the bit. If anyone asks, they used to be partners, okay?” she said.

“Okay,” he said, then cocked his head to the side. “Isn’t it weird that you know him better than Dad does, though?”

She grimaced slightly, her mind flashing to the almosts where it came to the man. If it wasn’t for Graham’s return, she might have allowed herself to trust him, to let him in. The thought nagged the back of her mind, even though she knew her feelings for him weren’t a factor anymore. She couldn’t say the same for Killian, and it left a lingering tension between all three.
Maybe they should skip dinner. Ritu had an eye for those sort of things.

She cleared her throat and focused on answering Henry. “Well, sure, but it’s easier to explain this way. At least explain to the 20th. Graham needs an excuse for why he’s leaving, and why we don’t know how long we’ll be. If Killian was his partner, then it makes sense to them,” she clarified.

The detectives all knew how fiercely loyal and protective her husband was, so it would be easy to claim he had a sense of obligation to Storybrooke. Besides which, Killian had taken to ignoring her in favor of using Graham as the go-between. As infuriating as it was, it did help in keeping up appearances that it was the men who were old acquaintances.

“Being self-employed makes it easier to take my vacation time. I don’t need an excuse like he does,” she finished, and then pushed her papers away. “And Greenweld and Thompson just paid us back, so we have cushion money and nothing outstanding for now.”

He sighed and leaned over to hug her middle, cheek and one palm pressed over her stomach. The baby twisted, kicking out against his hand and she grinned down at her two kids interacting. He hummed and moved his hand around, smiling absently as his brother moved to follow. “You told the school already?”

She pulled her fingers through his hair, smoothing the tresses comfortably. “Yep. All set. Your teachers set up a couple stacks of homework to go through, and I picked it up while you were at Avery’s.”

“Damon’s mad. We have a group project due on Thursday.”

She frowned. “I’m sorry, kid.”

He nodded in acknowledgement. “How long are we gonna be gone?”

She swallowed. “I wish I knew. Hook said that they don’t know exactly who’s doing this. It’ll be an investigation even before we get around to defeating whoever it is.”

He curled closer. “It was always been one crisis to the next there, at least once the curse was broken. What if … what if it doesn’t stop?”

She hesitated, her heart aching. Her voice sounded wet when she finally choked out, “it’s my fault. It didn’t start becoming crisis after crisis until I showed up.”

His head shot up, and his eyes narrowed. “No, it’s not your fault. Before you came, it was just a steady stream of bad. And if you never came, we’d still be stuck there, and it would be torture. But here … yeah, it’s still scary sometimes, but it’s not even near like how it was.”

She swallowed and cupped his face in her hands. She hated seeing him like this, hated seeing the fear painted on his face behind the determined facade. Suddenly, she felt selfish. Why hadn’t she thought this through? Why had she just assumed the kid would go? “Are you sure you don’t want to stay? I’m sure I can convince Gia or Ritu or Emilia … maybe even Andie if the bar isn’t too busy—“

“No,” he said firmly. “No, I feel safer with you and Dad.”

She chewed on her lip. “You’re sure? Even there?”

He nodded sharply. “Yes. Even before you … when Dad got those chances to be with me, I always felt safer when he was around, too.”
The thought of how distant she had forced them to be, but how close they had wanted to be, made her seethe. A rush of tears at the back of her throat had her wondering if it was purely the hormones or just how furiously upset Regina made her. Emma valued every second of how happy her boys made each other, how happy their whole little family made each other. The fact that Regina was so selfish as to deny that was horrifying.

But perhaps it would be better to leave Henry, to have him safe with the people they trusted.

“If you leave me, I’ll just steal another credit card.”

“Henry,” she said warningly.

He gave a sheepish but resolute smile. “I mean it, mom. I wouldn’t feel right without you two. Besides, if he gets to go, I should, too,” he said stubbornly, pressing his hand against her stomach again.

She raised a brow. “Your brother is kinda a package deal at this point.”

He shrugged. “I’m kinda a package deal. You can’t leave me behind.”

“Point noted,” she said, and kissed the top of his head. “Can’t get rid of you.”

“Nope,” he said, and hugged her close.

“What if there is another crisis after? And another? Can I send you back, make you get some real world in between?” she wondered. It was something to be considered, now that he had her thinking. She didn’t want him wrapped up in the crazy that being the Savior made her life.

He thought about it a long, silent moment. “Can I think about it?”

“Of course,” she said vehemently. “But know it’s going to be a discussion if it happens, kid. We want what’s best for you.”

“I know.” Much quieter, he pressed, “it will be a good thing, too. We’ll get to see everyone we’ve been missing.”

Her breath hitched. She thought about her parents, and her stomach fizzled in anticipation. It didn’t seem real, the fact that she’d be with them again.

“But … but we don’t have to stay too long, right?”

She closed her eyes. “Not too long,” she promised, and hoped she could keep it.

“Do you think everyone’s okay? Even Archie and Ruby and Paige and everyone?” he asked.

She blinked in surprise. She honestly hadn’t thought about the others beyond her parents. The people who depended on her, who were kind to her, people she’d helped. Granny, Ruby, August … were they all okay? “I think Killian would’ve told us otherwise,” she said cautiously.

“My other dad’ll be there, then,” he mused.

Her stomach twisted, and she tried not to think why that might be. “Yeah, more than likely.”
He looked up at her, and at first she was afraid that he felt her reaction. His eyes were wide, and he looked contrite. “Is it bad that I almost want to see the others more?”

She brushed her fingers through his hair, and bit her lip. “No, kid. It makes total sense. The others were there first, and there consistently. Even your grandpa was there longer for you, and he was in a coma most of your life. You didn’t get much time to know Neal,” she said soothingly.

“But maybe I’ll get the chance this time,” he said. “I can ask him questions and everything.”

“Exactly,” she said.

He was looking serious, brow furrowed, but he didn’t say anything further on that point. Instead he leaned against her. “I love you, Mom.”

She let herself relax and scooped him as close to her as her belly allowed. She knew this conversation was far from over, and there was worry in his eyes that she still needed to soothe. But she let herself have this one spot of connection with her son, the last bit of alone time they’d have for a while. “Love you, too, kid. We’ll make it through this.”

“Of course we will. We got each other.”

She chuckled. “Package deal,” she agreed.
Keep Them on a Leash

Chapter Summary

Graham needs to make her realize just how dangerous Regina is.

Chapter Notes

Post Back Up. For anon, who wanted Maggie's impression of Graham or a heart-to-heart. I decided instead of Emma and Maggie talking about Graham, that Maggie and Graham should have the talk. Also for lessawildmoon because I know she’s been waiting for this. TW for rape mention. As always, strong anti-Regina.

After it was settled, when he had checked in on Maggie and Henry up in her room, he’d gone back to his own. As soon as the door was shut, he all but collapsed against the wall.

He cradled his head in his hands, his body shaking, as he played through what had happened.

His head absolutely throbbed as he tried to quell the white-hot bits of panic and rage that were not so easily squashed after seeing her again. Again, he considered how much simpler it would all be if she were gone. Violent images scrolled through his brain quicker than he could second-guess; they multiplied exponentially the more he tried to push them out.

His past was checked with regret and remorse for some of the things he’d done, but his actions before his enslavement weren’t as easily marked. Protecting his family had never brought about a second thought. Having her gone … it would spell relief more than any other thing through his soul, that was certain. But it also triggered another feeling, something more akin to a vengeful delight. It made the detective in him a little alarmed.

Having Maggie around reinforced both sides of this. She was someone that reminded him of who he was in New York, but she was also another person to protect. He didn’t need more people to protect. Not ones that would try to put him before themselves. He wasn’t worth that; he’d had enough experience to know that. Especially not when there were others at stake.

The door clicked open and he quickly swiped at his cheeks, not wanting to look quite so intensely upset in front of Emma. However, when he looked up, dark brown eyes were waiting for him instead. He shuddered and clanked his head back. No point in hiding from Maggie.

She was silent as she closed the door behind her. She leaned against the wall and then sunk down to the floor next to him. She pushed her legs out and crossed her arms, situating herself on the ground. He tried not to think about his migraine and the nauseating feeling of fury coursing through him, and couldn’t manage to look at her directly as he did so. After a moment, she pulled a paper bag from her jacket pocket and unwrapped a plastic bottle of cheap whiskey.

He looked down at the bottle for half a second before a bitter laugh escaped him. He
scrubbed his face with his hands and finally shook his head. “Thanks, but no.”

She raised her eyebrows in surprise before twisting the cap. “You sure? Emma gave the okay.”

He nodded with a furrowed brow. “I don’t – I can’t feel out of control right now.”

She watched him out of the corner of her eye and then swallowed back a bit of the brown liquid. She winced and then set it to the side. “Okay.”

She didn’t prompt him to speak, and he wasn’t entirely sure he was able to right now. They sat in silence for a while, the clock in the corner the only noise besides their breathing.

He set on controlling his breath, trying to make the fire in his soul temper. Maggie’s silence was somehow soothing, her quiet support unbroken. He cocked his head to the side to watch her, and finally decided to be the one to break the quiet. “Emma said you were like this.”

A smile tugged on her lips. “Like what?”

He sighed, and moved to knock their shoulders together. “That you don’t press. But that you’re there regardless. She needed that.”

She scraped the bottle close to her. “Do you need that?” she asked.

He looked down and a softer chuckle trickled out. “Yeah, I think so. Thanks.”

She nodded. “Emma looked a little wild when she heard the mayor had been by. No, probably worse than that. Livid. I figured giving her some time with Henry would give you some time to come down a bit.”

He gave a tight smile. “I appreciate it.”

“Of course,” she replied simply.

He thought how best to approach the topic he knew he’d have to tackle. He needed to give her a warning, something to make her realize just how dangerous Regina was. She couldn’t keep provoking her like she had been.

He knew the witch’s arguments didn’t make sense to an outsider, and thought perhaps that was the best way to start. “Ask your questions,” he finally said.

She clicked her tongue and shook her head. “What’s there to ask? Obviously she’s got a screw loose.”

He rubbed the back of his neck, trying to release some tension. “Yes. To say the least,” he sighed. “But you must have questions.”

She rubbed the pad between her thumb and index finger, looking thoughtful. “Would you have answers?” she asked.

He took a deep breath. “To some of them, maybe,” he said.

She grabbed the bottle and took another sip. “How much do you want to tell me?” she asked hesitantly.

He swallowed thickly, and part of him thought that taking some of the liquor would calm his nerves. Another second and he remembered why he didn’t want to. “I don’t know where
to begin. So, ask. If I don’t have an answer, I don’t have an answer.”

She nodded at that. “Why does she think she has claim over Henry?”

He grimaced. Of course she would pick at that first, the one thing that wouldn’t make sense more than any other. It was the thing that threatened one of her loved ones, and thus the biggest concern as well. “That’s … it’s complicated,” he began. At least some of the story was the same. “She was the one that was supposed to adopt Henry.”

A clank sounded, and he turned to face her fully. Her expression was hard. “Emma didn’t go through with that. What the hell? How the hell does she even know?”

He pressed his lips together. “It wasn’t legal, you remember,” he said, trying to guide her through the story he was weaving.

Emma and Maggie had found out about six months after she took Henry home. There was a scandal in the papers all about the takedown of the ring. She had felt exceptionally betrayed, even without her memories. She had thought the company was legitimate; to realize that it was actually a shell foundation for illegal adoptions was heartbreaking.

It made more sense and made her that much more self-punishing when their memories came back. It fit, once they talked it through. Regina had no real identity in this world, and wouldn’t be able to walk into a real agency and be found fit to care for a child. Gold had somehow tracked down the shadiest corporation with the best façade, and Regina had played normal for the men who needed no background checks.

And the company found Emma at her most vulnerable. It was at a time where no one believed in her, least of all herself. Teenagers in jail were an easy target, it seemed.

He pushed past the churn of his stomach, and refocused. “Apparently, the company gave away plenty of information before the adoption fell through,” he said. It was a lie, but it didn’t feel exactly like one. Half-truths were the only way to make this fit, and he couldn’t feel bad about them.

Her eyes flamed. “God, as if Em isn’t already kicking herself over almost giving him up.”

He looked away, fresh feelings of anger piercing him. She had thought she was doing the right thing; it killed him that those people tricked her. He remembered Henry living here, what a strange mix of sad and hopeful he had been versus the safe and happy child he was in New York. “Regina thinks it means that he’s hers.”

She snarled. “What a delusional—“

“There’s more, of course,” he said.

She looked at him.

He shuddered as he thought how to best get across the point. “She is exceptionally possessive. Henry is terrified to be near her, and she keeps trying to get to him.” He hesitated a second, flashes of fear for his kid igniting within him. After some internal debate, he finally yanked his shirt from his waistband and tugged up the side to show his abdomen, where the scar from his childhood was. “I tried to get away from her, when I lived here. She didn’t take that lightly.”

She stared at the scar a long time, and he couldn’t read the thoughts scrolling across her
He let go of his shirt and looked down at his hands. “Yeah, get away from her.”

She paused a moment. “Do I want to know what that means?”

He blew out a low breath. “It means that … I didn’t want to be with her.”

She leaned up onto her knees, facing him. “You broke up with her, so she, what, tried to kill you?”

He looked away. He had felt powerful as Sheriff Graham, walking away from her in that cemetery. But it hadn’t been real; it had all been an elaborate illusion of free will. “Is it breaking up if you never had a choice in the first place?” he muttered.

A beat. “What?”

He shook his head. “Never mind.”

She shook her head. “No. No ‘never mind,’ Graham. Don’t start that.”

He cursed himself for bringing this up. “She was holding something over me. I didn’t have a choice in our … relationship.”

She balled her hands into fists, fury pinching her features. “You’re telling me that she’s an attempted murderer and what, a freaking rapist and she’s still walking around free as the mayor? What the actual hell, Graham?”

He gritted his teeth at the word. He never liked to think about what had happened, not here and not in the old world. He’d never named it, for certain. It was better pushed out of his mind, not dwelled upon. He was happy now. But the word flashed with memories, things he thought he’d buried enough to only see in nightmares. “Just know she’s not going to be contended with. Not alone, Maggie.”

She huffed in disbelief, snapping to her feet in an instant before pacing the length of the room. “She’s got some damn cockiness if she thinks she’ll get away with this.”

“She has gotten away with it, Maggie. All the times before … the … town just lets her,” he spat. It wasn’t until then that he truly felt those bitter feelings come forward. The royals should have put an end to her reign and her freedom, if not her life, decades ago.

She turned to him, her face painted in frustration and such rage that it was almost alarming. “Did you get to trial?” she asked.

Of course she was thinking in real-world terms. No, there had been no trial. There had barely been a second thought for his death, let alone anything else. “I left right after it happened,” he said carefully.

She seethed, fist hitting the wood of the dresser before she started for the door.

“Maggie, where are you going?”

She stopped. “Me? I’m going to make a goddamn citizen’s arrest, is what I’m doing.”

He jumped to his feet and grabbed her wrist. “No. You’re not listening. I didn’t tell you this so you could do something. I’m telling you this so you know not to do something hasty,
She wrinkled her nose, her eyes still hard. “This is a simple case, Graham. I can make the arrest now, wait for the sheriff or even call staties if all else fails. She can’t just be walking around like nothing happened. I won’t sit around and do nothing.”

He took a deep breath and met her eye straight on. “No, it’s not an easy case. I don’t care about what happened to me, okay? As long as she stays far away, I really don’t care. What I care about is Henry and Emma. I need to keep them safe, and part of that is making sure I’m not causing her to act.”

She raised her chin. “Getting her behind bars would go a long ways toward that end,” she advised.

“I don’t like this,” she spat. “I don’t like the idea of doing nothing. Let me do something, here.”

“Help me keep my family safe,” he coaxed. “Help me protect them.”

“What I want to do is snap her neck,” she fumed.

He raised his brows and gave a small smile. It was good to know the feeling was mutual. “Wouldn’t that be easier,” he said wryly.

She shook her head. “I can’t believe they’ve let her get away with something like this. If she’s that bold, then she couldn’t have just targeted you,” she mused.

“Truer words,” he muttered. “I was just a … a tool. I wasn’t the target by any means.”

She peered at him from the corner of her eye. “Does that mean you know who was?”

He nodded. “Yes. The sheriff’s wife,” he said. And his wife, he quietly reminded himself.

She blinked and laughed in exasperation. “Seriously?” she asked, her voice strident. “Does that even make sense?”

He shook his head. “Not even a little, even when you know the story. It’s complicated; there’s a history, there.” His brow furrowed, and he decided one piece of information was fine. “She used to be her stepmother.”

“You mean she’s actually had kids? One she hated enough to target? And then she wanted, what, a chance to raise more?” she asked, mouth dropping open.

“Sn—Mary Margaret,” he quickly corrected himself. He didn’t bother to check if the misstep was picked up on. “She was about ten at the time Regina married her father. Her father died about six years later, under some … well, suspicious circumstances.”

“Great,” she intoned. “So she may have actually succeeded in killing someone before?”

He shrugged. “There wasn’t ever enough to prove it. I always strongly suspected so.”
She dragged her hands through her hair, pulling at the strands. “Graham, why did you never move forward with this? If she’s probably killed before, if she’s targeting others … why did you never press charges? If not for … well, at least for trying to kill you.”

His chest panged in an echo of what was. That was not so easily explained. He had been dead; there wasn’t much he could bring to anyone’s attention with that fact. “No one would have believed me,” he said, as true as anything he could say.

Maggie’s expression twisted into one of plain sympathy, a knee-jerk reaction that she quickly tried to cover.

He absolutely hated it. “Stop it.”

She looked chagrined but resolute as she squared her shoulders. “Look, I get it. I really do understand where you’re coming from. I’m not going to say that it doesn’t hit me right in the gut, because I’ve had a cousin and more cases than I can think of both now and as a MSW that went through that kinda shit. But just know that I’m also not going to treat you with kid gloves because of it.”

He looked away, his fist balling and unclenching. He didn’t know how to react to that. It was a thorn in him, the fact that someone other than Emma now knew that part. He trusted Maggie, of course, but he didn’t like feeling this exposed. Weak. Knowing she would not prey on that feeling went a long way in helping him resolve his feelings about it, but they didn’t fully amend.

“Having something like, I don’t know, a stab wound wouldn’t have got you evidence?” she asked, changing the subject smoothly.

“Not the way she did it,” he said, scratching the back of his neck uncomfortably. “And like I said, I left right after.”

She pressed her lips together, her mouth a firm line. “What I need to know is that we’re not going to sit here and play pretend. That we’re going to look for evidence to knock her down from her high horse, that we wait for the right time to strike. That we make sure you all are protected, but we take her down. It doesn’t feel right to just let her stay in power. And to let her stay unpunished.”

A smile tweaked his lips and he reached to take her hand, squeezing gently. “It can’t be first. And we need to drop it if there’s even a hint that it might hurt Henry or Emma,” he conceded.

Her eyes sparkled, pleased. “Deal.”

“Deal,” he said, and shook the hand in his.

She rolled her eyes and dropped his hand, swinging her arm around his neck to hug him. “Sorry,” she murmured.

He shook his head as he pulled back. “I’d appreciate … not—if you didn’t—“

She raised her hand. “I won’t. That’s not me.”

He blew out a shaky breath and a nod, knowing that to be true.

She pursed her lips. “But could I shoot her a little?”
He barked out a laugh, nervous energy escaping with it. “Maybe. I’ll keep you posted.”

She smirked and hit his shoulder. “You need your wife, I think.”

He cocked his head to the side. “Maybe my kid, too,” he said.

She nodded. “I think Emma wants a chance at you first, though. I’ll bring her down, and then have her call when you’re ready for the kid.”

He sat on the edge of the bed and nodded. “Yeah, that’s probably best,” he agreed. If Emma knew that she had been by again, he had no doubt that she’d want to expel some anger and make sure he was okay without alarming Henry at the same time. “Thank you, Maggie.”

She opened the door and half turned to him. She shrugged. “I want to protect my people, is all.”
Concrete

Chapter Summary

Emma hates to admit it, but sometimes she does need some help.

Chapter Notes

Prompt from farmgirlusa: "In my defense I didn’t know there was concrete on the other side of the fence when I tossed him over it." Pre Grilled Cheeses. I mentioned in a couple chapters how Ritu helped, but I wanted a little peek into how those days go.

This chapter is completely fueled by bitterness and I have zero regrets.

*  

“In my defense, I didn’t know there was concrete on the other side of the fence when I tossed him over it.”

Ritu’s laugh came in peals, and she swiped at her eyes as she turned back to the stove. “I’m certain of that. It’s not like this is Manhattan or anything,” she teased.

Emma rested her head on the cool kitchen island, her stomach still flip-flopping even as she desperately tried to take her mind off it. “Hey, there was grass on my side. And he complimented my dress in a less-than-tactful way.”

“Oh, then perhaps it was karma,” she joked.

“Mm, that’s what Graham said,” she said. She tried to breathe evenly, but it felt like her insides were squishing together. It was well past 11am now, and she had been sick all morning. She was slightly worried that whatever Ritu was preparing was just going to make it way back, like everything else seemed to lately.

“I’m sure he loved to hear all about it,” she said with a chuckle.

Emma smirked. She remembered the faces Graham had pulled when she told him the story when she came home that night, months ago now. She knew how to handle whatever life threw at her, and he really shouldn’t find the need to be so protective most of the time. He elected to ignore it that fact for the most part, and she tried not to be too amused or exasperated because of it.

After all, they both were pretty dead-set on protecting one another.

Ritu scooted the tea to her with a raised brow. “Now, this is the good chai, so try to keep this one down.”
“The good one from Mumbai or Montreal?” she asked as she lifted her head, blinking owlishly at her.

Ritu grinned. “This one is Chennai by way of Montreal, so it’s extra special. It’s not a Masala, so don’t expect sweet,” she warned.

Emma took the mug to her lips and rested her teeth along the edge. “I might need a minute if I wanna fulfill that request to keep it down, though,” she warned.

Ritu leaned forward and brushed the hair off her forehead like she was a three-year-old, something very motherly in her eyes. “You know I didn’t mean it. You have a pallor, sweetie, but at least you’re not green for the moment. You need to try a bit, get some strength. So just sip slow, okay?”

Emma buried her nose in the tea, trying to shake the image of a paler face with that same expression. Her stomach was rolling fitfully, and she swallowed thickly before taking a few deep breaths. “It doesn’t smell like the other one,” she finally commented.

Ritu hummed an agreement. “This one’s a green chai, actually. Ginger-heavy. It should help with your stomach and isn’t very caffeinated.”

Emma felt like grumbling at that. She missed caffeine. She missed black coffee so strong she could feel it all the way down. She missed cup after cup of hot chocolate with cinnamon. Being stuck with the low-caf or decaf versions was almost torture. Finally, she took a cautious sip. It was very gingery, the spicy taste at the forefront of her tongue. She paused. It didn’t settle her nausea, but it didn’t aggravate it, either, so she took another sip. “It’s good,” she pronounced.

Ritu nodded. “The oatmeal’s almost done. Think you can manage that?” she asked.

Emma frowned. Plain, flavorless oatmeal. “Yeah, maybe,” she grumbled. This hyperemesis thing was actually the worst because of all the things her stomach couldn’t handle. What she wanted was a giant, bloody burger with loads of processed cheese and bacon. Steel-cut oats with not even a hint of sugar was a damn sorry substitute.

“I’ll put some pistachios over the top. Good B vitamins, there,” she said. “But if it’s too much, let me know. You just need some more calories.”

Emma patted her stomach as she leaned to full height in her seat. She looked at the meal in front of her. Ritu had tried hard to make it presentable, the green nuts carefully strewn across to look like a smiley face. Annoyingly, tears stung the back of her throat. “Thanks, Ritu,” she croaked out.

Ritu nodded. “The oatmeal’s almost done. Think you can manage that?” she asked.

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“Don’t mention it, sweetie,” she said with a wave of her hand. “So, what happened after the guy broke his ankle?”

Emma grinned down at her oats and raked a spoon through them. “He didn’t break his ankle. All he did was scrape his knee. But he started crying, like actual full sobs. I could barely get the twist ties on him because I started laughing so hard.”

“He didn’t!” she exclaimed, then broke into giggles. “Emma, I swear you go after the most ridiculous people!”

She frowned slightly. “Well, I used to,” she grumbled.

“Oh, Emma, I’m sure you’ll be back to your aggressive tendencies in no time,” she said
with a pat on her shoulder. “You’re better than last week already. It just takes time.”

She shivered. She rubbed the back of her hand, where the mark from the IV was still healing. “Don’t want that again,” she said and took a determined bite of the oatmeal. She wrinkled her nose at the plain flavor, but swallowed it. She was mildly proud of herself that she kept it down.

“I don’t want that for you, either,” Ritu said, a little more seriously than she liked. “You scared me quite a bit that day, you know.”

Emma ducked her head, hair from her ponytail falling in messy strands to shield her face. She didn’t remember much leading up to the ambulance. She just remembered that she had been having one of her episodes, but it had started turning a little pink. The rest that she recalled before waking to a worried Graham and Henry was just Ritu’s steady voice as she stroked her hair. “I never thanked you,” she mumbled.

Ritu tsked. “I think Graham thanked me enough for all of you. I actually got a hug out of the guy. And I don’t need the words, sweetie, though I appreciate it.”

She took another bite, and her gaze flashed over black and white for a second when she realized it was too big. She coughed, then carefully swallowed and leaned back. “I’m looking forward to getting past this part,” she said. “Then you wouldn’t have to babysit me all day.”

Ritu leaned forward, helping to tuck the loose tendrils back into the elastic. “What would I do with all my free time, otherwise?” she joked.

Emma groaned and her head fell back down to the tabletop. “You’re right, you should be enjoying your leave of absence instead of taking care of me.”

Ritu shook her head. “And do what with all that quiet in my house? I taught my boys too well, there’s nothing to clean up after. I have more knickknacks than I care for, so crafting is off the table. I have filled half the volunteer hours for the Trinity school, and Aamer would prefer I stay away from his at this crucial point in teenagerhood. I needed something to help fill the hours. Might as well be you,” she said, grinned with a pleased nod.

She snorted. Ritu had left her job for about a month ago, needing to get away from the pressure of the big accounting firm she’d been at. Sam had been more than supportive, and the boys had been as well.

She wasn’t all too sure when it was decided that Ritu would be the one to come over to check in on her when Graham and Henry were at work and school respectively, but she had gotten used to her neighbor’s presence easily. Maybe too easily.

“You don’t have to be here, you know,” she said as she scraped the oatmeal from her bowl.

“Have to? Who said anything about have to?” She sighed. “Henry and Avery are friends, and you are my friend. You’ve helped me out before, now I’m helping you.”

“Ritu,” she said pointedly. “I haven’t done anything remotely on this scale for you.”

She raised a brow. “You mean you haven’t been good to my son, kept him safe, or let him stay over in your home? You haven’t had us over, brought us food?”

“Well, yeah, but that’s not—“
“Sweetheart, you’re family. You don’t ask for these things when it’s family, it’s just done. Stop fussing over it,” she said pointedly.

Emma looked away sharply, sniffing conspicuously. She *hated* these hormones. “Thank you,” she said plainly.

Ritu only smiled. “So, you said he was crying when you put the ties on. What happened next?”

Emma smiled and continued explaining the rundown. But she barely paid attention to her own words, the story rote and well-used. She watched as Ritu listened, eating her own meal that was explicitly made to not be too strong-smelling, her bright eyes attentive.

It was later, when she was getting ready to sleep, tucking herself into Graham’s arms between the open casefile in his hands, that she truly stopped to think about what her neighbor had said.

“This life … it’s good, isn’t it?” she murmured.

He looked down at her and took one of his hands to scratch at her scalp soothingly even at the awkward angle. “I certainly think so,” he said, voice lilting up playfully. He moved to press a kiss to her forehead.

“No, not just this,” she pressed, and leaned up. She rested her head on his shoulder and took their hands down over her belly. “I love this, all of us. But I mean … everything else.”

He set the file down and focused on her. She loved when he looked like this, sleepy eyes still dancing, curls all messy across his forehead. “Anything in particular?”

She pressed her lips together, and then tilted her head to kiss his jaw. She settled back down over his heart this time, letting him scoop her close. She felt her stomach finally halt, soothing down to nothing more than background noise. “This is our family: you, me, Henry, and the newbie. But it’s … strange, I guess. We have more outside this inner circle, don’t we?”

His breathing shifted slightly, and she pressed her nose more firmly against his chest as she wrapped her arms around his waist. “Ritu’s good to you,” he commented. “I honestly don’t know what I would have done without her last week, or this week, or even the week before. She cares about you and Henry, and I do believe she’d do anything for you. So yes, Em. She’s family.”

She nodded. “And the others, too.”

“And the others, too, of course,” he replied. He was quiet a moment. “And I know it’s not a replacement, but it’s good, Emma.”

She swallowed, her belly tightening just a bit before settling back down. “Time for an again?”

He scattered kisses across the top of her head. “I love you.”

She felt the last of her tension release, and she felt bone-tired. “I love our family,” she said softly. “If there were just two more ….”

“I know, Em.”

She liked that. She liked that he didn’t offer platitudes, things that would fall flat into the
space of missing her parents. Instead, she listened to the steady beats of his heart and tried to focus on the family they had here, the one slowly expanding. “Do you miss your brother?” she asked suddenly.

He was quiet a moment. “Yeah, I do.”

She took his hand in hers, playing with his fingers absently to hear their rings clink against one another. “But you’re happy, too, right? You like being around people and us and—“

“Yes, Emma,” he said firmly, passionately. He tilted her face up and kissed her, enough to make her toes curl in reminder that pregnancy didn’t just make her feel the bad things. “It’s just the connection, now. Being accepted by others. The 20th especially, but Andie and even now Maggie and Ritu and all your other friends, all Henry’s friends … they’re pretty irreplaceable, aren’t they?”

She hummed an agreement, feeling contentment flutter in her chest.

“And as for you? You, Henry, the twins?”

She scoffed, but he silenced her with another kiss.

He was smiling as they parted. “You all are beyond anything I felt before.”

She bit down on his lip, tugging gently. She knew this, something he’s said before but never really fully sinks in. She leaned on her elbows to better settle over him, straddling his hips. “We’ve got a pretty amazing family then, don’t we?”

He grinned. “If they make you feel like this, then absolutely,” he said. He buried his head against her neck before trailing his lips up to her ear. “I mean that, though. Anything that makes you happy is pretty amazing in my book.”
Bath

Chapter Summary

Trying to settle morning sickness through sheer willpower doesn’t always work.

Chapter Notes

Little fluffy piece to get the muse going. Prompt from anon: "I loved the chapter where Emma feels real sick and Graham stays home from work. Are you planning to write something picking right after the end of that?" Follows Morning Sickness.

She sighed, still feeling the slight tremors in her body even as she relaxed against his chest. He slowly brushed a hand up and down her side, creating little waves in the warm water. She didn’t feel right yet. This had been the worst she’s had of this stupid part of pregnancy, even with Henry.

And she tried not to think of the fact that her changing hormones had made his simple joke about Sheriffs spark fear in her gut, too.

He reached up to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear and nuzzled against her cheek. “Any better?”

She swallowed and closed her eyes. She took a deep breath, letting the steam fill her lungs. “A little,” she said. Her stomach was still in knots, but she didn’t want him feeling any worse than he already did.

He hummed a response, vibrating against her back and she tilted her head back to further mold into him. “Not exactly what we were going for.”

“This is nice, though,” she breathed.

“I could get you some tea?” he asked, wet hands trailing across her stomach lightly.

She shook her head. “Maybe later. I like having you here,” she admitted. She couldn’t remember ever sharing the bath with him before. It was not as uncomfortable as she first assumed to have two bodies in at once. It was hard enough to share a shower, as they’d found through some escapades that usually entailed slipping and giggling, so she hadn’t ever given this idea a real thought.

But now, with the subtle ebb and flow of the water, the warm skin against her … it was intimate in a way she hadn’t anticipated. Especially since her current state left other ideas to the backburner.

He chuckled slightly, and pressed a kiss to the side of her head. “I like when you can admit that, I’d say,” he said. He settled his hand just between her hipbones. “I like being here with you.”
She knew he wasn’t just talking about the tub. She felt a little better just thinking about it.

“We gotta tell newbie to settle down, just for a bit.”

She grinned and placed her hand over his. **Theirs.** “He doesn’t even have ears at this point, Graham.”

He hugged her closer, the water swishing along her skin with the movement. “He can hear me,” he said, teasingly stern.

She breathed in deeply, and suddenly her mind went to Storybrooke, to wondering if he could hear her as she cursed his name in an empty sheriff’s office. The smell of lavender was suddenly overpowering instead of soothing. Her stomach churned dangerously again. She clamped her hand on his thigh, tensing against him.

His hands floated over her skin gently, moving the water at a calming pace. “I got you, princess.”

Her eyes fluttered closed, and she bit down a response. She tried to concentrate on him, on his warmth, on the soothing feel of his hands gliding across her. “I’m okay,” she finally said, even though her brow refused to smooth and her stomach refused to relax.

She can practically feel his concern as he pressed kisses along the side of her face. She didn’t know what to do, what to tell him. She had nothing in her stomach to upend, thankfully, but the feeling was still there, so close. She knew he was feeling helpless, and there wasn’t anything to placate him in that.

Finally, he stopped moving and just held her close. “I’ve got you. I’m not going anywhere. I love you,” he murmured into her hair.

She stopped thinking about the past, and blew out a low breath. He was still here. She took his hand and finally brought it to her lips. “I love you,” she said into his skin. “Thank you.”

He nuzzled into her, his day-old stubble brushing against her skin. “Months, you said?”

She nodded with a grimace. She had liked some parts of pregnancy last time, didn’t she? She couldn’t remember anything past the nausea right now. “Yeah. With Henry it was a little longer than the books said, but probably mostly because ….”

He nodded, and she knew she didn’t need to finish the statement. She thought of the bars and the loneliness, and burrowed into his warmth with a shiver. “I’m sorry.”

She tangled their fingers loosely. She knew what he was saying, the underlying anger under it aimed at someone he couldn’t yell at. She never could tell whether those flames were directed at Neal, August, or just Regina. That anger for her, though, was something of a comfort. “I was alone, though. I’m not, now.”

His opposite hand pressed against her stomach again. “Never again,” he vowed roughly.

She tried not to worry about the promise and tightened her grip. “You either,” she whispered.

She can feel his smile. “Me neither,” he agreed.
She breathed in the steam, and closed her eyes. They both had those childhoods, the ones permeated with loneliness. Henry, too. The fact that this kid wouldn’t was something that stung her eyes and throat at how lucky this little one was going to be. “Graham?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you for staying.”

He shifted, the water rushing as he moved to face her. “Always, Em. Whenever you need.”

She smiled and touched his nose with hers. She could always count on him. It was so foreign, the trust she carried for him. Her heart fluttered, and she tilted her head to kiss him gently. “I know,” she murmured.

Maybe this part of pregnancy wouldn’t be so bad, if she at least had this.
Something Good

Chapter Summary

Emma and Snow take a break from researching.

Chapter Notes

I am a bad writer. I totally forgot which one of you prompted this: “I was going to ask if Regina still having her vault was going to come up, and Graham calling Snow out on that one as a possible prompt.” However, this is a Snow-Emma moment. Hope you still enjoy!

Takes place after Meetings.

“Emma?”

Emma set down one of the books on the table, feeling her head throb slightly at the sound of her mother’s voice. They were at a better place, to be sure, but all she wanted at this point was to go back to Granny’s and back to Graham and Henry. Even Maggie had been a little much for her right now.

They had spent the better part of the day researching into what could motivate Zelena. They hadn’t made much progress, especially on account of her friend being there. Maggie had wanted to be involved as much as possible with the investigation. Emma knew it was thinly veiled excuse to make it easier for them all to leave this town, to get back to where Maggie knew they all felt more like themselves.

But she couldn’t take looking over the books to her mother’s sad face without considering all the pieces involved.

Maggie left earlier, under Emma’s insistence that she check up on Henry. She had only perfunctorily protested. Emma had no doubt the Maggie felt the tension in the room, and was at least half willing to let Emma subdue it.

“Sorry, Mary Margaret,” she said, and pulled a hand through her hair. “I guess I’m just getting frustrated.”

She bit down on her lip, hands covering her belly. “I understand that,” she said softly.

Emma sighed. “I want to get this figured out. You don’t understand how much. And I feel like we’re getting nowhere.”

She turned to the window, her large eyes reflecting a hefty amount of worry. “It scares me how much she wants the baby. I don’t think … I can’t go through that again,” she said, her voice cracking.
Emma looked down, bright pain flashing through her. Her own baby kicked out in response to her rapid heartbeat for a moment before twisting to settle. She swallowed thickly and blinked away the sudden rush of emotion. “And it would be out of your hands this time. I won’t let that happen to you.”

She turned sharply to her, brows knitted. “Emma, you don’t think …. We didn’t choose.”

She bit down the bitter feeling stirring in her. “Off topic,” she warned, and shuffled through her papers.

She persisted, reaching to touch her hand. “That night, the night the curse came. Do you know what would have happened?”

Emma grimaced. She didn’t want to talk about this, about the curse and about her “best chance.” She shook her head and refocused the topic. “Zelena is obviously obsessing over this. She’s too interested in my new kid, too. There’s gotta be a link. We’ll figure it out. We’ll get through this.”

Mary Margaret sat down. “Emma.”

She sighed and shut the book firmly with a soft thump. “We don’t have time for this.”

Her mother looked at her pointedly before hesitantly continuing. “Regina, she—she knew you were to be the Savior. Everyone did. You would be the one that would break her curse, her revenge. If you were—if she got rid—.” She swallowed. “It wasn’t that we wouldn’t remember …. Emma, the curse wasn’t all we were saving you from, you know that right?”

Emma cocked her head to the side, studying her. Her face was paler than usual, the rosiness lost and her eyes bright. She looked desperate to convey, even though she couldn’t force the words out.

Emma turned this new piece over in her head and felt her stomach twist.

Oh. Oh.

She looked away sharply, numbness tingling through her. “If that’s the case, we need to consider just what Zelena has in mind for our children,” she said, her tongue heavy as she tried to stumble past it.

It wasn’t sinking in. She had been abandoned so she could be the Savior, right? She was left alone to fulfill some destiny. That was all; she was just some cog to be used. She was just someone that people needed to fix their own happy endings and to use to protect themselves. This was her truth, as much as she’s known for over a year now.

She pictured Regina’s face, the expressions she had pulled in order to invoke sympathy in the months after the curse broke. She worked hard at twisting her narrative, at making herself the victim. The stories she’d concocted became even harder to swallow once she knew all that she’d done to Henry, to Graham. The faces Regina made before her mask dropped once she saw Graham were probably the only thing she needed to know how she veiled herself in her own narcissism.

And Emma knew she was a murderer. She knew it. So why wasn’t this solidifying in her mind?

She would have killed her before she ever had a chance to be anything: Savior, mother,
Emma felt sick.

She wasn’t sure who she was more upset with, she thought as she curled into herself. Regina, of course, was the easy target for her anger, and would indeed receive the brunt. But she felt furious with herself that she could have believed so little in her parents.

They had to choose, or else she would be dead.

“Emma … yes, we need to be sure they’re safe,” Mary Margaret conceded. She glanced away, wringing her hands uncomfortably.

She bit down on her lip and then cleared her throat. A few tears slid down her face and she quickly swiped them away. “We should see if there are any spells involving newborns,” she said hoarsely.

“Children of true love,” Mary Margaret clarified, and then curled a hand around her wrist. “I’m so glad you found yours, Emma. I’m worried what it will mean for him or her, though, after all we went through with you.”

She frowned, and took her hand back to rest over her belly. To hear it like that was something so unnecessary. She didn’t like using those terms for what she and Graham had. And something about the way Mary Margaret framed their child, framed her, in the terms of that relationship was even more unsettling.

She still wasn’t sure how her mother felt about her with Graham specifically; she always spoke of True Love, but not about the man he was. It reminded her how Mary had spoken of Neal before, so certain that he was The One because of Henry that she disregarded their actual interactions.

And Graham … Graham was so much more than just what he was to her.

But that wasn’t what had her pausing. She pieced through the idea of True Love children, of what she knew of the curse, and it twisted her stomach into knots.

“I need to know something,” she said, and grasped her bracelet.

“Anything,” Mary Margaret insisted.

She twisted uncomfortably in her seat, trying to piece her thoughts. “Did you need to have me to combat the curse?”

“Have ….” Her mouth parted, shock registering on her face. “Oh, Emma … no. No, of course not. It was our honeymoon. We didn’t even know of the curse until I was eight months along.”

She ducked her head, letting that surround her. “Really?”

“Sweetheart,” she said, and grasped her forearm. “Is that really what you thought? Oh, Emma, we knew Regina was plotting something, but we had no idea. We had no idea that you’d be the Savior until we spoke with Rumpelstiltskin. All we cared about when we found out was that we were so happy to have a child.”
She squeezed her eyes shut, and tried to stem back her emotion. She was wanted. She was wanted?

Timidly, Mary Margaret reached out, brushing back her hair from her face. It echoed in feeling, the last kiss on her forehead before she left past the town line. “We loved you from the first moment, Emma. If it hadn’t been for the curse, we would have showed you that every day for every moment of your life.”

She let out a muffled sob, and turned her head away. She stood up, the chair scrapping back noisily as she stomped to the back shelves. She took a few gulps of breath, trying to calm herself back down. It was the hormones, that’s all, she told herself. It was the damn hormones.

She still felt sick, those sharp rolls in her stomach like early on in her pregnancy. Carefully, she remembered to filter her power out through her fingers, letting it trip up and down the lights.

She blinked rapidly, needing to temper down. She had to. This wasn’t the time or the place.

Mary Margaret was silent the whole time, but she could feel her eyes on her. Finally, her musical voice broke through. “You had the chance with Henry, now. I can’t help feeling a little jealous.”

Emma scrubbed her face with her fingertips, leaving red streaks on her pale face. She could take this. This was different. It didn’t focus on them, and it allowed her a chance to explain. “It’s good, to have those memories. But it doesn’t always feel real,” she said hoarsely.

She nodded. “I could see that.” She hesitated, standing up slowly. “And you don’t feel like you’re replacing Henry now, do you?”

She grasped her stomach, and her head shot up. “No,” she said firmly.

She smiled softly. “You love this little one in a new way, and it’s not any better or any worse.”

Emma realized what she was saying, and she rested her fingers on the spines of the books in front of her. “I know you’re not replacing me. I know it,” she said.

It still hurt, a dull ache in the back of her mind, but she knew it. It had nothing to do with the mere fact that they are pregnant, but instead had to do with the cave. The confession. The I want to pretend like I’m okay with that and I’m not.

It had felt like replacement, then.

“Did you … were you trying?” she asked timidly after a beat.

Mary Margaret pressed her lips together and then reached over to rest her hand on hers. “Yes,” she said honestly. “Were you?”

A couple tears dripped down her face and she sniffed hard as she rolled her eyes. “No. We weren’t being careful, but we weren’t trying.”

“You wanted this,” she stated.

Emma hesitated. She had never really admitted anything to herself about that, why she hadn’t refilled any prescription or insisted on protection.
Because she had, hadn’t she? She hadn’t even been positive that he could get her pregnant, but she had wanted it. She wanted a baby with Graham, even though she had thought it might be too soon. She wanted something that cemented them in their reality, wanted the proof of them as a couple. She wanted to see Graham in a new little person, wanted a chance to raise a child with him, wanted Henry to have a sibling. And she wanted normalcy; she wanted what the baby made all soon-to-be-four of them as a family.

She crossed back to the table and sat heavily. “I—” she stumbled, and brushed her cheeks. “Yeah, maybe I did.”

“It’s scary, isn’t it?” she said softly. “Wanting, not knowing what could happen.”

She swallowed thickly and rested her hands over her stomach, feeling him twist and shift. “Yes.”

“I want so much for him. I have such hopes … similar to the ones I wanted for you,” Mary Margaret said. She flicked her eyes up with a sad smile. “And I am so excited to see all that you are getting, Emma”

Emma stared at her, her heart breaking a little. “I’m excited, too,” she admitted. “And I want your kid to have the kind of life you wanted me to have.”

Her hand came forward, but she hesitated before brushing back her hair. “I wish—“

“No sense in that,” she said quietly.

She gave a pointed look but didn’t press. “I felt a little jealous,” she said. “When I see how happy you were in those photos … I felt jealous.”

Emma twisted her hands. “I might be a little jealous, too.”

Mary Margaret sighed and tucked her hair behind her ear. “I wanted to be there for your firsts. Every one of them. And when I finally found you this time, I’ve realized I missed even more of them.”

She gripped the table with white knuckles, and let a shoot of power dim the lights. “I know.”

She looked up at the electricity and drummed her fingers over the counter. “I missed your wedding.”

She grimaced. “Yeah,” she said. “I—I wanted you there.”

She smiled sadly. “I wanted to be there.”

Emma took that in a moment, feeling that same wash of grief that had struck her when talking with Henry as she was getting ready for that day. She had missed her, them. As happy as she was that she was married, she definitely wished she could have had a couple extra guests that day.

Mary Margaret brushed her cheeks. “I think I found the photo of your wedding.”

She sniffed back her tears. “The bubbles, right?” she asked.

She nodded. “And the big group.” She picked up her phone and scrolled through the photos. She looked down fondly at the one. “You were already pregnant?”
Emma wondered for a moment if there was judgement in her tone. “You found the one with Henry pointing to his sibling?”

“Yes, that one. You looked radiant, Emma.”

She grinned, and a little of the uncertainty melted away. “It was good, that day.”

“It’s not what I wanted for you, though,” she said hoarsely. “You were supposed to have a grand wedding. In the castle, flowers everywhere, a dress with yards of silk, with—“

“That’s not what we needed, though,” she interrupted. Something about the vision of that was nice, but it also just didn’t fit with her reality as she saw it now. “We just wanted to have it on paper, really. We didn’t care much about the ceremony. When it came down to it … honestly, I couldn’t have imagined a happier wedding.”

Her head bowed.

She pressed her lips together and then gave a half smile. “Gia made us go to this ridiculously expensive place for the reception. It was forest themed and stunning, but way too over-the-top. So we did get a little extravagance, too,” she said with a shrug.

She was silent for a second more. “More friends,” she murmured. She twisted her hands. “Maggie was there,” Mary Margaret said, her voice a soft, fragile thing.

She looked up. “Yeah, she was. Maggie’s … I’ve known her for twelve years. Ever since Henry was born.”

She worried her lip.

Emma twirled her ring around her finger. “She’s been there for some of the hardest moments of my life. And that’s why she’s here now.”

“Yes,” she said absently.

Emma sniffed, and thought about how much she had leaned on her, how Maggie had leaned on her back. “She’s my best friend.”

“I was that, once.”

Emma felt her heart sink as she remembered that feeling.

“I felt like we at least had our friendship. The time before the first curse broke. And now,” Mary Margaret trailed off, her tears falling down her face.

Emma’s head throbbed. “I liked that, too,” she said. “In that first life, you were the person I felt closest to.”

She brightened. “Really?”

She nodded, her heart stinging. “It’s just gotten hard.”

“I know that,” she replied softly, and her eyes shaded.

Emma wiped her face and gave her a pointed look. “With Regina especially.”

Mary Margaret twisted her hands together. “I am so sorry about Henry.”
She nodded jerkily. “I know you are,” she whispered. “And I know you think you’re trying to do the right thing. But do you realize what she’s done? What she’s still doing?”

Her brow creased, and she looked away. “I know Henry doesn’t feel safe around her.”

She sighed. “Yes.” Her head ached. She pulled her hair from her face and glared down at the table as she braced herself. “This woman would have killed me. She did kill my husband. She hurt my kid for more than a decade. I just don’t get why you still feel the need to be by her side,” she grit out.

“I’m trying to protect you, Emma,” she insisted.

She looked up, her brow furrowed. Anger was so much easier than hurt, but she pushed it down as much as she could. “You could help me by distancing yourself.”

She turned away.

She blew out a low breath. “I don’t feel right around you when I know you’re around her. And I’d at least feel a hell of a lot more comfortable if I knew you’d support me at the time when I can throw her in jail.”

Mary Margaret was silent a beat. “I will support you, Emma. But I want to keep her tempered at the moment. At least until we catch Zelena.”

“She’s trying to go after Henry. And she’s been getting too close to Maggie,” she pressed.

Her mouth opened to speak before it abruptly snapped shut. She shook her head. “I won’t let her hurt you.”

Hesitantly, Emma stepped forward. “Mary Margaret … I know you were able to before, to protect me, that first time. Just barely. But haven’t you also not been able to stop her?”

“That was when I was fighting against her,” she said stubbornly.

“And I don’t think you realize that Regina is still just as much of a threat, if not more so, than Zelena,” Emma said firmly.

Mary Margaret opened her mouth, and then closed it. She looked thoughtful, her brow creased, before she met her eye. “What did she do to Graham?”

Emma pressed her lips together, spine steeling automatically. She placed a hand over her stomach, their child, to gather strength, to push past the mute terror. Her mind scrolled through the stories she’d pulled from him, the scars over his body, the paralyzing pain when he’d collapsed in her arms. “You were the target, Mary. But there were people that made sure you didn’t fall into her grasp,” she said simply.

She looked pained, her eyes closing. “I left them all there,” she said, barely audible. “I left them.”

Emma felt another spark of her magic leave her, another attempt to settle. “Why?” she finally asked. When Graham had described it, how Regina had been captured, how her parents let her free … she didn’t understand.

Mary Margaret grimaced, face shattering. “I didn’t know what to do! I thought … giving her mercy …”
Emma’s head bowed. That was her mother, now, wasn’t it? Do something that seemed so good-hearted for one person, forgetting that others did not have those same intentions. “You expect her to react as you’d react to mercy. She didn’t. She won’t. Her whole life view is set on what is good for her.”

Her face crumbled, and she sat heavily. “There was once a time—“

“And then she crossed a line she can’t return from,” she said firmly. She just couldn’t understand letting her go, letting her be in her castle with everyone she’d enslaved.

Mary Margaret ducked her head, short strands of hair falling into her face.

Emma came forward, blowing out a low breath. “She still has the vault, doesn’t she?”

Her head snapped up, eyes wide. “Her vault?”

Emma nodded. “The hearts.”

Her mother’s face grew paler still. “She can’t. She’s … after everything … she can’t still have them. …Right?” she pleaded.

She sat down and folded her hands on top of the table. “Maybe you need to see before you start getting your hopes up.”

“I can make it right,” she whispered, nodding to herself.

Emma looked at her warily. “Yes, you can. But you can’t depend on Regina to help you, there. She doesn’t like giving things up.”

“I know,” she said miserably.

Cautiously, she reached out and covered her hand. “If you are serious … I can help. I’d want to help, and Graham likely would love to, as well. We can make it part of this whole thing.”

“This whole thing?” she questioned.

She gave a half smile. “The Savior thing.”

She laughed a little, and she could see some of the tension leave her as a few tears escaped down her cheek. “Yes, Emma. You have no idea how proud I am of you for that.”

She shrugged a shoulder. “Yeah, well.”

She leaned her head down on her shoulder. “My daughter,” she breathed. “I am proud of you for so much.”

She grimaced, feeling her face heat. “Thanks,” she said simply.

“Can we … do you think we’ll ever be the same?”

Emma gripped her hand and rested her head on top of hers. She missed what they had, both before the curse and after. It felt so distant, something she could barely grasp. “Probably not. But we can still have something new, something good,” she said honestly.

She could feel her nod more than see it. “Okay. Yes. Something good.”
They could rebuild.
Reunion

Chapter Summary

Emma finds what pieces to use to ease them into the changes that have happened.

Chapter Notes

Directly follows Coincidences. Prompted from a few people that wanted the aftermath of that bomb drop.

“Excellent. So’s Graham.”

“Wait, Graham?”

Emma gave a half smile and wiped her cheeks again. Tears still were falling down her face with each swipe, and she couldn’t get a damn handle over them. She sniffed and nodded. “Yeah.”

Mary Margaret’s mouth was still dropped open, clutching around David’s arm as if to hold herself up. “You mean—you mean Graham? Sheriff Graham?”

Emma gave a short chuckle and leaned against the wall. Why did she feel so exhausted? “Yeah, that Graham.”

“I don’t … I don’t understand,” she stammered.

Emma brushed back her hair with both hands. “I … I don’t exactly understand, either. We don’t, I mean. He was there when I woke up.”

“You woke up married to someone?” David asked, his voice strained.

She couldn’t help a tight laugh, and shook her head. “No, not like that. Not like you guys had here before. Nothing was forced, it just—you see—“

She thought a moment, wondering how to explain it. She didn’t know how Graham was alive, didn’t know how to push back the fear that came with the fact that they couldn’t manage an explanation. She had long pushed down that terror where she could almost keep it hidden, and now it was bursting in shock waves over her body again. It itched through her veins, tightening in a band around her stomach. She knew she had to release it before it started affecting her. She pressed her palms into the wall behind her and let the energy shoot out, flicking the lights above them.

“Emma, is that you?” David asked in confusion.

“Yeah, sorry,” she said with a shudder. She looked back, noting dark lightning streaks across the whitewashed bricks. Her jaw dropped as she saw the physical effect her powers had.
“Oh—I-- …. Sorry. It’s not usually like that.”

“You’re using your magic,” Mary Margaret murmured thoughtfully.

She shuddered. “I have to sometimes. It makes me sick if I try to hold back,” she admitted. The idea that it wouldn’t be so easy to hide was unsettling. She had another burst of worry, of how Graham would react to it. She traced the ash on the wall, her heart sinking.

“It’s just paint, Emma. Don’t worry about it,” David said and smiled shyly.

After a moment, she looked up, her eyes bouncing over her parents’ faces. “Thanks. I’ll help fix it.”

David waved her off. “It’s nothing, Emma. But … you were saying that the Sheriff … it wasn’t anything set up, right?”

She could hear the sharp concern in his tone. The last curse must have truly caused deeper scars than they all thought originally. Just how was his relationship with Katherine constructed by Regina’s hand?

She swallowed. She couldn’t go down that road right now. Thinking of Regina would only end in rage.

She took a breath and focused on his question. The Sheriff. That wasn’t a name they used in quite some time. “He was just … there. In the City, at the bar, at work. In the background.”

“Oh, Emma,” Mary Margaret said, and she can hear the pity in her tone. Mary Margaret had been the only one to see her after she had finally made her way back that night, the only one to witness her fall to pieces before she was able to brick her emotions back in.

She swallowed thickly and rested a hand over her stomach again. It helped to ground her, to steady her emotions to feel their baby. “We officially ‘met’ the first day. We all got our memories back a couple weeks later.”

“How?” Mary Margaret asked, brow furrowing.

To use the actual terms for what she and Graham had was strange enough. To have to explain it to her parents was downright embarrassing. Snow White and Prince Charming may be those fairytale characters with bursts of true love magic all over the place, nothing uncommon about it.

But Emma Swan? Emma Swan was still getting used to the idea of normality; a job, a home, and a family was just on this side of absurd. Curses killed with a kiss still fell into the “logic not found” category for her. The baby kicked out as if in amusement at how embarrassing this was for her and she nearly huffed in disbelief. Kid was taking sides already.

“It was me and Graham. When we, uh … when we ….” she trailed off, heat rushing to her face.

David and Mary shared an amused look, and she realized she didn’t need to finish.

She sniffed. “Anyway, once we did we found Henry and realized he’d gotten his memories back, too.”

“That’s amazing, Emma,” Mary Margaret said proudly.
“I still can’t quite believe we found each other,” she said quietly. “And we’re married now,” she said and shrugged one shoulder. She spun her ring around her finger nervously.

David beamed at her, even though she could see the conflict underneath. “It’s—it’s good?”

She nodded with a half-smile. “Yeah. Henry’s happy.”

“You’re happy?” Mary Margaret whispered.

She smiled fully, and felt the tears continue down her cheek. “Very,” she managed, and realized how much she believed it.

Her mother leaned forward with a smile and gently tucked her hair back behind her ear. Emma forced her eyes shut, wincing back on the parts of her that wasn’t ready for this. Oh, but she had also missed this. “And you’re pregnant.”

Emma swallowed and let out a huff of a laugh. She wondered at how she could feel so very young but also so very adult around these two. “Yeah, I am,” she said, then looked down at her stomach. She looked so much further along. “But you two—“

Mary Margaret smiled and rested a hand on her belly proudly. “Your brother. Just a couple weeks left.”

Emma wanted to only feel happiness for them, she did. But she couldn’t help the wash of something darker flood the corners of her soul, and ultimately her smile was a little forced. “What you wanted,” she said softly.

David grabbed her wrist, tugging her forward slightly. “And you’re back. That’s what we wanted, too.”

She nodded compulsively and pulled her arm free. “We missed you, too,” she offered, and brushed her hands over her arms. She felt chilled all of a sudden.

David’s features pulled ever so slightly, and he stepped back a pace. “How did you make it back to us?”

She shrugged a shoulder. “Hook. He dragged us down.”

He looked a little struck. “Oh.”

Emma winced, realizing the callous of her words. “Sorry, I didn’t mean—I want to be here. Me and Henry … we both really do.”

Mary Margaret wiped her cheeks, doing little for the tears there. “Not … not Graham?”

Emma swallowed, remembering that morning. I wish pretending was easier. “He wanted this for us,” she said slowly. She knew he did, truly and without question. “And he didn’t say anything against coming, of course; he was ready to leave right away. But I know that being here … it’s a lot for him.”

Having him be in this town, this place where Regina always seemed to rule no matter what, she knew it was devastating for him. There really was nothing here for him; less than that, even. He was just here for Henry and her. A burst of love and intense appreciation came from the pit of her stomach at the thought of it. He would do anything for them.
Mary Margaret still had that look of concern. “You know,” she said hesitantly. “Neal will be here.”

Emma felt her stomach shift to roll in disquiet. She looked down sharply. Suddenly, she remembered the feeling of pressure, the seemingly foregone conclusion that she was supposed to end up with him. The thing that everyone believed, but never fit in her own soul. “I’m sure Henry will want to see him,” she offered finally.

Mary Margaret frowned slightly and then perked up. “How is Henry?”

Emma smiled slightly, remembering how Henry had been drawn to her before the curse broke. She looked at David next, the tales of sword fights and gentle reassurance fresh in her mind. “He’s just thriving. It’s good for him. Really, really good.”

David gave a soft look, of pride and wistfulness. “He needed this, didn’t he?”

She brushed her cheek. “Yeah.”

“You all did.”

She parted her lips to answer, and then leaned back against the wall. She thought of how much more secure, strong, happy she had felt over the last year. “Yes,” she finally said, conviction clear in her tone.

“And now,” Mary Margaret said cautiously. “Now you need to be here.”

Emma looked down at her mother’s stomach, then to both of their faces. At length, she replied, “yes.”

It wasn’t until the word was out that she realized how much she believed that, too.

But as they finally came to wrap her in a hug, one so similar to the one after the curse broke, she realized it was what they needed as well.

You found us. They’ve been reunited before, but something about this time was different. She felt consoled. She felt comforted. She … she was ready.
Daylight

Chapter Summary

Early morning glimpse.

Chapter Notes

Post-moved in, Pre-married. Just a little minific to go with an edit for the appreciation event.

He felt the bed dip suddenly, but couldn’t manage to open his eyes. He took in a deep breath and curled around the comforter.

“Sorry, go back to sleep,” he heard Emma mumble.

He could feel the daylight streaming through the curtains, so he knew it was later than he usually slept in. He sifted through the exhaustion and grudgingly came back to consciousness. He rolled onto his back and threw an arm over his eyes. “Everything okay?” he managed, sleep slurring his words.

She sighed, and he finally opened an eye to find her beside him. She was fully clothed, down to her boots and leather jacket. “Just … long night.”

“Morning, now,” he reminded. He tossed an arm around her waist, tugging her in.

She smiled and dipped her head onto his chest. “Didn’t mean to wake you.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, well. It’s too late in the day for me to be asleep, anyway.”
“It is past dawn,” she teased, and then kissed his collarbone lazily.

He bobbed his head. He was usually the first to rise in the mornings, and rarely lazed about unless it was to keep her in his company. This was well outside his norm, though it made sense for how long he’d been up. “Stayed late last night, and then got some paperwork done when I got back.”

She tilted her chin to look up at him. “How late?” she asked warily.

He raised a brow. “You’re going to lecture me about staying out?”

She smiled and buried her head again. “I made some progress,” she reasoned.

“But you didn’t catch him, then,” he supplied, filling in the blank in her words.

She grimaced and held him closer. “Not yet,” she replied.

Joseph Marlow. Small time. Petty criminal with ties to a bigger conglomerate, he’d fled parole at the first chance. Emma had been close for the past week, but he was weaselier than expected. It made sense, then, why she wasn’t relaxing straight to sleep and instead engaging him in this restless conversation. He tugged his fingers through her hair. “Another day,” he said.

She nodded. “Another day,” she echoed. “At least this one wasn’t completely wasted.”

He frowned slightly, feeling the heaviness in her tone. Her makeup was smeary under her eyes and her long hair was straightening from its curls. He bit down a follow-up question, knowing how much she needed her sleep. He tugged on the hem of the leather. “Are you going to get comfortable?”

She shook her head. “Too tired,” she pouted. “Will you get Henry when he’s ready?”

He sat up and reached down to her feet to begin unlacing the boots. “Of course,” he replied. He’d been glued to his phone half the night, anyway, worried at the first time Henry’d had a sleepover since he’d moved in. It was half the reason he’d made excuses to work on the files he’d brought home with him.

She sighed when he removed her shoes and bunched her legs in to curl into a ball. “Thank you,” she mumbled, half asleep already.

He checked his phone again, finding it to be just after 7. There would likely be no messages from Henry until well past 9. “These can’t be comfortable,” he observed, tugging on the denim.

“Not ‘specially,” she breathed.

He smirked and unbuttoned her jeans, then rubbed along the mark the metal made on her skin. “Better?”

She nodded and lifted her hips to barely assist him.

He tossed them aside and then slipped her jacket off next. After he placed it on the chair by the window, he curled around her, hugging her in and breathing deep. “Couple more hours. I’ll get the kid and you can sleep.”

“’Kay,” she said, nuzzling her nose into his neck.
He tangled a hand in her hair and relaxed into the pillow. “I’ll try not to wake you later,” he promised.

“I know,” she replied.

She was typically a heavy sleeper, so he wasn’t too concerned about it. Sleeping during the day with no Henry in the house, though, might change things. But fairly quickly, she began to lightly snore, fingers still gripping his t-shirt just over his heart. He smiled softly, looking down at her peaceful face and let himself into a more restful state.

He could break his routine for this.
Emma woke to cool sheets. She shivered, blinking a few times to focus on the dark bedroom. She blurrily glanced to the clock at her bedside. It was just after 2am.

She sighed and rocked back and forth a couple times before she managed to get herself to a sitting position. She glared down at her stomach a second, the small little bump forming at her middle. “You are only twenty-one weeks along; it should not be this hard to move,” she muttered, mourning the loss of agility a second. She knew it was only going to get worse, especially since she was still just barely showing and had almost half her pregnancy left to come. She shook her head to snap out of it. She just needed to get used to this new center of gravity.

She reached down and picked up a shirt from the floor and pulled it over her head, patting her stomach comfortingly as she rose. She then swiped the pants from the chair next to the bedside table. She grumbled slightly as she walked off the rug and onto the freezing floor.

The baby didn’t even stir, and the house remained silent.

She pulled a robe from the hook at the back of the door and walked out in bare feet to the living room. She took a quick look around before finding Graham sitting at the window between the spider plants. She frowned a touch and leaned on the doorway to assess him.

The first thought that hit her was in direct response to her hormones: he was just so handsome. The glow of the moonlight half lit him gently, accentuating those sharp lines of his cheekbone and jaw. His hair was a little longer than usual, making the dark curls loop along his temple. He was dressed only in bottoms, the lean muscles in his back exposed in shadow. She bit down on her lip, pushing off the instant reaction to him like that.

Because her second thought was more attuned to her intuition when it came to him: she had a feeling she knew exactly why her husband left their bed so early.

“You’re staring again.”

She knew that he had felt her presence. He hadn’t turned, face still focused on the
Manhattan skyline. She tightened the belt on the robe and pushed up the sleeves, not bothering to deny the comment. She took to staring quite often for various reasons, and there were several at the moment.

He finally pivoted, his face exceptionally weary in the split moment before he warmed and smiled at her. His eyes were soft as he looked her up and down before he broke the silence, “you look amazing.”

She scoffed and bridged the gap between him. She was in the sweats that she had before her pregnancy and his robe, belly much more apparent due to the way it stretched both garments tight. Her hair was tangled and her eyes felt sore from having not gotten her full night’s sleep yet. In all, she rather doubted his words, even as she pressed a kiss to his lips for the sentiment. She hummed and leaned back in, enjoying the taste of him.

“I mean it,” he said, blue eyes illuminating in the brightness of the city lights so suddenly that she caught on that they had been quite fogged before.

She brought her hands up, flitting through his hair. She enjoyed the way he sunk into her touch while at the same time noticing that his hair was damp at the scalp. It only confirmed her instinct. “More dreams?” she asked simply.

He hesitated a moment before nodding. “More of the same.” He kissed her wrist and then pushed past the robe to roll his palms over her stomach. He smiled and the rest of the shadows in his expression fell back. “You can see her better now.”

She rolled her eyes, internally counting to realize his estimation was right. It was indeed a girl day. “And it will only get worse,” she said.

He looked up at her and smiled truly. “I am so lucky,” he breathed.

She couldn’t help the grin that overtook her face, and she kissed him again, deeper this time. She sat next to him and wrapped her arms around his neck to stay in his space. “Mustn’t have been too bad, then?” she asked. Usually if the nightmares were enough to send him out of bed, he’d brew in it for far longer than he seemed to be now.

He visibly swallowed and gave a tight smile. “Pretty bad,” he admitted.

She frowned and brushed back the messy curls from his forehead. “What was it this time?” she asked hesitantly.

He sighed and rested his forehead on her chest. “Things that remind me how good I have it,” he said simply.

She cocked her head to the side. Memories, then. He was usually wrapped a little more in self-loathing after those dreams. If they were truly creations from his subconscious, he took more to fear and protectiveness.

He tugged her closer, pulling her onto his lap and she shifted until it was comfortable for the new width of her belly. He was quiet a long moment, brushing hands through her hair, and she let him have the time to collect himself. “I don’t deserve this,” he murmured heavily.

She craned her neck to look up at him. “Don’t start,” she warned.

He grimaced. “After everything I did—“

“After everything she made you do,” she corrected firmly.
She’d heard bits and pieces, enough to know that his heart had been used to carry out her orders. She knew that he lived with the fact that innocent lives had been extinguished by his hand. He had been forced, just as he had been forced into so many things by that … monster.

Emma’s rage piqued, fire in her blood at the thought.

Regina had never had any guilt in her soul, no remorse, no regret. It was magically proven right before her eyes in Neverland, just before their lives reset. The more she learned the more disgusted she became with the display. Her assessment so long ago was truly right: the woman had no soul.

And so it was Graham that had to live with the guilt instead.

“That was not your fault,” she said forcefully.

He leaned against her, a soft and weary sigh expelled into her neck.

He didn’t like to discuss it, but they had spoken enough for her to know that he knew that. At least on paper, he knew who to place to blame on. But while he knew, it still weighed on him heavily and, at times, very visibly. She was loath to dredge it up while he was in this state, hoping not to break any of his progress.

She hugged him close, and pressed her lips together a long moment as she struggled with the emotion in her. “What was it this time?”

He shook his head rapidly, sinking deeper into her touch. Finally he sighed. “A man. She thought he had information on Snow, thought she stayed with his family in a village in the forest. She wanted to know where their cabin was located and where they directed her to go next. She sent me to get the answers. He chose not to confess.”

She swallowed. She knew what that meant.

He blinked rapidly, lashes skittering over his cheeks. “I know it wasn’t me, wasn’t my decision. But Emma … he had a family. I took him from them. How many families did I do that to? And how can I—how am I even allowed my own?”

She let out a short sob before she could contain it, and brought a fist to her mouth. She shook her head and caught his gaze. “Because it wasn’t your decision, and not your choice. You were used, Graham. And you are with us now because whatever force got you back to me knows your heart.”

He huffed lowly and nudged his forehead into her. “My hands and heart are nowhere near clean.”

“Who said they needed to be?” she asked, and kissed his temple. Her head hurt a little to think of all that he felt he had to carry. “You were a tool. And now you get the chance to heal with all of us.”

“It’s not just what happened with her,” he said carefully.

Her mouth firmed into a strong line. “You mean the ones that would have killed you or your family?” she demanded next.

His cheek twitched, almost a smile.

After Fell, there was certainly a new understanding of the man he was. She was aware
that he didn’t feel regret over the ones he’d killed to protect his family, both animal and human. If she asked him now, she knew he’d say he’d take the same action given the chance. Even so, there was something behind his expression for it.

“It’s still enough to tip the scales,” he reasoned after a beat.

“Doesn’t mean that you don’t deserve this, that we don’t deserve this life, Graham,” she pressed, and grabbed his hand to rest over her stomach again in reminder.

He shut his eyes tight and rested his temple on hers. “That’s not what I’m trying to say,” he said softly in her ear.

She shook her head, frustration pulling forward tears again and with it a small spark in her veins. “No, Graham, listen. When you say you don’t deserve this all, it’s like saying I don’t deserve it. Like saying Henry doesn’t.”

He looked doleful as he cupped her face in his palms. “You know I don’t believe that, Emma. You both deserve the world and I would happily give it to you. You two and a half people are everything,” he said passionately. His dark eyes were set on hers, making sure she read the truth in them. “Now let it go before you get sick.”

She sniffed and carefully released the magic across the pane of the window. It sparked and fogged the view before dissipating into steam, and she watched it with worry. “You’re my everything, too,” she said, voice still watery despite her best efforts.

He kissed her, and she felt the tension in him from the display fall to the wayside. He released her and brushed back her hair. “I love you,” he said roughly. He winced. “But I haven’t —”

“I’m not some innocent, Graham,” she pressed, already seeing the end of his thought. “I’m not perfect. I’ve done things to scar up my life.”

He gave her a look. “You, Emma, you are the hero. Henry is. I’m just … not.”

She frowned. She didn’t love the word herself. It implied too much about her that she couldn’t reconcile. Nonetheless, she did believe he was one. He was the reason she was alive in the first place, and if that wasn’t enough, his protectiveness and dedication in this life was affirming.

And no matter what, Henry definitely believed he was a Hero, big capital letters and all. He believed both of them were, her truest believer.

However, she also knew it put a pressure on him that he wasn’t ready for. She decided against protesting it outright. “Graham … you are a good man. It’s not that I don’t care about what you did in the past, but it doesn’t change how I feel. You are good.”

He hesitated. “I’m glad you think that,” he said carefully.

“Henry thinks that. Henry thought that back then and he thinks that now,” she said. Her lip quivered as she remembered how utterly depressed his tone was, the hopelessness in his tiny voice. She killed Graham because he was good. She could kill Regina for that alone.

He nodded and kissed her forehead. “I know he does,” he murmured into her hairline. “Doesn’t mean it’s black and white like that.”

“Exactly,” she said. “It’s not black and white. You are a good man and we deserve this
life. All of us do. We are lucky, and we deserve it.”

“You were meant for so much …,” he whispered.

“I would not be happy with anyone else. Not as truly as this,” she affirmed.

He acted like she needed someone with no flaws, someone pristine and perfect. That imaginary person would never understand her, never be able to relate. She could never be happy with someone like that, with a life like that. She had been damaged and broken, much like him, and they needed that in each other to repair. Rebuild. Renew.

That wasn’t all he thought about, she knew. She considered the nursery back in the other world and twisted her fingers in his hair. “As for the rest … I don’t know what our lives would have been. I just know that I love our life now.”

He smiled sadly and kissed her again, and she felt as he gave up his worry for the night. “I love you.”

She smiled finally and brought his hand over her stomach. “I love you,” she replied. “That’s how I know we’re meant to have this life. No scales, no lists … this is how it was meant to be.”

He sunk onto her lips, pulling her tight. “Okay.” He rolled his hand over her stomach soothingly. “Okay,” he repeated softly.

She hoped he would truly feel it someday, but could see he was trying. That was half the battle after these nightmares sometimes. Suddenly she felt a push from inside her, and she pouted at the fact that she was still the only one that could feel it. He could do with knowing that their little one supported him as well.

When she looked up at his face, though, something had changed. “Was that ….”

“You felt it?” she asked excitedly, grabbing his hand and pushing it harder into her stomach.

He swallowed. “I think … I think so.” The baby moved again, kicking out, right under his palm. His face absolutely transformed, awe touching his whole features. “Wow.”

She smirked and kissed him. “See? She even agrees.”

He smiled fully and chuckled, bringing both hands to cover the entirety of her stomach. “Amazing,” he whispered, then leaned to press his head to where she was most active. He looked up. “I guess if you all conspire to convince me this much, I should get to believing it, too, huh?”

She cupped his jaw. “You’re not perfect, Graham. But you’re all we need.”

His lashes slipped closed, but he smiled. “This is perfect.”

She nodded. “And part of that is because you’re here with us.”

He hesitated and nodded. “Okay.”

She waited with him to see if their daughter would shift again, move enough to make her presence known to her father. She settled with him, warm and comforted, and had to agree: this was amazing.
And she’d do all she could do every day to remind him that he deserved every part of it.

Because it had taken some time, but she finally believed it for herself, too.
Someday, Maybe

Chapter Summary

So, it wasn't what she thought.

Chapter Notes

Prompt from anon on Tumblr: “Emma on her period.” Pre-married, post-living together. Just getting my muse back into the groove.

She looked down at the package and sighed. The blues and purples seemed mocking now, taunting her as the cardboard remained sealed and the item unused. Her face twisted and she opened the medicine cabinet, pulling the tampons down instead and counting them.

Silly. This was all so silly.

The shower stopped and Graham reached around the shower curtain to the towel on the rack. He paused, startled, when he saw her there. “Em, didn’t know you were waiting. Get in now, while the water’s warmed up,” he said, and scooped her close to his wet body.

She squawked out in displeasure, then a laugh pulled from her just as easily. “You oaf! I wasn’t going to get in there so soon.”

He grinned and buried his face in her neck, curling his arms around her waist tight. “See, I’m just helping you not to procrastinate,” he teased, then bit into her skin just enough to indent. “It’s a service.”

“What?”

Her eyes snapped open. “What?”

He let go of her and stepped to the sink. “Is that a pregnancy test?”

“Oh,” she said and shook her head. She played with the hem of her shirt and then pulled the damp cloth over her head. “Yeah, but no. I thought maybe … I just started my period, though. I was only a day or so late.”

He blinked and picked up the test. “You thought?” he repeated.

She felt her face warm and she grabbed the package from him and tossed it in the trash. “I don’t know what I was thinking,” she said, and wished it hadn’t come out so bitter.

He sat down on the lid of the toilet, his eyes a little unfocused. “Oh.”
She crossed her arms and shrugged one shoulder. She pulled down her pajama bottoms and kicked them towards the hamper, keeping her eyes off him conspicuously. She turned on the water again and bit down on her lip before chancing a glance back to him. “It would have been too soon for any of that, anyway,” she said.

He raised his eyes to her. There was a big hit of seriousness in the depths of the blues before he visibly pulled himself back. “Right. No, exactly. Too soon,” he agreed, and then rubbed the back of his neck.

“We haven’t always been careful, though,” she said cautiously, and reached to test the temperature. The scalding spray covered her palm, raining across her skin. She adjusted the knob, then fiddled with it a moment longer. “So I thought it could, you know, be possible.”

He swallowed and rose, pulling her back against him. She took care to count the beats of his heart against her until he spoke. “Or she was right,” he said softly.

“We don’t know that,” she countered.

“It’s a possibility we need to consider, though,” he said hesitantly. “That I can’t give you that.”

She splayed her hands across his on her stomach, just over the line of her panties. “It’s considered,” she murmured. “But it’s also way too early to have this conversation, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know about that,” he hedged.

Despite herself, she smiled, then hid it away as fast as she could manage. Her heart fluttered, quiet anticipation, the same flicker of hope when she noticed her calendar. “Someday. When we get there, then we can discuss it and find out for sure, okay?”

He helped ease the last of her clothing off, hands lingering in places they had no time for this morning. He buried his face in her neck, lips against her pulse. “You’d, maybe … someday, you might want that with me?” he asked haltingly.

She felt some of her timidness around the subject ease, the hope and worry in his voice soothing those areas of uncertainty. “Yeah … I think I would,” she said softly. “Someday.”

He bit down on her skin, gently scrapping with teeth and she sighed pleasantly. “I think I would, too,” he admitted, then placed an open kiss to her jaw. “So, maybe we need to practice.”

She grinned and swatted at him. “Not now. You know the rule. Not the first day.” She stepped into the shower instead, pulling the curtain taut behind her.

“You know I don’t mind,” he called from the outside.

“I do!” she countered, and let the water run over her hair. “I feel gross enough.”

“I think I read an article about it easing cramps,” he argued, and she pulled back the curtain to find his mischievous grin. “Something to consider.”

She shook her head, but couldn’t help the grin that overtook her face. His eyes were so wide and innocent-looking sometimes, puppy-dog pleading. So despite herself, she leaned in and pecked at his lips. “No,” she said curtly. “Besides, we’ve tried the shower before and you know it’s no good. How about you make me a damn hot chocolate instead?”

He rolled his eyes playfully. “Fine. I guess I could get the kid up and ready, too.”
She let out a soft laugh, the domesticity of it all bringing her back to what she thought might be in store for them. “Yeah, try that practice instead,” she shot back.

He tossed a grin. “That’s one I can do,” he agreed, and left as the steam filled the room. “Breakfast in ten!”

She leaned against the tile, just knowing how dopey her smile must be. He wanted it, too, someday. Their family right now was pretty fantastic, but knowing that they both were amenable to letting it grow was pretty awe-inspiring.

She shook her head and started to scrub her hair, as if it could wash the idea out of her head. Someday would come when it was ready, when they were ready.

So why did that nagging little feeling inside her make her feel like it wasn’t too soon at all?
Relatives

Chapter Summary

They need to talk after this latest incident.

Chapter Notes

Post Keep Them On a Leash. So, I have no excuse. But we are finally moving the plot forward again! I know it won’t seem like it too much, but believe me.

Instead of staying in their room, Emma had dragged Graham out as soon as she saw his face.

Henry was with Maggie in her room so he allowed it, even if the idea of being out of his comfort zone of their family was a little off-putting.

She led him to the trees and dragged him near the spot he’d brought her when she’d needed to release her magic after Neal’s death. It was a small clearing, the tree canopy making the dusk seem darker.

He said nothing when he finally collapsed onto a fallen log, his head in his hands. He took a moment to draw in a deep breath, and then reached out for her. She came easily, and he wrapped his arms around her waist, burying his face against the swell of her stomach.

She wasn’t stiff, but he could tell she was holding back. Even when her hand came up, tugging through his hair soothingly, there was a hesitancy.

He looked up, blinking when her face was blurred. “I’m sorry.”

She sighed and shook her head.

He grimaced and rested his cheek against her stomach again. The baby moved against him and he closed his eyes briefly. “I’m sorry,” he repeated, lowly, to their little one as well.

She placed her hand on his cheek until he moved back. She sat next to him instead and gripped his hand. “I love you.”

He kissed her forehead then rested his own against hers. “I love you.”

She took their hands together, rings clinking as she twisted their fingers. She swallowed. “I know she was seeking you out. But I can’t explain how much I want to snap her neck whenever I hear she’s close to you.”

“I know,” he replied quietly. Her voice was shaky, and he could hear the rage behind it.
She gave a pointed look. “Especially when I hear that you put yourself in harm’s way again.”

He shook his head. “Maggie pulled a gun. I would have been happy to let her use it if I didn’t know that it would be meaningless.”

She looked away. “Mags failed to mention that part,” she murmured. “And you’re right: Regina could have hurt her, killed her with her magic. But, Graham, you have no better defenses.”

He pressed his lips to the corner of her mouth, getting her full attention from the images he could practically feel vibrating in her mind’s eye. “I at least know the risks. Maggie thought she had the upper hand. At least I knew I didn’t.”

She shook her head. “And I told you. I can’t—“ her breath hitched and she looked down, two tears falling down her cheeks in a slow trickle. “I can’t lose you.”

He hugged her to him, wrapping her close. Bile rose in his throat at the thought. “I’m not running towards the danger. I promise. But I will keep you all safe. I have to.”

She grabbed his hand and pressed it over her belly button. “We need you safe, too,” she reminded.

He cupped her stomach and nodded. His heart tugged. “I watched Henry growing up from afar. I promise I want to see this one grow up right up close.” Not just for the newbie, but for Henry and Emma, too. He wants to see their family flourish.

She offered a sad smile. “You’d better,” she said gruffly, the threat of more tears behind her tone.

He closed his eyes and thought through what had happened. “Regina only threatened. She didn’t touch me, physically or magically,” he reassured.

She shuddered and leaned in to kiss him gently.

He rubbed her shoulders soothingly as they broke apart, wishing they could just forget and leave. His head throbbed, the threat of a migraine once more. “She said that the Wicked Witch—it’s her sister. And Zelena wants to hurt anyone Regina ‘cares’ about, for lack of better motivation.” He shook his head, remembering Regina’s words. Anything I own. Rage piqued again. “Henry’ll be a target.”

She shivered and buried herself into him. “We need to get back, then.” She made no move to get up, though her eyes turned to the old home peeking through the trees.

He nodded. “I think he’ll be okay with Maggie. At least up in her room, with Granny and Red downstairs.”

She nodded and pulled back to swipe at her cheeks.

He leaned in. “Maggie, though … she’ll be yet another target since she’s in the way. I—having her here is great, really, but it makes me worry for her.”

She sighed. “I know. It makes me worry, too,” she admitted. “She loves us all so much, and she’s … well, Maggie. She won’t stand idly by, especially when she doesn’t understand the real danger.”

“Exactly,” he said, feeling relief that she understood. Maggie was family, and he
couldn’t leave her ill-prepared. The only reason he’d agreed to leaving them alone now was that the Bed and Breakfast was still in plain view, and there was at least a werewolf and an armed and protective Grandmother to keep watch. “I might have told her the scar from when I was a kid was from Regina,” he said.

She found the two worst sites even without looking, her hand covering his side and the other cupping at his neck. He pressed the hand on his stomach, answering her unspoken question. She focused on the area, thumb rubbing lightly. “At least it’ll get across what she’s like,” she murmured. “Though I’m worried these half-truths we’ve been giving her won’t hold up after a while.”

He hesitated, and held her closer. “I might have also started to tell her about the other thing,” he said, his tongue feeling heavy. “The one she really did.”

She looked up at him and let out a stuttered breath. She turned a pale sort of green, and swallowed thickly. Her skin started to flicker slightly. After a long beat, she said, “she’ll be fiercer, then.”

He carefully turned her, directing her hands over the ground. A small shower of magic specks fell from her fingertips, glowing faintly before extinguishing. He nodded once, glad she was letting it out. “I didn’t even mean to,” he continued. “It just … I was trying to list her crimes in a real-world perspective and it just—it just came out.”

“It’s not a small thing, Graham,” she said, and pressed a hand to his jaw. Her expression was stricken, tears swimming in her eyes.

Her skin was still sparking, and he moved his hands over her arms to soothe her. His hair began to stand on end, like static electricity. Strangely, he wasn’t put off by the feeling. Ever since she’d healed him, there was something calming to the feel of her magic. At least when he knew it was coming and had time to deal with it like this, on his own terms. It was also a nice distraction from thinking beyond the words he’d told Maggie, from thinking about the years of Regina’s commands. “Being here just brings up all the past again,” he admitted, feeling the claw of it despite his attempts.

“I should learn how to use this,” she said softly. “So I can protect Henry. The baby. You.”

He swallowed thickly. “Please don’t try on my account. If you can use it safely, fine. But I won’t have you putting yourself or him on the line for me,” he demanded gruffly.

She bit down on her lip, shook her head in denial. He relaxed, but she tensed further then pivoted out of his embrace to let a flare of electricity out of her veins into the ground, lighting the forest in a pale golden glow. The details came to light, and he suddenly found himself struck. He knew exactly where they were.

“I think I buried someone out here,” he said suddenly and rose. Something familiar about this part of the woods, a flash of vision behind his eyes.

“Huh?”

He glanced side to side, fist clenching as he tried to remember one of the early days of the curse. “She snapped his neck. I thought she’d have me do it; she made me do everything else. But there was a man whose child got away from her grasp, so she snapped his neck and made me bury the body.”
She shook her head and buried her face in her hands. She breathed heavily a few beats, trying to get under control. She darted out and grasped his hand, tugging him closer. “When?”

He studied the trees, trying to recall. “Maybe a week or so into the curse. Very early on. They weren’t from the Enchanted Forest. I think it was a mistake that they were able to find this place.” He shook his head. “Unlucky for them.”

“And the kid?” she asked. Her eyes were red-rimmed and hard.

He shrugged helplessly and turned to her. “I never saw him again. He made it to the outside, past the town line, and disappeared after that. His name … I think it was Owen. The father was Kurt. Maybe we can look him up.”

She nodded and rose to cross over to him before burying her face into his shoulder. “I am so sorry you have to relive these things,” she said thickly.

His lashes flicked across his cheeks and he shook his head. “It’s better than it used to be,” he said.

She brushed her lips against his bicep, an apology nonetheless. “Why?” she asked. It was obvious she was not referring to his state.

He closed his eyes. He remembered greeting them, remembered the boy’s inquisitive look and the man’s sincere smile at his son. “She wanted the boy. To what end … I don’t know. But she was furious that he escaped, that he rejected her.”

She shook her head. “She doesn’t do well with rejection,” she murmured, and pressed a hand over his heart. He shuddered, the reminder firm in his mind.

If you ever disobey me, if you ever try to run away …. She placed a kiss on his chest, and he was brought back. “Not good for Henry, then.”

“Exactly,” he said, and wrapped an arm around her. He kissed the crown of her head, idly wishing he could pull her closer to his body as the baby inhibited that. He placed his hand on her stomach again, rubbing absenty. “I got the danger Regina poses over Henry across to Maggie, at least. She’ll keep him safe, too.”

“As will David and Mary Margaret. And Killian. Red, Granny. And Belle, to an extent,” she said. She blinked a few times. “I suppose there is a good group here that will help, huh?”

“No one threatens quite like Regina, though,” he mused.

She nodded and rocked her forehead against him. “Zelena … she’s got enough self-preservation to hide away after she strikes. It makes it harder to defeat her and leave in a timely manner,” she said thoughtfully, a hint of bitterness to it.

He pressed harder against her stomach. “It must have something to do with the twins. And your brother. Why else pose as a midwife?”

“Not twins,” she said through a strained air of playfulness. She remained in his arms, thoughtful. “Mary Margaret and I looked through a bunch of books on spells including newborns. Mary … she thinks it has something to do with children of … well, the thing we are.”

He warmed slightly at the thought, and then he had a wash of cold. “You are as magical as you are because of that. Our baby …,” he trailed off. They had talked about this new person often; what he’d look like, what traits he’d get, what they wished for. They never discussed the
idea that this child of True Love, just like her, would have that boost of power. The truth of it had never really struck them, or perhaps they both ignored it. He knew that the baby made her powers grow, but only quietly considered that it was because of his potential for his own magic once he was born.

Now he couldn’t help but acknowledge that even the potential for magic in either child was something these villains would strike at. He pictured Ashley a moment, and shuddered at the reminder that villains would trade for these little ones readily. Zelena, Regina, any number of being they didn’t know about yet … they wouldn’t be as subtle about it.

The part of him that was the man he was before reacted violently to the idea. It was everything he had grown learning of humans, their disregard for life if it brought them what they wanted. Defenses reared up within him, snarling from that place in his soul.

He pulled her into him and breathed deeply, tempering to the smell of her.

She nodded into his shoulder. “Mary Margaret … she’s due almost any time. My brother,” she winced at the term and then forged ahead. “He’s the one in the most danger right now.”

“Agreed,” he said, and moved his hand soothingly. His little son moved with him, following him. He felt a spring of tears behind his eyes, how much he loved him already. “But we can’t be caught unprepared, just in case.”

Her eyes snapped open and looked beyond him. “Like now?”

He turned, whiplashing toward the direction she was looking and immediately pulling her behind him in the same action. His heart thundered even when he saw the flash of white and grey, the slow movement behind a bush. He chuckled in disbelief, realizing why he hadn’t picked up on another presence. “I think this ‘unprepared’ is more welcome,” he said as the wolf came into view.

His brother moved around the green, red eye piercing through the darkness. He was silent as he cocked his head, examining the couple.

“In laws,” Emma muttered.

He smirked and crouched down, ducking his head slightly in deference. “‘Bout time you had to deal with any,” he joked lightly. He smiled, awe collecting within him. He had missed this family. He was truly a reprieve from the dark worries, another protection against the evils of this town.

The wolf padded forward, but stopped a few feet shy of approaching. He continued to appraise them, silent but not tense.

Emma moved to press a hand between his shoulder blades. “I remember him from that night,” she said, voice strained.

“He tried to help,” he said and held out a hand.

His brother snorted and ducked his own head before bridging the distance. He pushed into his hand once then turned to Emma, whining slightly as he flattened to the ground in front of her, eyes trained up on her.

He blinked in surprise. He had never been this submissive, even with him. “I think he recognizes the baby,” he said, and laughed in disbelief. “He knows you’re pregnant.”
She smiled and crouched beside him, hand out cautiously. “Good to meet you, too,” she whispered.

The wolf suddenly hopped to his feet and spun around, growling to the distance as he backed up into Emma. She let out a noise of surprise as he pressed into her.

“Speaking of protection,” he murmured and grabbed for the gun at his hip.

A flash of blonde drifted through the trees, and the ice cream shop owner finally turned into the clearing. She startled in surprise to see them, but did not tense at the sight of the wolf. She only smiled gently. “Oh, I am sorry to bother you. I didn’t realize anyone would be out here.”

The wolf’s jowls peeled back, snapping towards the woman.

“Ingrid, right?” Emma said, and reached out an uncertain hand towards his brother.

He whistled low through his teeth, and the wolf steadied back into a low growl of disapproval. There was something about the woman that made him uneasy, but the reminder of how she could get Zelena to back down those days ago was fresh in his mind. “You startled us,” he finally said.

Ingrid smiled thinly, chin raised as she glanced at the animal without a trace of fear. “Indeed. I can understand that. I was just out for a walk.”

The light in the woods was strange at dusk, he decided, because he could have sworn her hands were blue just a second before. He shook his head.

“You probably shouldn’t be out here like this. You know about the threat, right?” Emma asked, and then very delicately placed a hand on the wolf’s head. His brother licked his teeth and settled, ears dropping back and tongue lolling out as he stared up at her.

“Magnificent animal,” she said, ignoring Emma’s question. “You are lucky to have his trust.”

Graham stiffened. He wasn’t sure if it was just because any stranger would set him on edge right now. “He does well defending his family,” he said, barely concealing an idle threat.

Ingrid raised smiling eyes to him. “I am sure that’s true,” she smoothed her hands over the hips of her trousers. She looked too immaculate for a walk in the woods. “I should let you be on your way?”

Emma turned her eyes to him, brow furrowed in confusion. She gave a short, barely perceptible shake of her head, a refusal to push things. “Yes, we should head back,” she said simply.

Henry. She’s right. Even if this woman was sketchy, the priority would be getting back to their son. The wolf trotted alongside Emma as she started walking, his good eye trained on the woman. Ingrid made no move toward them, and the wolf seemed to grudgingly accept that she wasn’t an immediate threat.

“It was good to see you again, Emma,” Ingrid said, and there was a fair bit of warmth in her voice. “I hope there will be no further trouble for you.”

Graham’s head shot up, meeting the icy blue of her gaze. He squeezed Emma’s hand in his, and shifted to cover her.
Ingrid only smiled before turning her back on them. “There will be a free cone next time I see you,” she promised with a look over her shoulder. “I would be glad to see your family around again.”

The wolf waited until she was gone and then turned dark eyes on them. His head bowed and he scampered away as lightly as he had come.

He turned back to Emma, confusion and unease still filtering within him. Her brow was furrowed, but she seemed more puzzled. “She’s familiar,” she murmured, then shook herself. She looked back up at him. “Let’s go to Henry, okay? We can figure out the motives of all these shady characters later.”

He nodded his agreement and leaned to press his forehead against hers. “Sounds like a plan.”

He couldn’t shake the nagging feeling that he had missed something nonetheless.

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