Emma Swan and the Year That Never Was

by goblindaughter

Summary

There are side effects to being the end of a curse. Emma Swan dreams of a world that burned, and a doctor comes to town.

Emma Swan says she never remembers her dreams. In a way, that's true. She only ever remembers her nightmares.

They're recurring. The first one, the worst one, came the week after she got out of jail. She dreamed that the President was murdered on air, that the Prime Minister of England took over the world, that a tenth of the Earth's population was culled by flying, giggling spheres. The Toclafane, they called themselves. She knows, because they came for her roommate, and Paula asked before they diced her head into pieces no bigger than Emma's little fingernail.

They didn't even seem to notice that Emma was there.

She fled her apartment after that, joined a group of other survivors. They settled in an abandoned building by the river, and watched as the skyscrapers were bulldozed to make room for the steel mills. The decree (she felt so silly, using that word, decree, like a king in the fairytale, but it came from a man calling himself the Master and everything was crazy anyways) went out soon after the clearing was completed--the people of the city would assist in the building and manning of the steel mills, or they would die.

Of course everyone complied.
In the dream, it was months upon long months that she worked, turning a winch. Her arms bulked up, her hands roughened with callouses. She got used to having one meal a day if she was lucky and to sleeping on the ground with only her clothes for a blanket again. Then she stumbled on a plot to destroy the largest of the factories in what used to be downtown, evacuate a lot of the workers into the subway tunnels where the Toclafane couldn't go because the thick concrete walls bounced their sensors and blocked their communications.

Of course she helped.

It's the clearest moment of the dream, the way she felt with the snow falling around her and the heat of the fire at her back, and running with the crowd, spearheading the race to the access points, the pops of the machine guns her friends were using to keep the Toclafane distracted, the feeling of triumph that surged through her when she jumped down on the tracks and saw the third rail was still live. She still wakes up with the words "we've got power" on her lips sometimes, or "down the stairs" or "go".

Then she dreamed Martha Jones came. Doctor Martha Jones, the women everyone talked about. She was going to save the world, they said. Emma didn't believe them, in the dream, because no one could save the world. The Master had the Toclafane, he had the rockets, he had everything. There was no way this Martha Jones, whoever she was, could make the whole planet free again. There was no way anyone could. Parts of it, like her little subway community, might be, but never the whole thing, never again. They fed the good doctor, and listened to her tell stories about the capital-d Doctor she ran with for a time, him of the impossible blue box and the two hearts and the madness.

She believed that, because, hell. Why not? Flying balls that spoke in the voices of children and laughed when they killed, why not a time-traveling police box with an alien inside? But not that he would save the world. Impossibility could only get you so far.

But when it came time, Emma shouted "Doctor!" to the skies with the rest of them.

And woke up.

But never really, because there are shadows around her life now. Things that don't fit. She knows the subway system like the back of her hand, even though she doesn't live there anymore. She had callouses when she woke up, her palms hard as hide. They've faded with time, but she remembers when they were there. She's saved a newspaper clipping, about a satellite that fell out of the sky and crashed in a Kenyan farmer's field. It's one of only two articles about it ever released. (Conspiracy theorists like to say it was aliens, or a secret government project gone wrong, or the Illuminati. Emma doesn't even know why she still keeps it around.)

Doctor Martha Jones comes to Storybrooke three days after Mary Margaret is cleared of all charges.

She looks different--not so skinny, and while she's still dressed in black, she's got enough weaponry for half an army in her car, and she comes trailing two men. One's black, with a short
beard and handsome nose. One's white and dark-haired. They both act like they're married to her, and that's not what bothers Emma, because it's none of her business. What bothers Emma is that Doctor Martha Jones does not exist. But here she is, anyway.

They see each other properly in the diner, and stare, and Mary Margaret shakes Emma's arm and asks her what's wrong. Emma shakes her head, says it's nothing, and she's out the door. But she knows Martha is following her even before she hears the door bang again.

"Emma Swan," says the woman who shouldn't be real, "You remember, don't you?"

"No," says Emma, turning to her. "I don't. There's nothing to remember, this is just some crazy coincidence--" And Martha is shaking her head, and it's infuriating, because it isn't possible.

"It never did happen, you know," Martha goes on, "It was held together by a paradox machine, and when that was gone, it got erased. There's only a handful of people who even know the Toclafane existed." Emma just stares at her, because she can't take it in--none of that, any of it, can possibly have happened. Not in any world. It was just a dream.

"Are you going to tell me this paradox machine was magic?" says Emma, and her voice is harder than she wants it to be, but she can't help it.

Martha shakes her head. "Technology," she says, "Timelord technology--more advanced than we can even dream of."

"What the hell's a Timelord?" Emma demands, and Martha smiles and says she'll explain over some lunch, with her husbands.

Emma's so busy wondering just what the fuck kind of technology can erase a whole year from existence that she nearly doesn't notice the plural.

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