Life As We Know It

by princessrorora

Summary

Aurora is a single mother dealing with raising her daughter and dealing with the pain of losing her husband, Phillip. Killian Jones is recovering from the loss of the love of his life and moving forward in the sleepy town of Storybrooke. What will happen when he notices the mother daughter duo and suddenly can't get the young mother out of his mind? Storybrooke AU. No curse.
Chapter One

Kids. He loathed kids.

Kids carried germs on their disgusting sticky fingers, and screamed and fussed and kicked if things didn't go their way. You had to feed them, and nurture them, and teach them things. Kids asked insipid questions all day and yet acted like they knew everything there was to know. They made messes and got into things and destroyed everything. Things dripped out of every orifice and everything on planet earth was free reign to be put in their mouths. They were up all night and got into everything. He never wanted to be around kids, let alone have them.

It shouldn't even matter to him. Being a father and having kids was the furthest thing from his mind. He wouldn't even know how to be one. He never knew his own father. His brother had been the one to teach him what he knew. The rest he picked up in daily life. He didn't need a father. He didn't need to be a parent to feel fulfilled with life.

So why was he standing outside the elementary school right now, watching all those squealing brats climb the jungle gym and push each other and bring his stress level through the roof?

"Hey Uncle Killian!" A happy voice shouts.

Oh. That.

His sister in law Emma was working a double shift at the sheriff's department. Of course no one else could pick up her son from school. Of course it just so happened to be the day that his brother August was working as well. Of course it just so happened that Killian was surprisingly free.

"Hey." He mumbled. "Come on, kid. I've got to get back to work."

"I thought you were free today. That's what mom said. She said you'd get me a milkshake at Granny's." He grinned that smile that was too much like August's.

Killian rolled his eyes and his head cocked back. "Of course she did." He stuffed his hands in his coat pockets, surprised his exuberant nephew would even want a milkshake in this chilly weather. "Come on, let's go."

As they turned, a sweet little voice called out. "Henry! You forgot your book!" A little girl with bouncing brown curls and big brown eyes came running towards Henry. She held out his heavy storybook, and gave Henry a shy smile. "I wouldn't want you to be without this all weekend." She has little flowers laced in her hair, and her dress is frilly and pink and lacy. Someone put too much time in this kid's outward appearance. Didn't her parents know she was going to school, where she would be sure to get dirtied up instantly?

Of course, what did he know, right?

"Thank you so much, Lucy!" Henry exclaimed, taking the book from her.

"Of course." She looked up at Killian and grinned. "Hello." She sent him a little wave before looking back at Henry.

"Lucy! Come on, honey!" A voice called out.

This time it wasn't Henry who looked up, but Killian. He locked eyes with a young woman on the sidewalk. Her hair was long and curly and seemed to glisten in the sunlight. She had soft blue
eyes and a beautiful set of full lips. Killian couldn't help but bite his lower lip as he looked her up and down, a smirk tugging at his lips. The woman quirked her eyebrow at him and gave him an expression that said, 'not now, not ever.'

"I'll see you on Monday, Henry." Lucy grinned and hurried away, towards the woman on the sidewalk.

"Come on, you owe me a milkshake." Henry yanked on Killian's sleeve.

Killian was too distracted by the lovely creature in purple that embraced the little girl. He was sure he hadn't ever seen her before. The town was small. He saw everyone at least twice a day every single day. But how come he hadn't seen her? They would have bumped into each other at least a few times.

She's probably not the kind of woman to visit a skeezy bar like yours. She is a mother after all.

Killian smirked to himself. Indeed. She was a mother. Probably had a husband at home with the white picket fence and all the trimmings.

She glanced towards him as she took the little girl by the hand to lead her away. She studied him curiously for a moment before looking away to turn and walk down the street.

"Henry, who was that?"

Henry had been studying his uncle the entire time he gaped at Lucy and her mother. He sighed, adjusting the heavy book in his hands. "That was my friend. Lucy."

Killian rolled his eyes. "You won't get a milkshake unless you answer my questions without the sass, kid."

Henry sent him an eye roll of his own. "Her mom is Miss Aurora. Can we go now?"

"She married?" He asked, though already guessed the answer.

Henry hesitated, and looked towards where his friend and her mother had gone. "Well...not exactly..."

"What's that mean?" Killian asked. "Do I have hope with her or not?"

Henry looked up at Killian and shook his head. "I wouldn't hold my breath. She's not...she's not ready to date." Henry turned and started to head in the direction of Granny's diner.

"What happened to her husband?" He asked, hurrying after his nephew. "He run off on them or something?"

"No...no...he died." Henry deadpanned, figuring it was best to not beat around the bush.

That changed everything.

And not exactly for the better, either.

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"Lucy, who was that with your friend Henry?" Aurora asked gently. "I've never seen him before."

"I don't know, Mama." Lucy murmurs, squeezing her mother's hand.
He certainly wasn't the boy's father. Aurora had known August and Emma for her entire time in Storybrooke. Even before she was married. She could remember Emma being pregnant, and Henry's birth. He wasn't his father. But she had seen him before. Perhaps in passing. He wouldn't be able to pick up Henry unless he was family. So he was related somehow. Aurora sighed and shook her head. She couldn't pinpoint who he was, or why he even mattered. There was just something about him that captured her attention.

Aurora shook her head, and gave her daughter's hand a gentle squeeze as they approached their apartment building. "What do you want for dinner, Luce?"

"Macaroni and cheese." She beamed up at her mother with a smile that was too much like her father's. Aurora tried her best to ignore the tight squeeze in her heart and fought off the tears like a pro.

"You always want macaroni and cheese." Aurora managed a soft laugh for her daughter.

"So do you." Lucy giggled, adjusting the blue and pink owl backpack over her shoulders. "Please, mama?" She asked sweetly, her warm smile growing.

Aurora swallowed the lump in her throat as she fished her keys out of her pocket. "I suppose so, sweetheart. Don't think we'll be making this an every night thing."

"Whatever you need to tell yourself, mama. We'll be the mac and cheese queens by the end of the month!" Lucy giggled.

Phillip would have been in awe of his daughter. She brought sunlight and joy wherever she went. Much like he had. Everything seemed brighter when she was around. The darkness didn't creep into her mind as often.

Oh, he would have been such a good father.

Aurora thought after five years with him being gone it would get easier. And in a few ways, it had. And yet, every single time she thought of him, she had this overwhelming urge to laugh and to cry at the same time. She couldn't control her emotions sometimes. She did her best not to let Lucy see her weakness, but the little girl always knew what Aurora was feeling. She would always comfort her in that special way only she was capable of doing.

The mother daughter duo walked upstairs and found Mary Margaret fighting with her lock. "Hello, Mary. Need help?" Aurora offered.

"Oh no, no. It's just this stupid lock. It's okay. David should be home soon."

"I heard my name." A voice laughed up the stairs.

A glow suddenly brightened Mary Margaret's cheeks, and her smile could have lit the entire town when David appeared on the top of the stairs. "My prince has arrived to save the day." She waved her hands in the air like a princess would, and Lucy giggled at her teacher's antics.

"Have a good night." Aurora murmured, doing her best to smile at the happy couple.

Hadin't it just been yesterday she was like that? Hadn't she once had a prince of her own to save the day? Hadn't she smiled like that before? Aurora couldn't even remember the last time she laughed because of a man.

But whenever she pictured herself laughing and being happy again, she saw it in the company of Lucy or Phillip. Never anyone else.
She couldn’t even imagine moving on. When she'd allowed herself a night out with the girls, they had all suggested she try to move on. Emma and Ruby had been trying to get her to get out there and find a man to release her stresses and anxieties onto. Belle and Mary Margaret had been a little gentler, but still encouraged her to move forward. For her sake and Lucy's sake.

And what about Lucy? Aurora couldn't bring a man home and have her daughter become attached to said man and have her be crushed when he ran off or when Aurora pushed him away.

And how could Aurora ever love again? She couldn't picture loving anyone like she loved Phillip. She couldn't imagine being happy and in love again unless she was with him. She couldn't imagine getting so close to someone again, to open herself up to another person only to lose them like she had lost Phillip. Aurora didn't know if she was strong enough to go through that again.

Whenever she closed her eyes, she saw her husband. He was still with her, even after all this time. She saw him in different places throughout her day, remembering sweet memories with him. She could see him on their wedding day, when he had been so handsome and never let her go through the entire celebration. She could see him talking to her stomach as Lucy grew beneath her heart. She could feel his hands upon her face, feel his kiss and his warmth. She could see him the day Lucy was born, and how in awe he was of his wife and daughter. She could still see him the day he died. How he'd given her and Lucy a kiss goodbye before heading off to work like he always did.

Aurora found herself afraid of forgetting him. How could she move on with someone new and make new memories as if he hadn't ever been there? It was impossible to go through life without thinking of him and seeing him. Their daughter was the spitting image of him. Even if she had been five when he died, she still remembered him. She exuded his light and gentle spirit. She was so beautiful. She deserved a father. She deserved that male role that would protect her and provide for her and guide her through life. She deserved so much more than Aurora could offer her.

Would Phillip want her to move on? Would he want her to be happy, to find love again? Of course he would. He would want Aurora to laugh again, to be in love and to not be afraid anymore. He would want her to find someone who could quell her fears, who could hold her through the nightmares, who could cherish her and love her and Lucy and take care of them.

Aurora did fine on her own. She gave Lucy everything she could and took the time to make her look like a fairy princess each day. She helped her with her homework and was at every school play. She always encouraged her to be whatever she wanted to be, and to fight through each trial life gave her. She taught her to be polite to others, and to always look for the best in others. Aurora wanted to give Lucy everything she could possibly ever want or need.

But did that include a father? Could Aurora open herself back up to love for Lucy's sake? She didn't know if it was possible.

"Um, Mama?" Lucy suddenly asked.

"Yes, sweetheart?" Aurora murmured, blinking herself back to reality.

"I just...um...didn't know macaroni could burn like that." She said as sweetly as she could.

Aurora gasped and quickly turned the flame off. The noodles were stuck to the bottom of the pot, and steam rose off of the goop.

"Let's head to Granny's. I'll treat you to a milkshake." Aurora sighed, tossing the pot directly into the trash can.

"I'll get my coat."
"You've had four milkshakes in an hour, kid. Might have to cut you off." Ruby teased as she collected the empty glasses onto her tray.

"I just want to try one more. The malted milk ball shake, if you please." Henry grinned. "My dear uncle is treating me today. We never get to spend time together."

Ruby glanced at Killian, heavily lined eyes looking him up and down. She smirked and nodded at Henry before resting her hand on Killian's shoulder a moment longer than necessary. If Killian had a nickel for every time that waitress ogled him, he'd be a rich man indeed. He could buy a boat and sail away from this stupid little town and never have to look back.

"I think I want some chili cheese fries too." Henry grinned.

"Where the hell do you put it all, lad?" Killian exclaimed.

"Hey, watch your language around my kid." August sent Killian a glare as he stepped towards the pair at the booth. Ruby appeared with another shake, and slid it across the table to Henry. "You trying to fatten my kid up?" August sent Killian another glare. "How many have you had?"

"Uhm...I lost count." Henry said sheepishly.

"This is his fifth." Killian grumbled. "Now that you're here, I'm off. I've got things to do before the night shift."

"Ah you have time to sit with us for a little while." August grinned, sliding into the booth beside Henry. "How've you been?"

"Just dandy, thanks." Now was not the time for his brother to catch up and check on him. Killian was getting a headache, and he was already irritated. It would be a shock if he didn't end up growling and barking orders at his staff later on.

"No really, how've you been?" August sighed. "You going out, seeing things?"

"There's not much to see in Storybrooke. And I go out. I went out today and look what that got me." He gestured towards Henry and his wobbly form.

"Look, man, you should get out more." August shrugged his shoulders. "Meet new people. Move forward."

Killian tensed up at his brother's insinuation, and shook his head slowly. "I run a bar. There's nowhere else to go to get out more." He tapped his fingers against the tabletop and sighed. "Look, Aug, I know what you're trying to do. But really...I'm fine. I meet people. Every night. This is my life now. I'm a big boy. I can take care of myself."

"I'm just trying to help you out." August sighed, raking a hand through his hair. "I mean ever since..."

"Don't." Killian shook his head, and rose to his feet. "Don't say her name, don't bring it up. Just don't, August." He growled.

The bell above the door jingled. Killian looked up, and spotted the little girl from earlier running across the diner to attack Ruby with a huge hug. "Lucy! Hey sugar, what's going on?"

And then the door jingled again, and the woman in purple appeared. She had a small smile on her
face as she moved across the diner towards the little girl in Ruby's arms. "Hey Rory. How have you been?" Ruby hugged her and led the pair over to the bar.

The woman slipped her coat off and shook out her amber curls. Killian's fingers suddenly itched to rake through them, to feel the softness and watch the delicate curls bounce back into place. He quickly looked away, feeling a cold sweat break out across his neck. He hadn't felt this way in a long time, not since...No. It wasn't the same. Pretty girls were all the same. He encountered pretty girls every night. This one was a mother, with a bad history to boot, and she seemed snobby. Yeah, sure, she was probably snobby. You had to be if you cared that much about how you and your offspring looked in a town like Storybrooke. Sure, that was it.

"What are you staring at?" Henry asks in a slightly slurred voice. Kid couldn't hold his ice cream.

August quirks his eyebrow and looks towards where his brother had been gaping, and his eyes widen. "No, Killian. No. You need to go out, meet new people, sure. But Killian...leave her alone. She's been through enough."

"And? Nothing is going to happen."

"And? Nothing is going to happen." Killian shrugged his leather jacket on and rolled his eyes. "I don't know the woman."

"Keep it that way." August instructed.

"Fine, fine. I've got to go. Work. This and that." He adjusted his flannel and jacket, and stepped past his brother. "Thanks for the fun, lad." Killian sent Henry a little wave, and the boy giggled and waved back, a little loopy from all the ice cream.

"Thanks for picking him up." August patted Killian's arm as he stepped away.

"Oh yes, anytime." He drawled.

As Killian headed towards the door, Ruby's voice stopped him. "Dining and dashing? I don't think so. Don't make me get Granny."

Ah yes, the blasted bill.

"Sorry, love." Killian mumbled, doing his best to avoid looking at the duo sitting at the counter a few feet away from him. Had he actually looked, he would only find the little girl, and not her mother. He quickly pulls his wallet out and tosses a few bills down.

Ruby takes the cash and is quick to print the receipt and get his change. "Don't let it happen again." She slides his receipt and change across the counter, and Killian notices how she had added her phone number as well. He looks up at her with a quirk of his eyebrow. "Use that." She says in her smoothest voice.

"Hello again." Lucy giggles, oblivious to Ruby's flirting.

Killian glances at the little girl. She sits daintily at the counter, napkin placed carefully in her lap. "Hello, lass." He murmurs, sending her a smile.

"Who are you?" She deadpans. Kids. They never seemed to beat around the bush. She wanted to know something, so she simply asked. It was almost refreshing, really.

"I'm Killian Jones. At your service, m'lady." He gives her a sweeping bow, and she laughs.

"Pleasure to meet you, Mister Jones. I'm Lucy." She bows her head in return.
Aurora returns from the bathroom to find her daughter giggling at the man she had seen that afternoon.

"Mama, this is Mister Jones." Lucy grins at her mother before turning back to Killian.

"Hello." Aurora murmurs with a small smile.

"Ah, it's Killian." He offers. She's even prettier up close. No, not pretty. Beautiful. He'd seen plenty of pretty girls. But none quite as beautiful as the girl before him. "And you are?"

"Aurora. It's nice to meet you." She gives him a small smile, and he reaches out for her extended hand. He barely has a chance to admire the softness and tininess of her hand before she pulls it away. "How are you related to Henry?" She asked, glancing towards August and Henry still in the booth behind them. "I ah, noticed you picking him up today. I've never seen you around town before." She murmurs, a curious glint in her bluebell eyes.

"I keep to myself." He shrugs, stuffing his hands into his coat pockets. " August is my brother. The kid is my nephew." Killian glances towards August and Henry still seated in the booth. August is staring at him, practically throwing daggers at him with his gaze.

"The...the kid?" She asks with a lift of one perfectly shaped eyebrow.

Killian smirks a little. "Yes, that's my little nickname, I suppose."

"Precious." She murmurs, pursing her lips as she looks away. Ruby brings them their plates. A bowl of macaroni and cheese for Lucy, and a salad for Aurora.

"I love macaroni and cheese. I make it homemade." Killian turns back to Lucy, and leans against the counter. Something about the little girl is awfully likable. She isn't like the sticky handed brats he had encountered before. She's a little lady.

"Really?" Lucy's big brown eyes widen. "Mama, we've got to try that. I'll bet it's better than the boxed stuff."

"Oh definitely." Killian grins. "I'll have to give you my recipe."

"We're the macaroni and cheese queens." Lucy beams, leaning forward happily.

"Really now? I suppose I'm the king." He teases back.

"I suppose so!" Lucy laughs.

"Lucy, hush now. Let him go. I'm sure he's a very busy man." Aurora murmurs with a soft smile to her daughter. To him, her expression hardens, as if telling him to 'buzz off'.

He certainly could read her better than most, for some reason. As guarded as this woman seemed, she sure was open with how she was truly feeling.

"Aye, lass. Forgive me for invading on your meal. Have a lovely evening, you two."

"It was nice to meet you." Lucy grins, and sends him a little wave before picking up her spoon to scoop out a bite of cheesy noodles.

Killian headed out of the diner, fighting the urge to look back. Something about the young mother intrigued him. Maybe it was the fact that he couldn't have her, that she was untouchable. August would literally kill him, and she didn't seem to have a care in the world for him. Her husband had
died. She understood loss, just like he did. But it was different. She had a child. A child that was too likable and warm for her own good. Killian hated kids, but that one, that one wasn't too terrible.

But the fact was, he could never have her. It wasn't even because of August's warning. His brother's warnings had never stopped him before. But this woman was different. There was an emptiness in her eyes when she looked at a person, even when she smiled. She had seen too much, had endured too much. And being with him would only cause her more pain, he was sure of it. He couldn't do that to a person. He couldn't drag another woman down and have it end in the same way as before. And he couldn't do that to the girl. She was too sweet for him to corrupt.

Had he looked back, he would have seen a pair of blue eyes watching him go.
Chapter Two

The next day, Saturday afternoon, was lazy. All Saturdays should be lazy. The mother daughter duo had nothing going on. Aurora worked for the mayor all week, but thankfully the woman let her have the weekends off to spend with Lucy. Usually they would do something that was more exciting than laying around the house. But Saturdays were made for being lazy, if you considered Lucy and Aurora lazy at all.

Lucy was sitting at the kitchen table working on her homework for the weekend, and Aurora was attempting to clean out the fridge. Soft music played in the background, and Aurora hummed along. She was a clean freak and always had everything in their apartment in place. Nothing was ever terribly messy. She just hated cleaning out the fridge, which is why it was always put off until it was the absolute last chore there was to do.

"Mama?" Lucy asked.

"Yes, sweetheart? Do you need help?" Aurora asked as she scrubbed one of the shelves within the fridge.

"No. I was just wondering..." She paused, and Aurora lifted her head out of the fridge to see Lucy pursing her lips as she always did when deep in thought. "Do you think Mr. Jones a pirate?"

"What?" Aurora asked, quirking an eyebrow. "Mr. Jones? Oh...Henry's uncle."

"Uh huh." She giggles. "He just...he talks like a pirate. He calls people 'love' and 'lass' and walks like Jack Sparrow."

"Maybe you should ask him next time you see him." Aurora sighed. Lucy hadn't stopped talking about the supposed king of mac'n'cheese ever since she saw him the night before at Granny's. She was absolutely enthralled by him. She liked something about him, and made sure Aurora knew all night and into the next day.

Aurora, on the other hand, couldn't help but wonder about that man. She had lived in Storybrooke all her life, and had never met him before. How could their paths not have crossed at some point? He was related to August and Emma, and they had been close friends to her and Phillip for years. It wasn't like Storybrooke was some huge city people could lose themselves in. They would have met, even in passing. And Aurora would have remembered him, wouldn't she? He was all charm and wit and shining blue eyes and teasing little smiles. At least, that's what she noticed in the short moments she had encountered him in.

A knock interrupted her thought process and pulled her head out of the fridge once more.

Lucy jumped off her chair instantly, bored of the math equations on her paper. She was more a fan of history and reading than the ever looping numbers and symbols. "I'll get it!" She announced happily.

Aurora watched as the door opened and Emma and Ruby appeared. They each carried bags in their hands, and stepped into the apartment with bright smiles.

"Hey. What are you two doing here?" Aurora asked as she closed the fridge.

"We're going out." Ruby answered, grinning towards Emma.

"Good?" Aurora glanced between them questioningly.
"And you're coming with us." Emma murmured, setting her bags down.

"Wait, what?" She shook her head. "I don't think so..."

"Oh no, princess. You most definitely are." Emma insisted. "Luce, tell your mom she needs a night out sometimes."

Aurora glanced at Lucy, who had quirked her eyebrow. She looked towards her mother, and shrugged her shoulders. "Sounds like fun."

"I uh...don't have anyone to watch you, honey." Aurora looked towards her friends, trying to make sure her smile wasn't too relieved. Lucy was responsible, but Aurora was nowhere near ready to let her stay home alone so late.

"It's already taken care of. Belle is watching Grace tonight and has agreed to watch Henry and Lucy as well. We're making a night of it." Emma insisted.

Aurora sighed, and ran a hand through her hair anxiously. "Well..." When she looked at Lucy, her daughter had a bright grin on her face and excitement in her eyes. She grabbed Aurora's hand and bounced. "Please, mama? I can finish my homework tomorrow. I promise you. Please?" Henry and Grace were her best friends, and Belle was just about her favorite adult in Storybrooke.

"It'll be fun. We'll get all dolled up and paint the town red." Ruby grinned.

"Storybrooke? There won't be much painting, seeing as everything closes before eight pm." Aurora quipped.

"You gotta get out more, Rory. It'll be good for you." Emma said gently. "And you already know you'll have fun with us, so why not?"

"Please, mama?" Lucy's gaze softened. "Daddy would want you to."

She had to play that card.

Emma and Ruby silenced, glancing away before they burst out into agreements with the little girl. But she had a point. Phillip wouldn't want her to cage herself in anymore. She deserved to be free, to live her life. She couldn't stay stuck in this routine she had put herself in five years ago. Time out with her friends needed to be included. She had to start doing things out of routine.

Aurora pursed her lips and nodded slowly. "Fine." She murmured. "But I am not wearing anything too..." Aurora glanced over at Ruby and smirked. "Risque."

"Deal." Emma said before Ruby could react.

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Jefferson pulled another box off the shelf. The bottles inside jingled together and he whistled as he moved across the empty bar to restock the shelves. As much as he wanted to be home with Belle and Grace, he was thankful for the extra hours. An all night shift meant more tips, which meant more money into savings.

He, much like Killian, wanted a way out of Storybrooke. He wanted to take his girls and go on an adventure. He wanted to rewrite his story, to be more than the madman he once was. And he was close. He was almost there. If he kept at it, he would have more than enough to leave the sleepy little town behind.
He was always encouraging Killian to do the same. It had been years since his best friend had lost his girlfriend to some old codfish. (His words, not Jefferson's.) Killian had been too young, and too naive at the time, and the woman was older. She was adventurous and exotic and gave Killian a rush of excitement. All cougar jokes aside, Killian had loved that woman fiercely. He had been a broken, empty shell of a man when he came to Storybrooke. Jefferson had helped him get on his feet again and start a new life in the sleepy little town.

Jefferson was the only one Killian ever opened up to about Milah. Well, aside from August of course. But Jefferson took it as a bonding, friend type thing. So he took it upon himself to check up on the woman, to see if she was till with that old codfish any longer.

The results were rather heartbreaking, to say the least.

The woman had died at the hands of her husband, and their son had run away never to be seen again. The guy was in prison for life, but showed very little remorse. Apparently Milah had been married to the old man, run away, met Killian, had an affair, and then went running home to her husband. She had been trying to do the best for her son, but it ended badly once her husband found out.

Jefferson had decided it would be in Killian's best interest not to know. He had found all this out right when Killian was finally adjusting to Storybrooke life. He hadn't been drowning his sorrows in a bottle, and actually had ambitions. It would be best for him to just move on, to start a new life and leave the past behind. He could tell him at another time in life. Or maybe he just wouldn't know. Better he think the love of his life was happy than murdered.

Or so he thought. Jefferson wasn't always the most sane person.

"I don't know about this." Aurora murmurs as they step out of the cab.

While Emma looked every bit like a vintage pin up model and Ruby a fiery hot tamale, Aurora felt like a little girl trying on big girl clothes. Even though her friends hadn't forced her into anything too revealing, she still felt exposed. The thin straps and swooping sweetheart neckline of her purple dress seemed to reveal too much skin. It was a reasonable length, but still showed off more of her legs than she would have liked. At least in her case. Her friends had rolled their eyes when Aurora tugged on a pair of stockings, but decided not to stop her.

She couldn't help how she was raised. She was always taught to be modest and not show everything off. She always thought being modest was sexier than showing everything off. It was more imaginative that way.

"You look great, Rory. Stop tugging on it, you'll wrinkle it. And I know how much you hate wrinkles!" Ruby pushed Aurora's hands away from the soft cotton of her dress. Ruby brushed a curl back behind Aurora's ear and grinned. "Perfect. Come on. Let's go get you a man!"

"Excuse me?" Aurora gasped.

"Nice going, Ruby." Emma groaned, resting one hand on her hip.

"Is that what this is about?" Aurora nearly screeched.

"Not completely." Ruby said quickly. "Don't give me those accusing Aurora eyes. We're just trying to help."

"Ruby...I get what you guys are doing...but-"
"Aurora, when was the last time you tried meeting someone new? We're not setting you up on a blind date here, we're just trying to help you. You're with friends. Friends who aren't going to let you rot away in a tower...or apartment. Whatever." Emma's hands gripped her shoulders in a firm, yet loving grasp. "You and Lucy have been through a lot. You two have had time to deal with this and heal. It's time you let yourself live again, Rory." Emma gave her an uncharacteristically sweet smile. "Take it from me, Rory. You can't hide yourself away from the world forever. He wouldn't want that."

"We'll take care of you, Rory." Ruby promised. "Just come have fun with us."

"And you never know, something could change. Something magical could happen." Emma grinned.

Perhaps Emma had been reading too many of Henry's storybooks. She was the last person to say things like that. But maybe love did that to a person. Maybe Emma, the most closed off person in the world, opening up to August, had been enough to make her say things like that. To make her believe that magical moments could happen if you took risks.

Aurora looked up at her friends with dewy blue eyes. They were right, of course. She had to rise from the ashes. She was stronger than this. All it was was a night out with friends who loved her and cared about her. Aurora was thankful for friends who stuck by her through all these years. Anyone else would have ditched her a long time ago, and left her to wallow in her misery. But not them.

"Okay. Let's...give this a shot." She murmured, managing a tiny smile.

"Good girl." Ruby grinned, grabbing Aurora by the arm and pulling her towards the brick building ahead of them. "Let's get inside and get the fun started before the rain hits!"

Inside the bar, there was loud, blaring music and a strong scent Aurora couldn't pinpoint lurking in the air. The majority of Storybrooke under forty seemed crammed inside, taking up every space available.

"Hello, boys!" Ruby is quick to alert the bar of her presence. There's a few shouts in her direction, and wide set smiles towards the girls. Aurora caught how a few of those smiles faltered once they realized she was there. It took all her strength to not run back out of that bar and never look back.

Emma and Ruby were wrong. She didn't belong here. This wasn't comfortable for her. It was wrong of her to come out with them. Maybe it would be different if they had gone elsewhere, out of the sleepy town and into someplace new. Not a bar frequented by people she saw every day. The men in this town wouldn't touch her with a ten foot pole. She was a single mother with too much emotional baggage. Even if she was attractive, no guy wanted to be saddled with that.

The girls ordered Aurora a drink that was much too strong for her and sat her down with them at a booth. Aurora sipped slowly at her drink, but instead of relaxing her, it only seemed to make her nerves worse. The loud laughter and noises made her antsy, and rather jumpy. Ruby and Emma distracted her with light conversation, but Aurora was relieved to see Mary Margaret sliding through the crowds towards them.

"Aurora! I'm so glad to see you!" Mary Margaret hugged her, and Aurora took comfort in her friend for a brief moment before they pulled away from each other. Almost instantly, Emma and Mary Margaret began to chat animatedly. The two women had marriage in common, and a deep friendship. Even if they were attempting to bring her into the conversation, Aurora knew she didn't really fit in that category anymore.
Aurora glanced towards Ruby, who had excused herself to invite herself into a group of young men downing shots. The boys were all impressed by Ruby's outgoing personality and bright smile. Aurora wished it could be that easy for her. To just walk up to a group of people you never met, and yet still belong. Ruby liked having fun, and why shouldn't she? She was gorgeous, had no baggage attached, and was free spirited and happy.

With a sigh, Aurora stood and excused herself to the bathroom. It was empty, but the loud sounds of the music and drunken voices still seeped through the walls. Aurora touched up her lipgloss and studied her reflection in the mirror. Her friends had expertly pinned stray curls out of her face and done up her makeup with soft brown shadows to make her blue eyes hazy and sultry. Aurora didn't see anything sultry about herself.

Aurora leaned against the counter, and cleaned a few gum wrappers and old receipts out of her purse. Once she was done with that, she made a few faces at herself in the mirror, attempting to copy expressions she'd seen Ruby give to men that made them go weak in the knees. She felt ridiculous. If anything, the faces she made would scare men off even more than she already did. As tempting as it was, Aurora knew she couldn't just hide out in the bathroom forever. But the thought of Emma or Ruby finding her there snacking on mints from her purse out of boredom and their reactions instantly made her leave. She refused to be pitied any longer. She could do this.

She slowly emerged from the bathroom, and made her way to the bar. She hopped up onto a stool, and glanced around nervously. Emma was still chatting with Mary Margaret, as was Ruby with Billy. If they noticed her, they didn't show it. She was a big girl. She could sit on her own. Someone would eventually approach her.

"What can I get you?" A voice asked. Aurora jumped slightly, her heart suddenly leaping in her throat. When she looked up, she suddenly locked eyes with Killian Jones. Without meaning to, his gaze softened, and he gave her a warm smile. "Hello, Aurora."

Aurora bit her lower lip. "H-hello, Killian." She took a deep breath, and forced herself to make conversation. "We go from never seeing each other to bumping into each other all over the place, don't we?"

"It'd be hard not to bump into me here. Seeing as it's my bar." He smirked, and noticed how her cheeks instantly bloomed with a pink blush.

"Oh." She murmured.

"Are you here by yourself?"

"No, no. I'm here with Emma and Ruby. And Mary Margaret, I suppose." She murmured.

"Well...can I get you anything?" He asked, noticing how nervous she seemed.

Aurora took a deep breath. "Honestly? I have no idea. I don't drink much." She murmured. Her lips quirked into a slight smile. "Why don't you surprise me?"

"That's a dangerous game to play, Rory."

Aurora looked away from Killian to find Jefferson putting together a drink for another customer. "Hey, Jefferson. How've you been?" She asked softly, thankful to see another familiar face that didn't look at her like she was a pitiful little woman.

After Phillip died, Belle had swooped in instantly to help Aurora with whatever she needed. And with Belle, came Jefferson. The pair had taken care of Aurora and Lucy, and helped set them back on their feet. Jefferson was always looking out for Aurora and Lucy from afar. He and Belle
always made sure Aurora knew that she and Lucy could come to them for anything.

"Good, Rory, and you?" He gave her an easy smile.

"Oh I'm alright. Been keeping busy. You know how Madame Mayor works her poor little receptionist." Aurora mock pouted. "I thought you worked at The White Rabbit?"

"Those old farts were too boring. This is more my scene." Jefferson smirked.

"Ah yes, I see." She chuckled.

Killian quirked his eyebrow as Jefferson and Aurora easily talked. "How do you know all of my friends, and yet you and I haven't ever met?"

Could he read her mind or something? "Pure luck?" Aurora teased, feeling a little more at ease now.

Killian couldn't help the broad smile that crossed his lips, and he laughed. His voice was warm, she noticed. He had a very nice laugh. And a very nice smile.

"She's got you there." Jefferson smirked.

"I'll whip you up something delicious, love. Give me a minute." Killian sent her a smile and stepped away, tossing different ingredients and liquids together.

"Can I trust you?" Aurora asked, glancing towards Jefferson with a wary expression.

"He'll take care of you, Rory. Don't worry. Now, if you'll excuse me." Jefferson set a bowl of nuts in front of her and kissed her hand before sliding away to help some customers.

Aurora glanced towards Killian as he set a bright pink drink in front of her. It fizzed and bubbled and she almost burst out laughing as he dropped three cherries on top.

"A Shirley Temple?"

"I figured I'd start you off easy." He smiled. "It's got more bite than you think, love."

The way he kept calling her 'love' was both welcomed and unsettling. She was nobody's 'love'. And yet, it was almost endearing? Aurora blushed to herself, realizing he was waiting for her reaction to his drink. She sipped at it, the sweet taste mixing with a tart sting at the end.

"Perfect." She murmured.

"I make the best." As much as he was drawn to her, he knew he needed to step away. Not only for work purposes, but for his own sanity. If he spent much more time with this woman, he would probably reach a point of never wanting her to leave his sight. And that was dangerous. "If you need anything, just let me know."

Aurora was almost disappointed to see him go. She knew he had to get back to work and couldn't just sit there and talk to her all night. Not that she wanted him to. Or maybe she did.

Aurora glanced over her shoulder to check on her friends, only to find Emma and Mary Margaret coming towards her.

"Having fun?" Mary Margaret asked warmly.

"For the most part." Aurora murmured, nodding with a small smile.
"Glad to hear it." Emma sighed. "Hold onto your hats and glasses, but it looks like Ruby has met her match."

The women all looked towards their brunette friend, and Aurora gasped in surprise at the sight of Dr. Whale sitting near her. Ruby, who was usually all confidence and smirks, was grinning from ear to ear with the sweetest look in her heavily lined eyes. Even Dr. Whale, ever the smarmy scoundrel, had his hands respectfully placed on Ruby, and his eyes didn't rake over Ruby as if he was undressing her. He stared her straight in the eyes, enthralled with whatever they were talking about.

"They...they look..." Mary Margaret began to stammer.

"Sweet?" Aurora gaped.

"Downright adorable." Emma smiled. "It was bound to happen eventually."

"I can't believe we get to witness this." Aurora murmured, a soft smile crossing her lips.

The ladies sat with Aurora for a while, chatting about this and that. They had always noticed the smarmy doctor softening whenever Ruby was around. Whenever they suggested Ruby go talk to Whale, she'd always brushed it off and rolled her eyes. The ladies were just thankful Ruby was finally allowing herself true feelings. After a bad breakup years ago, she had run a little wild. Not that there was anything wrong with it. She was free to do what she wished. But the women had always hoped Ruby could have happiness with that one special person.

A few times, Emma's phone lit up on the bar beside her. She didn't pay much attention to it until it began to frantically ring. When she excused herself to take the call, Mary Margaret scooted closer to Aurora.

"Are you really having fun? I know Emma and Ruby kinda shanghaied you into this."

Aurora brushed a stray curl out of her face and shrugged. "Yeah...I am. It's nice to get out."

"It's good that you're out. I know everyone here is just the same old people we all see everyday, but still...it's good to get out anyways."

Aurora glanced over her shoulder to make sure no one was approaching them before leaning back towards Mary Margaret. "It feels like...I won't find anyone new here...because everyone knows about what happened with Phillip. No one wants to take on all that emotional baggage I've got to carry. And I've got Lucy to consider. I just...I don't feel like anyone here is...well...it, for me." She confessed quietly.

Mary Margaret's expression turned motherly and tender. "Someone will come along, Aurora. Someone new. And it'll be different. It'll be a new adventure for you." She touched Aurora's hand. "And even if not, you have a beautiful daughter who loves you more than anyone else in the world. And you'll always have us."

Aurora managed a small smile and nodded her head before turning back to her drink. She took a few slow sips of the cold drink, considering this. How could she spend the rest of her life on the outside watching everyone else live their life with someone? Lucy would be grown and setting off on her own adventure in the next few years. As much as Aurora didn't like to think about it, she would be left behind and alone. Her friends all had families of their own, and their own adventures.

Aurora had had an adventure. And when it was ripped from her grasp, she was forced to start a
new one, only this time, with half of her heart missing.

Emma returned moments later, breaking Aurora out of her thoughts.

"I've gotta go." Emma rolled her eyes. "August is freaking out."

Mary Margaret furrowed her eyebrows together. "Why? Is everything okay?"

"He said he had to pick up Henry from Belle's. Guess the poor kid is vomiting all over the place. I've gotta get home. He's hopelessly lost without me." Emma touched Aurora's shoulder. "Do you want to ride back home with me?"

Aurora hesitated. Nothing had really happened that night. And after their heart to heart, she wasn't really wanting to leave without some sort of magical moment happening. She bit on her lower lip. "I think I want to stay a little longer." Emma's expression of surprise was priceless, but Aurora continued. "I'll be fine. I can walk home or call a cab."

"Nonsense." Jefferson pressed his hand on the bar in front of her, capturing Aurora's attention. "You're not walking home in the rain. I get off in an hour for a break. I'll drive you home."

"Women."

"Thank you, Jefferson. I appreciate that." Aurora giggled with a small smile.

Killian couldn't help the smile that appeared on his lips as he mixed a drink behind Jefferson. Even though he couldn't see Aurora's smile, he decided hearing her soft laugh was enough to make his heart skip a beat. Since when did that sort of thing happen to him?

"Will you be okay on your own?" Mary Margaret asked with a gentle hand on Aurora's shoulder. "I'd better go too. I promised David I wouldn't stay out too late. I'd rather catch a cab now than stand in the rain and wait."

"Of course. I'll be fine." She assured her.

"We'll keep her company, won't we Killian?" Jefferson asked with a grin.

Killian nearly knocked the drink he was preparing over. He glanced at Emma, who shot him a warning glare, and Aurora, who had a small, hopeful smile for him. "Of course." He agreed, giving Aurora a slow nod before turning back towards her drink.

Aurora glanced towards her friends, who were exchanging glances with each other. "I'm a big tough girl. I'll be just fine." Emma and Mary Margaret looked at Aurora and nodded in agreement, though Aurora caught the hesitation in their eyes.

"Atta girl." Emma sent her a smirk. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"If you need anything, David and I can come get you. I mean, if you decide you want to leave early or something." Mary Margaret murmured before glancing at Killian.

"I'll be fine. Don't worry about me." Aurora chuckled, confused as to why her friends seemed so anxious. They had brought her here, knowing full well that this was Killian's bar. They wanted her to go out and meet new people and reemerge herself into the world. And technically Killian was someone new. And he wasn't so terrible. He was rather likable, actually. And yet, they seemed wary about leaving her on her own in his presence. It wasn't like he was going to gobble her up. He was just a man. Aurora wasn't afraid of him in the slightest. And besides that, Jefferson was there. He wouldn't let anything happen to her.
After an exchange of hugs, Aurora was alone again. She could have gone to join Ruby, but by the looks of it, she and Dr. Whale were going to be jumping each other in a matter of minutes. So there she sat, alone at the bar. She glanced around the room, noticing how when they had arrived, the bar had been packed to the gills. But now, the crowds had begun to die down. There weren't many people aside from a few small groups scattered about and Ruby and Whale snuggled together in a booth.

Aurora pursed her lips and twirled her straw around her glass. Her blue eyes lifted, and she took a moment to study Killian as he worked down the bar. He had an easy swagger about him as he moved. Very piratey, like Lucy had noticed. He wore a flannel shirt, similar to the one she had seen him in the day before. The sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, and she'd be lying if she didn't find his forearms impressive. She'd always had a weakness for men with their sleeves rolled up. Her eyes wandered up towards his face. He was concentrating on preparing a drink for a rather exuberant girl who'd already had one too many. He made the drink carefully, making sure not to add too much of any of the ingredients laid out in front of him. There was something about his stubble and the way his eyebrows furrowed together and how his lips pursed as he worked that made her toes curl within her shoes. It had been too long since Aurora had just allowed herself to admire a man. It really wasn't a terrible thing to do, was it?

"Uh...Rory?"

Aurora jumped out of her skin, blushing instantly as she looked up to find Jefferson in front of her again. How long had he been standing there? She looked up sheepishly to find him giving her a sly smirk. "You alright?" He asked, quirking her eyebrow. "With all that drooling I thought I'd have to get a mop."

"Shut up." She gasped, taking a quick gulp of her drink. "I wasn't drooling." She murmured, dragging her thumb beneath her lip. Just to be sure.

Jefferson patted her arm, and winked. "Right...right. Whatever you say." With a devious grin, he turned away. "Oh Killy willy! Freshen up Rory's drink, won't you?"

"Rory?" Killian laughed. Aurora looked up as he approached her. "Why does everyone call you Rory?"

Aurora shrugged as he reached for her half empty glass. "I don't know. Everyone has for as long as I can remember." She murmured. A memory suddenly burst into her mind of exactly how she'd gotten the nickname. "My...my hus-" She stopped herself quickly once she realized what she was about to say and to who. "Nevermind." She mumbled, shaking her head.

Killian furrowed his eyebrows together, and set a fresh drink down in front of her. She expected him to leave her alone. Even though he had been staring at her the day before when she picked up Lucy, he had kept his distance from her tonight. Of course. He must have known about her too. Someone must have told him. Stay away from poor little Aurora with the broken family and broken heart. She's not worth the trouble.

But no. He noticed her nervous expression and leaned on the bar towards her, his arms resting on the edge. "Do you mind if I call you 'Rora?"

Her head lifted in surprise. "W-what?"

He gave her a grin and leaned a little closer. "Do you...mind if I...call you...'Rora?" He drawled in a slower voice.

Aurora instantly blushed and quirked her eyebrow. "Why?"
"We're new friends. I should have a special nickname of my own for you." Killian tapped his fingers on the bar. "A fresh start with new friends. If you make up a nickname for me, just be sure it's not Killy willy."

Aurora laughed, and she lifted her hand to her lips. "Okay. Deal." She giggled, blue eyes flickering up to his face.

Killian couldn't help but grin as she laughed. This time, it was because of him. It filled him with a sense of pride. He had been the one to cause her happiness, if only for a moment. It was worth it. She certainly was beautiful when she laughed.

"Can I ask you something?" Aurora asked through giggles. "No, no, I'd better not. I promised Lucy she could ask you herself."

Killian quirked his eyebrow. "Go on, you can tell me. I'll act surprised when I see her."

"She wanted to know if you're a pirate." Aurora giggled.

It was Killian's turn to laugh. And laugh he did. It was a strong, hearty sound. Aurora felt her heart grow warm from such a sound. "No, love, I'm not a pirate. Though I've always loved the sea." He grinned. "She's a cute kid."

Aurora's gaze softened and she smiled. "Thank you. I do the best that I can."

"She's terribly likable, that one. A real ball of sunshine, and I mean that." He grinned. "That's a lot coming from me, since I don't like kids."

"Well I take that as quite the compliment, then." Aurora giggled, lifting her drink to take another sip.

"The highest. You should be proud of your girl."

"I am. Thank you, Killian."

When Aurora looked up at him, he felt a little dizzy. The same woman who had been glaring daggers at him the day before now had the softest, sweetest expression on her face. Her bluebell eyes stared straight at him, and her glossy pink lips curved into a sweet smile. Yeah, pretty didn't even begin to describe her. How he hadn't ever noticed such an otherworldly creature like herself all these years was lost on him. She was reeling him in, despite his best efforts to stay away.

Aurora smiled up at him, and brushed a stray curl out of her face as she took a sip of her drink. Killian was awfully close, she realized. She caught the slight musk of his skin, and the warmth of his breath. His eyes were what drew her in, though. She hadn't ever seen such a shade of blue before. And the way he was looking at her with those blue eyes of his wasn't unwelcomed, either. There was tenderness and warmth there, but also this wanting, almost needy gleam. She couldn't remember the last time someone had looked at her like that. She bit her lower lip, and gave him a shy smile before looking away.

You really can't remember? Does Phillip already mean nothing to you?

It felt as though someone dumped a bucket of ice water on her head. Aurora sat back, needing to pull away from Killian and his intoxicating musk and easy smile. She glanced around the bar, realizing exactly where she was and what she was doing. She was out in the world again. She was experiencing things again. She was moving forward.

Aurora knew it was bound to happen. She needed to move forward. She couldn't live in the past.
and mourn Phillip for the rest of her life. She had to press forward, to be stronger than this.

And yet, the realization of what she was doing there in that moment with Killian looking at her like that made it all the more real. It was happening.

"Uh...'Rora?" He quirked an eyebrow. "Is something wrong?"

She looked up at him, her fingers curled tightly around the edge of the bar. "Uhm...I uh...I don't know." She murmured. Aurora forced herself to take slow, deep breaths. She would not lose her cool here. She wouldn't fall apart here, in front of him. "I think I need some air...yes...air is good."

"It would be if it wasn't raining." He murmured, furrowing his eyebrows together. "We're friends now, 'Rora. You can tell me if I said something wrong."

"Oh...no...no...it's not you it's just..." Aurora took another deep breath and held it, and counted to ten before releasing it. "I haven't been out like this in...well...five years and I just...I feel...guilty? I guess?" She stammered.

"It's good for you to get out. You're young, you're lovely..." Killian didn't really know what to say. He didn't want to let on that he knew her husband had died, but he wanted her to know he understood. He bit on his lower lip, trying to figure out a way to convey that, when Jefferson wandered over.

"Hey, everything okay?" Jefferson asked. "Rory? You're looking a little pale..."

"I'm fine!" She squeaked. "I just...I think I ought to get home...could...could you take me?" She asked quietly, looking up at Jefferson anxiously.

Jefferson glanced at Killian questioningly. "Yeah, I said I would. I'm off in a half hour."

"I...I can walk, then. I just...I need to go." She murmured, taking a deep breath.

"Go ahead, mate. You'd better take her now." Killian rested his hand on Aurora's, and she was sure she'd pass out. No man had touched her in years. The warmth and feel of Killian's hand was almost too good to be true. She swallowed hard and looked up at him as he pulled back. "Don't be a stranger, 'Rora. I'd like to see your face in here again." He gave her a slight smile and a nod, and then turned and headed down the bar to busy himself.

Killian had every urge to turn around and comfort her. In some way, he wanted to try. But when he turned to look back at her, Jefferson was already leading her out into the rain. There would be another chance. He would make sure of it.

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The car ride was silent aside from the pattering of rain on the roof. Aurora had calmed down and taken a few deep breaths, and finally was beginning to come down from her panic.

"How come I've never met Killian before?" Aurora asked softly, glancing towards Jefferson.

Jefferson's hands tightened on the wheel, but he kept an easy expression and shrugged. "Like you said, pure luck, I guess."

Aurora rolled her eyes. "He knows you, Jefferson. He knows Emma and August and Ruby and Mary Margaret and Belle. I'm guessing he knows the whole town as well. How is it that he and I haven't ever met?"
"Rory...geeze...I don't know, okay? He moved here right when you and Phillip were getting engaged and he was going through a rough time. I didn't even get to know him until I got that job at The White Rabbit because he came in a lot. He would drink and drink and drink until I had to carry him home. Then he decided to open his own bar and we became friends." Jefferson sighed, and lifted a hand to rake through his wet hair. "He only started going into town and meeting people around the same time Phillip died. I don't need to remind you how you were around that time. You were focused on you and Luce, which is exactly what needed to happen. You guys met recently because that's just how it happened."

Aurora glanced at Jefferson, surprised he had revealed that much about him. Even still, it didn't seem like the full story. She shook her head, and fiddled with a stray string on her skirt. "Is everyoneo telling him to stay away from me?" She asked softly. "Yesterday, when I saw him at the school, I thought he was going to make a move on me by the way he was staring at me. And then at Granny's diner, the same thing. But now, suddenly, he's keeping his distance?"

"You guys seemed to be chatting just fine before we left." Jefferson pointed out.

"Yeah, only because you sent him over to me! All night he was avoiding even looking at me." She frowned at him. "Did you tell him about Phillip? Is that it? No one wants to come near me because of everything that's happened. Did you tell the one person in Storybrooke that doesn't know about what happened everything that's wrong with me?"

Jefferson groaned and couldn't hold back his eye roll. Aurora was overdramatic sometimes. "Geeze." He grumbled. "You know I wouldn't do that, Rory."

"Well someone must have. Someone must be telling him to stay away from me. Is he really that bad?"

"It wasn't me, Rory. Personally, I think Killian is a good guy. He's really been through a lot and would be understanding to you. He's not my first choice for you...but...he has potential." He sighed. "You deserve to be happy again, Rory. And if by some stroke of luck it's with him, then I'll support you both." He smirked. "But if he does anything idiotic, I'll punch his lights out for you."

"I appreciate that." Aurora smiled. "I just...I don't know, Jefferson. I've been so focused on Lucy these past five years that I've never gone out much like this...I've never noticed guys around or even entertained the thought of...love...marriage...all that..." She took another deep breath, and swallowed the lump in her throat. "I wanted Phillip, you know?"

"He'd want you to be happy." Jefferson sighs. "But he's not coming back, Rory. You know that."

Aurora swallows the lump in her throat. It was the truth, but it still stung. "I know." Her eyes flicker out the window at the rain. "I just can't imagine loving someone like I loved him and...having this happen again."

Jefferson was finally at a loss. This was the point in the conversation where Belle would take over with her knowing, warm voice and wise words. His bookworm would have a better response than his own. "It could happen, Rory."

The truck stops, and Aurora grabs her purse. "Thanks for the ride, Jefferson. I'll be by to pick up Lucy in the morning." She brushes a curl out of her face and sends him a smile. "I appreciate everything you guys do for us."

"Anytime." Jefferson sends her a wave and she smiles and climbs out and disappears into the apartment building.
The apartment is silent when Aurora unlocks the door and slips inside. She doesn't often have it all to herself. The rain is loud outside, and the sound of it echoes throughout the apartment. It's almost a little spooky, without any other sounds. Any other night on her own, Aurora would wallow in her pain and watch her wedding video over and over again until she cried herself to sleep.

But not tonight. Tonight, as nerve wracking as it had been, had been a milestone for her.

What she needed now was a bath and to slip into bed and sleep for ages.

As she heads down the hall, she catches a red light blinking on the machine next to her phone. To her surprise, there's a message waiting for her.

"Ahh...hey...'Rora...uhm...it's ah...Killian...Killian Jones...you knew that...uhm...anyways. I know this seems like a line or something but...I just wanted to say it...it was nice talking to you tonight. I um...I meant what I said. I hope to see you around again sometime. I'd like to ah...get to know you. Uh...so yeah. Anyways...I hope you're not creeped out by me calling you...uhm...Ruby left me your number tonight...and she's fine...went home with Whale. Okay anyways...have a goodnight, 'Rora."

Oh yes, a milestone indeed.
Chapter Three

The next morning, Aurora woke with a headache and a queasy stomach. The rain outside was loud, and she instantly hid beneath the pillows, and tugged her comforter over her head. Perhaps she could hide beneath the soft downy fabric all day.

She had to remember that no matter how little she drank, she always woke up the next morning feeling as if she'd been hit by a truck. Aurora never drank. And this was why. Her body was too weak to handle even the tiniest bit of alcohol. Last night had been the first time in ages. She hadn't even picked up a drink after Phillip died. It had been a year or two after when she finally did, the first time the girls had dragged her out. And then after last night? Never again.

A smile crossed her lips as a memory flashed behind her closed eyes.

"Phillip, look! I'm a ballerina!" She laughed, rising clumsily onto her tiptoes and twirling around in a circle. The little spin that she had once been graceful in doing when she was younger, now threw her off balance.

But Phillip was there to catch her. He always caught her.

Phillip laughed at her, and the sound was rich and warm. "Darling, you might have had too much wine." She bit her lip and smoothed her hands over his chest as he helped her stand.

"Just a little..." She pinched her fingers together, and giggled. "Do you still love me?"

His hands touched her face, and her eyes closed as he brought her close. "Always and forever, my darling."

Aurora slowly opened her eyes, and dragged her fingertips across her lips. "Always and forever." She murmured softly. She forced herself into a sitting position, and glanced at the photo that never left her nightstand. Her weary blue eyes looked around the room at all the pictures of her and her husband.

Nothing had really been changed in the apartment since Phillip died. She'd left it exactly how he left it. After last night, she suddenly had this urge to change all that. Living in a shrine to her dead husband wasn't healthy. Not for her. Not for Lucy.

Aurora had been so scared of moving forward, of change.

But last night had been a milestone.

"It's time to move forward."

Killian spent all morning trying not to think about Aurora.

After he'd left that message on her machine the night before, he instantly regretted it. Yes, Ruby did give him her number. And yeah, it might have been so he could tell Aurora Ruby got home safe with Whale. And yeah, he might have used it for his own personal reasons. But at least he gave Aurora the original message.

Killian leaned against the bar, swirling a spoon around his mug of coffee. It was lacking something. Whiskey, perhaps.
Instead of reaching for the bottle, he got off the stool and headed out of the bar. No one went out to a bar on a Sunday anyways. Not with the rain coming down as hard as it was.

He'd spent all morning just sitting around in the bar, cleaning up his already scrubbed clean establishment. Jefferson never missed a spot, even after working an all nighter. Killian thought it would distract his mind from wandering to a certain mother dressed in purple, but it hadn't. If anything, it made him think about her more. As he scrubbed the already sparkling bar, he kept thinking about what he could have said, what he could have done to keep her there, to make her feel at ease. Something obviously made her uncomfortable the night before. And he felt like it was his fault.

Maybe he should just listen to August. Staying away from Aurora might be the better idea. She had bolted out and not called him back for a reason.

Since when did he listen to August? Besides that, getting Aurora out of his head wasn't going to happen anytime soon. And being upset a girl didn't call you back when your message was left in the middle of the night and it was only eleven in the morning was in bad form.

He could still remember how she looked at him, like maybe she would give him a chance. She had laughed, had focused her full attention on him, and actually seemed interested in him. She hadn't given him that icy expression she had the first day he met her. She had been so calm, so free, with a smile only for him.

And then her eyes had grown wide, and her demeanor had changed. Suddenly her sweet smiles were gone, only to be replaced with a pale face and frightened eyes. She had been fluttering about, all stammers and stumbling feet.

And he'd done that to her. Something about him pushed her away.

Killian adjusted the hood that shielded him from being soaked to the bone. He wandered around Storybrooke for a while until he came across the library. Belle had neatly taped a pink poster to the front door. Killian paused in the rain and read over what it said before venturing inside.

"I'm sorry, we're closed right now! The movie isn't actually until tonight! Come back then! Her voice echoed from behind one of the shelves.

"How do you propose you're going to have a movie night in this weather?" Killian called out.

Belle peered from around the shelf, and quirked her eyebrow. "It's the perfect weather for it!"

"Sure, in one's own home. No one's going to venture out in this weather."

Belle hugged a stack of books to her chest as she approached him. She gave him a stern look and looked pointedly at his dripping coat before meeting his gaze again. "Did you venture out in this weather just to mock me?"

Killian rolled his eyes. "No, little lioness. I'm not mocking you." He huffed. Belle had quite the spirit. When he'd come to Storybrooke slobbering drunk and met Jefferson, she'd been there. She'd been stern with him and would fight back when he'd act stupid. But when he came out of it, she was there with Jefferson, tending to him like she was some sort of mother lion tending to her cub. She would scold him, but would make sure he was completely comfortable while doing so.

Belle rolled her eyes at his little pet name for her. "Well what are you here for then? Surely not the books."

"I just...was wondering what movie you're going to show."
"Breakfast at Tiffany's." Belle set her books aside, and crossed her arms over her chest. "Why? Are you interested in coming?" Her voice grew softer, and her lips quirked into a smile.

"I uh...I might be."

"Well good." She smiled wider. "You know, we're going to have quite a crowd tonight, unlike your previous assumptions." Belle turned and gathered her stack of books and walked away to put them on a shelf nearby.

"Oh really?" The bookworm was friends with Aurora, right? "Like who?"

Belle smirked. There it was. When Aurora had picked up Lucy that morning, she'd told Belle all about her night. Belle was proud of her friend for going out and doing something out of the ordinary. Aurora had gotten a little nervous at the end of the night, but Belle understood. Unlike everyone else, Belle thought Aurora shouldn't rush into things and go headfirst into the world. Aurora was brave. Belle just thought she needed to take these things slower. When Belle had gently asked if Aurora had met anyone, she'd let it slip that she and Killian had had a nice little chat and that there was a message waiting for her on the machine when she got home from him. Like Jefferson, Belle thought Killian wouldn't be too bad for Aurora. She didn't mind him too much. He came with baggage, but so did Aurora. They might have been a good fit together.

"Oh, the usual suspects." She murmurs, hoping her smile wasn't too obvious. "Your brother and Emma are coming." She offers, hoping he doesn't catch the slight giggle in her voice.

Killian huffs, and crosses his arms over his chest. The movement makes more droplets of rain fall off his coat, and it makes him smirk. "And?" He refuses to come right out and ask if she's coming.

"Who are you hoping will come?" She asks, turning around once she's finished putting the books away.

"No one. I'm just asking. I don't really want to trek out into the rain again, but I'll come if no one else does. I'd hate for you to show a movie to an empty room."

Belle giggles. "I'll see you at six. It'll be a joy having you here."

That evening, Storybrooke's library was stuffed to the gills with townspeople. After being cooped up inside all day, getting away to see a movie was just what everyone needed. And a classic like Breakfast at Tiffany's was enough to draw everyone in. Plus, Belle had been sure to bake plenty of delicious treats for everyone to enjoy. She and Jefferson had cleaned up the auditorium in the back of the building and set up a projector and plenty of seats. It had been used in the old days for town meetings. When she'd suggested they start town meetings up again, just for fun, Madame Mayor had seemed exhausted with the idea. Apparently locking everyone in the town up in a room and arguing over town issues was not something she wanted.

Killian had showed up nearly fifteen minutes before the movie started. He looked around the crowded room, hoping to seem nonchalant despite feeling antsy. He didn't feel like himself. He couldn't pinpoint exactly what was wrong with him. But it felt familiar. From years ago, but familiar nonetheless.

There was an itch under his skin that only Aurora seemed to be able to relieve.

The longer he stood in the corner staring at everyone milling around, the more ridiculous he felt. He had no interest in watching some old movie with a bunch of goody goodies. It still wasn't too late for him to quietly slip out and pretend he hadn't ever been there.
"Mr. Jones?" A small hand tugged on his sleeve, and he nearly jumped out of his skin.

When his eyes settled on the small brunette girl, his heart jumped into his throat. That meant her mother was here too. Sure, of course. An old movie like this was probably something right up her alley. Finding out they were actually here turned Killian's stomach into knots. But wasn't this what he wanted? He was conflicted. Killian swallowed hard, and remembered the little girl staring expectantly up at him.

"H-hello, lass." He managed a smile. "Excited for the movie?"

"Very. Mama and I love all of Audrey's movies." Lucy sighed, a dreamy smile on her face. "You like Audrey too?"

"Well...uh...who doesn't?" He chuckled, despite not ever once seeing one of her movies.

"Insane people. Mama got me a boxed set of her movies for my birthday once." Lucy giggled. "Hey, I wanted to ask you something!"

Killian couldn't help the grin that crossed his face. He knew what was coming. The excited gleam in her eyes was similar to Aurora's when she'd asked him the night before. "And what is that?"

"Okay, I know this sounds crazy, but...are you a pirate?"

"A pirate?" He chuckled, doing his best to sound surprised. "No, lass, of course not. What would make you think that?"

"You sure talk a lot like a pirate. It's like you came out of Peter Pan or something!" She laughed, giving his sleeve a tug. "Are you hiding a hook I can't see or something?"

"Perhaps there's a pirate deep down inside of me just fighting to get out." He teased with a sly grin.

Aurora watched this exchange from the popcorn stand. She'd seen Killian when they had walked in, but he didn't see her. Lucy begged Aurora to let her go talk to him, and Aurora had let her. He looked so nervous, and appeared to be waiting for someone. Of course. A man like Killian Jones probably had scores of women falling all over him. She'd seen how he acted in the bar the night before. He was flirty and grinned at every lady that ventured up to the bar. Of course he wasn't a one woman kind of guy.

"He actually likes her." Belle murmured, scooping popcorn into little bags. "And he barely can stand Henry."

Aurora smiled and turned back towards her friend. "Lucy has that effect on people." She murmured. "I'm surprised he'd come to something like this."

"I'm glad he showed up. He doesn't get out much." Belle handed Aurora the bags of popcorn. "You should ask him to sit with you."

"He looks like he's waiting for someone." Aurora murmured, her cheeks turning pink from her friend's suggestion.

Belle smiled warmly. She wanted to say, 'Yeah, you.' But she held her tongue. "I don't think so, Rory. Go for it. Lucy likes him. And who knows? You might actually have fun." Belle shrugged her shoulders. "He's really not so bad."
Aurora glanced back at her daughter and Killian. Lucy was laughing at something he had said, and he genuinely seemed happy in her presence. Lucy had the same demeanor Phillip had had. It was impossible not to smile in her presence. Her innocence and sweetness radiated off of her big brown eyes. Aurora glanced back at Belle, who was scooping more popcorn into bags. She sent Aurora an encouraging smile before turning back to her work. "Thanks, Belle."

"Anytime, Rory."

Aurora took a deep breath of courage before moving across the room to Killian and Lucy.

Killian looked up from Lucy’s big brown eyes as Aurora approached them. She nearly froze in her tracks from the sweetness in his icy blue eyes. He gave her a warm smile as she came closer. The chattering of voices around them seemed to melt away. He could only see Aurora in that moment. She had a sweet smile for him as she approached, quite unlike the flustered expression of the night before. So she was okay now. Good.

Lucy turned to look up at her mother. "Popcorn!" She exclaimed, breaking the moment.

Aurora tore her eyes away from Killian to smile at her daughter and hand her a bag. "Belle even added extra butter for you too. " She murmured, before sparing Killian a glance. "Hello, Killian."

"Hello, 'Rora." His smile softened, and he gave her a slight nod.

Lucy watched the exchange with interest. She’d only ever heard people call her mother 'Rory.' This was new.

"Did you get my message?" He asked.

Aurora’s cheeks instantly tinted with a shade of pink, and she looked away with a smile. "I did, yes." Her voice was light and merry, like she was pleased he had called her.

"She listened to it about ten times." Lucy mumbled.

"Oh Luce. Aurora whispered. "I did not."

"Okay, eight." Lucy giggled. She glanced towards her mother's flustered figure and Killian's proud smile.

"Really now?" Killian grinned wider, feeling much too pleased in that moment.

"Just ah...a few times..." Aurora admitted quietly, her cheeks inflamed with a red flush as she peeked up at Killian's triumphant grin.

Lucy gave a sly smirk before giggling. "Are you meeting someone here?"

Killian chuckled, and tore his gaze away from Aurora to Lucy. "Ah, no, lass, I'm not meeting anyone." He looked back at Aurora, shaking his head quickly. "Belle invited me. She thinks I need to get out more. She's quite the mother hen." He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't really ah, date."

The last thing he wanted Aurora to think was that he was flirting with her and ten other women. No. Sure, with his job and all, he was a major flirt. Making the women of Storybrooke flutter and swoon was fun. But he'd never actually meant his advances. And everyone knew that. That is, until Aurora came along. And with her, he didn't feel the need to use cheap lines. She'd just roll her eyes and ignore him forever if he did, he was sure of that. And besides, she deserved better. She deserved better than him.
The lights began to flicker, alerting everyone to grab their snacks and head into the auditorium. "We'd better find our seats." Lucy grabbed her mother's hand. "Why don't you sit with us, Mr. Jones?"

"Ah, I don't want to intrude on your night out with your mother, lass." Killian murmured.

Surprisingly, it was Aurora who spoke up. "You wouldn't be." His surprised expression made her smile grow wider. "You should sit with us."

"Well...I'm not going to argue." He grinned.

Lucy instantly let go of her mother's hand and reached for Killian's. "Come on!" As she tugged on his hand, Aurora laughed and looked towards Killian's helpless expression as he stumbled after the little girl.

The auditorium was full of chairs of different sizes. Obviously Belle and Jefferson had just grabbed whatever seats they could find, regardless of if they matched or not. There was a few loveseats, a few recliners, a few plastic or metal folding chairs, a few stools, and a few cushioned chairs scattered around. Most of the seats had been taken already, but not all. Lucy pulled Killian past rows of chairs until she stopped at the end of a row near the front. Aurora caught up with the pair, and spotted August, Emma and Henry sitting together, with three seats beside them.

"Hey Lucy!" Henry waved from August's side. "Come sit by me!" He gestured to the empty seat beside him, and Lucy nodded happily.

"Sit by me, okay?" She grinned at Killian, and then slipped past others politely to get to the Booth family. Onlookers around them glanced at Killian questioningly, surprised to see him at a town event. Especially with Aurora and Lucy.

"Hey guys!" Emma said happily, though her eyes were wary as she looked at Killian. "Since when do you like old movies?"

"I was bored." Killian chuckled. He turned his attention back to Aurora, who still stood beside him. "After you, 'Rora." He smiled, extending his arm for her to slip in first.

"Thank you." She murmured with a slight nod. As she moved past him, she rested her hand on his arm to brace herself as she scooted past a couple who was staring directly at them. "Excuse me." She murmured sweetly, before sitting down on a cushioned armchair.

"I didn't think even boredom would drag you to a town event." August murmured as Killian passed them.

"Well it did." He murmured, taking a seat between Aurora and Lucy on a folding chair.

"I'm glad." Lucy giggled, looking up at Killian.

"Me too, little lass." He grinned.

"How are you feeling, Henry? I heard you had quite the stomachache last night." Aurora smiled, glancing towards the little boy who appeared fit as a fiddle.

"Much better, thank you. I think all the milkshakes upset my stomach." Henry sent Killian a pointed look.

"Gee, I can only imagine why." Killian drawled. "While I admire your determination to try every single milkshake while on my tab, you had to know there would be consequences, kid."
"You could've stopped me at anytime." Henry gave Killian a sly smile.

"You were not a force to be reckoned with." Killian shot back.

"You're the adult."

August laughed. "He's got a point."

"What about you, Rory? How are you feeling after last night?" Emma glanced at Killian before looking back at her friend. "Do you think you'd want to come out with us more often?"

Aurora grinned, and nodded. "I think so." She leaned forward, to see Emma better around the worn fabric of the armchair she sat in. "After last night, I'm feeling rather, well...refreshed. I just feel like it's finally time to start fresh, to get a move on with my life. With our lives." She murmured, her gaze flickering to Lucy. "Luce and I are doing some redecorating and cleaning and it just...feels like we're finally moving forward."

It had been a rather emotional day, actually. She had had this urge to suddenly throw everything out of her house, to put new furniture up and new pictures and just start completely over. Lucy hadn't taken it too well, and had thought her mother wanted to simply pretend Phillip was never there. Aurora had cried and promised Lucy that this was what he would have wanted, for them to move forward, to not be afraid anymore. They were stronger than this. So, the pair had dried their tears and began working on what they wanted for their new apartment.

"That's great, Rory. Really. We're happy to hear that." Emma nodded. "Maybe August can build you guys some stuff."

"It'd be my pleasure." August smiled at Lucy. "Anything you want, sweetie."

"We'll compile a list for you." Lucy said with a small smile.

Change was scary, but if her mother was ready for it, so was she. It was the first time in years that she had seen her mother so determined. Her demeanor had changed ever since she went out the night before. Lucy wasn't sure if it was just the going out with friends that did it, or Mr. Jones. Her mother had been so put off by him when they'd first seen him. Curious, but put off nonetheless. Now she was smiling at him and listening to his voice message over and over again. Lucy wasn't sure how she felt about her mother moving on in the male department. It was hard to picture her mother with anyone but her father. She didn't know if she wanted her mother to be with anyone. It had been just the two of them for so long after her father died. They had bonded fiercely, and were closer than most mothers and daughters. Imagining anyone else but her own father stepping in and invading their mother daughter duo was strange. She didn't want anyone to take her mother away from her. As much as she liked Killian Jones, she liked her mother more. Lucy wasn't about to let him take her place.

"So, we'll be seeing you ladies more often then, eh?" Killian grinned, looking away from Emma towards Aurora. He could feel August's glare on the back of his head instantly.

"Maybe. It might be nice to get out of Storybrooke sometimes." Aurora shrugged. "Your place is great, but...adventure is out there!"

"Exactly. Plenty of other towns to paint red." Emma chimed in.

Killian smiled, and nudged Aurora's arm. "So." He began. "Are you doing alright? After last night, I mean."
Aurora fiddled with her paper bag of popcorn and nodded her head slowly. "Yeah...I'm okay." She murmured. "I'm sorry I kind of...spazzed out on you last night." She sighed. "It's just been the first time I've been out in years."

"It's good that you got out. You deserved it." He murmured. "Obviously it's made an impact on you."

Aurora pursed her lips. She couldn't decide if his actions meant that he knew about Phillip, or if he was just talking out of his butt. He could have just been casually agreeing with August and Emma. He might not have known anything about Aurora and Phillip. But of course, in a small town, he probably knew everything. Aurora leaned closer, her small hand touching his arm. Even through the sleeve of his jacket, she could feel his warmth. "Do...do you know? A-about my husband. I mean...did anyone tell you?" She whispered.

Killian swallowed hard, and his expression grew serious. His blue gaze flickered away from her nervously, and he refused to meet her eyes. That answered it for her. She bit her lower lip, and pulled her hand away from his arm. "I do know." He whispered. "'Rora, I...I'm so sorry."

"You don't need to be, Killian. It was...it was years ago." She murmured, glancing anxiously at Lucy to be sure she wasn't listening in. Thankfully, her daughter was invested in a conversation with Henry at the moment. "I just...I didn't know if you knew."

"Yeah...Henry let it slip..." He sighed. She grew silent, and her blue eyes had a faraway glaze to them. His fingers ached to touch her hand, to bring her attention back to him. But he didn't know what to say, or what to do that would change anything.

Aurora reached up and began to fiddle with her necklace. It had been a gift from Phillip for their wedding. A simple silver chain with dainty silver vines that came together to hold a pearl at the end. As the room began to grow dark and the movie played on the projector onto the screen on the wall, Aurora's mind wandered. She could hear the movie in the background, knew every line word for word. But she wasn't paying attention.

Maybe he had found out the day they met. Maybe he had been so distant from her the night at the bar because he knew. He didn't want to get involved with her. And he shouldn't want to. She would push him away, she would hurt him. He didn't deserve the baggage she carried. Maybe he was just being nice to her. Why he had any sort of interest in her was baffling. No man had given her any mind since Phillip. And besides that, Killian was handsome, charming, and could have any girl he wanted with a snap of his fingers. Why would he bother with her?

Aurora did her best to be interested in the movie. But her mind kept wandering. Maybe it would be best to not attach herself to anyone right now. Yes, it had been five years. Yes, she had mourned Phillip. Yes, she deserved happiness and love, as did Lucy. But maybe it just wasn't meant to happen to her again. She enjoyed Killian's company, sure. But she didn't know him. Not really. She wasn't sure if she should even try getting to know him. What if Lucy got attached? What if Aurora realized too late that he wasn't what she needed for her life, and then Lucy would be hurt in the end?

Her fingers fiddled with the popcorn bag in her hands, and she crossed one leg over the other. Killian looked over at her as she moved beside him, but she ignored the heat of his gaze. The rest of the movie was like that. Anytime she'd move, he would glance at her quickly, stare a moment, and then force himself to look away.

The movie progressed smoothly. Aurora did her best to focus on the movie, and not the man beside her. It was one of her favorites, and it had been too long since she had watched it. She was finally beginning to relax until the end scene came on.
"Holly, I'm in love with you."

"So what?"

"So what? So plenty! I love you, you belong to me."

"No. People don't belong to people."

"Course they do!"

"I'll never let anyone put me in a cage."

"I don't want to put you in a cage, I want to love you."

Aurora stiffened beside him as the quick talking woman on the screen chirped her lines. Killian looked towards her for the millionth time that night, noticing how her bluebell eyes seemed dewy, and how her lower lip quivered. He glanced back towards the couple on the screen for a moment before looking back at her. It was starting to make sense. She would begin to open up, only to close herself off again. Aurora's hesitation and fear was becoming clearer to him. That's what she was scared of? Being put in a cage? Killian furrowed his eyebrows together in worry, and his hand gently reached out and touched her arm. Aurora didn't flinch, didn't even acknowledge him there. She just stared at the screen, tears hovering in her blue gaze.

"You know what's wrong with you, miss...whoever you are? You're chicken. You've got no guts. You're afraid to stick out your chin and say, 'okay, life's a fact.' People do fall in love. People do belong to each other. Because that's the only chance anybody's got for real happiness. You call yourself a 'free spirit', 'a wild thing'. And you're terrified someone's gonna stick you in a cage. Well, baby, you're already in that cage. You built it yourself."

Aurora swallowed hard, and before she realized what she was doing, her hand reached out, and suddenly found herself tangling her fingers with Killian's. She needed something to anchor herself to, something to hold onto as the classic scene unfolded before her. She'd felt caged for years. Locked away in this town doing the same thing everyday. She'd done all she could for her daughter, so Lucy could be happy and free, but Aurora herself had refused to let herself out, to let herself be free. It hadn't been because of Phillip's death and the weight of what had been left on her shoulders. No, she could not blame Phillip or anyone else for this. No one had locked her in this cage of pain. No one else had closed the door on her heart. She had no one to blame but herself. She'd let herself focus so long on Phillip's death, that she stopped herself from living life. She stopped herself from trying, for fear of failing. This wasn't her. She wasn't some caged little bird. She had always been so strong. Hadn't she? She had endured so much, had heard from so many people say that she was so strong for all that she had endured.

Killian never took his eyes off of Aurora as her small hand grasped his. Her hand was small, and trembled as she squeezed his hand tightly. She clutched his hand like she feared she would fall. He held her hand back just as tight, and dragged his thumb over the back of her fingers gently. What was this woman thinking? He gave her small fingers a gentle squeeze, showing him he was there, that everything was okay. But she didn't even acknowledge him as she stared at the screen.

The couple onscreen embraced, and kissed in the rain. It was romantic, and one of the most iconic scenes in movie history. The lights flickered on as the credits began to roll, and Belle appeared at the front of the room.

"Thank you all for coming in out of the rain and enjoying Storybrooke's first movie night! Maybe we'll do more of these, should the weather get nasty again. She grinned at everyone, and smoothed her hands over her blue ensemble. "It finally stopped raining! Yay!" She giggled
cheerfully. "Thanks for coming! Hope you all get home safe!" Belle continued, despite the fact that people were already beginning to file out.

Aurora released Killian's hand quickly, despite how tightly he was holding onto hers. She pressed her fingers against her flushed cheeks, and stood quickly. "'Rora..." Killian began.

"Wasn't that fun, Luce?" Aurora quickly squeaked.

"Yeah. It was." Lucy looked up her mother with a worried expression. "Are you okay, mama?"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course. We'd just...we'd better go. School tomorrow." Aurora murmured. She stepped past Killian, nearly tripping over his legs. He grasped her arm as she righted herself and she quickly pulled it out of his grasp.

Lucy didn't question her mother, she just stood and gathered her things. "See you tomorrow, Henry." She murmured, sending him a little wave. Her dark eyes lifted to Killian, and she noticed the concerned expression on his face. She'd seen her mother grab his hand, seen him looking at her all night. And as much as she liked Killian, it was still unsettling to her. "Bye, Mr. Jones." She murmured with a half hearted smile. Aurora glanced at Killian and ushered Lucy out of the aisle with quick goodbyes to August and Emma.

The Booth family instantly looked at Killian, albeit accusingly. "What'd you do?" August sighed.

"Me?" Killian croaked. "I didn't do anything."

"She was awfully upset." Emma mumbled, though her tone was softer than August's accusing sigh had been.

"I told you to stay away from her, Killian. She doesn't need you bothering her." August sent Killian a pointed look.

Emma rolled her eyes at her husband. "You told him what?"

Killian sat up straighter, glaring at his brother. "Would I really be so bad for her?"

"No." Emma murmured, silencing her husband before he even began with a hand on his knee. "But you've got to understand, Rory's been through a lot. And I know you have too. But Killian, there's a lot at stake here. She has Lucy to think about, to take care of. She can't just go around giving her heart away to any man who's nice to her."

"She's different. I haven't seriously bothered with women in years, you both know that. And now there's this woman who is the first one in years who captures my attention and I can't help but want her, regardless of the circumstances." Killian shrugs, and glances over his shoulder where the mother daughter duo had disappeared to.

"What if she doesn't want you back?" August asks with a lift of his eyebrow.

Killian rolled his eyes. "I think that's up to her, and not you, dear brother."

"You're not even considering Lucy in all of this, Killian! She lost her father. What if Aurora let's you in, and then it doesn't work out? Then you've left this poor girl wounded in the process." August reasons.

"And you're not ready to take on that responsibility of being a father figure. I know you aren't. You hate kids." Emma shook her head, golden curls bouncing. "You really think you could love another man's child?"
"Maybe it's not for everyone else to decide." Henry shrugged. "If they like each other, if Lucy likes them together, then why does it matter what everyone else say?"

Suddenly, Killian had a fondness for his nephew. He smirked, and looked towards his brother and sister in law. "I like how the kid thinks."

"Killian..." August rolled his eyes. "Love is sacrifice. How much are you willing to sacrifice for a woman and her child you only met days ago?"

August didn't get an answer. All he got was a grunt as Killian got to his feet and stomped off.

"Mama?" Lucy asked as Aurora tucked her into bed. "Can I ask you something?"

"Of course you can, sweetheart." Aurora murmured, still distracted from her rollercoaster of emotions over the past few days.

"Do...do you like him? Mr. Jones?" Her soft voice was quiet, almost as if she was fearful of the response.

Aurora paused in her adjusting of Lucy's quilts, and looked towards her daughter. In the low lamplight with her mess of brown curls and wide chocolate eyes, she looked so much like her father. The same questioning, cautious expression had been on her husband's face before. Aurora sighed, and slowly sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Well, I don't think he's terrible. But...no, sweetheart. Not like that." She murmured. "Why do you ask?"

Lucy looked away, and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know..." She sighed. "Nevermind."

Before Lucy could lay down, Aurora grasped her small hands and tilted her head down to meet her daughter's gaze. "Luce... talk to me. You know you always can."

"I just...I never realized that moving on would mean a possible um...addition." Lucy stammered.

Aurora bit her lower lip. "You're worried about someone new changing our lives?"

Lucy slowly nodded. "I want you to be happy, Mama. But...I just...I can't imagine anyone else here...with you...in his place." The moment her voice began to quiver, Aurora pulled Lucy into a tight hug. Lucy melted against her mother, slumping into her arms with a soft sigh. "I'm sorry...I'm sorry I'm so selfish, Mama." She whispered.

"Shh...Luce...you're anything but selfish." Aurora hugged Lucy tightly, her fingers threading through her daughter's long curls. "Oh, my beautiful girl." Aurora rested her head against Lucy's head and sighed softly. "It's okay to feel this way, honey. It's a scary thing, moving on. For both of us. I don't want to. In fact, I would like to sit around and hope that one day your father will just waltz in, and everything will be how it once was." Aurora pulled back, and tilted Lucy's chin up. "But sweetheart, we both know that's not going to happen." Gently, Aurora tucked a curl behind Lucy's ear. "But he would want us to keep going, even if that meant someone new comes along. And even if someone does...he could never take the place of your father. You know that. It's absolutely impossible."

"What if you love this...someone new...more than Papa?" Lucy asked quietly.

"Impossible." Aurora murmured quickly. "Absolutely impossible. I could never love someone like I loved your father. But that doesn't mean I may not love someone again one day, fiercely and
strongly." She took a deep breath, and managed a small smile. "Your father was my true love, and his love was everything I ever could have wanted. He gave me you. And without you, I would be lost right now." Aurora smiled a little wider. "But who's to say I couldn't love again?"

Lucy bit her lower lip nervously. "I don't want someone to steal you away from me."

"No one ever could." Aurora's heart ached for her daughter. The fact that she had even thought that was a possibility broke her heart. "You and I have a special bond, you know. We're not like most mothers and daughters."

"Understatement." Lucy smiled.

"Even if it's just the two of us for forever, we'll be okay. We're strong on our own. We hold each other up." Aurora murmured, kissing Lucy's cheek. "And even if there was a new man in our lives... that wouldn't replace your father... and it wouldn't diminish the love I feel for you. Our bond would be just as strong."

"Promise?" Lucy stared up at Aurora with her big brown eyes, and Aurora couldn't help but smile.

"Always and forever, sweetheart."

Over the next few days, Aurora did her best to avoid Killian as best as possible. She was embarrassed yet again for getting nervous and flustered around him. She went to work, picked up Lucy, and then they would go straight home. It wasn't that she was scared of him, no, that wasn't it at all. He was just a man. She was just scared of getting attached to him. She had been on her own for a long time, save for Lucy. And yes, Jefferson and Belle and August and Emma had all been there for her to lean on. But never like this, with the possibilities of romance.

Aurora had been with Phillip for as long as she could remember. They had grown up together, and fell in love when they were older. It had been something most people would consider straight from a fairytale. It had been so simple with Phillip. He knew her better than anyone else. He knew what made her tick and what she hated and what she loved and when to leave her alone and when to stay with her. He was everything she could have wanted. He was her sunlight. His death had been the hardest thing she ever had to endure. Suddenly she was forced to be a single mother and to bear the weight of loss and pain unlike anything she had ever felt before.

After all of that, Aurora wanted to be careful with her heart. Phillip had been the only one to ever hold it, aside from Lucy of course. Aurora was cautious with it now. Her heart was fragile, and yet very strong after everything she'd endured. Still, she was cautious to just give it away to the first man who showed interest in her. Love needed time to grow. She needed time to accept that love could happen to her again. She needed to find the courage down deep inside of her to accept that someone might actually want her like Phillip once had. It would be completely different, of course. Aurora would need to not compare.

Killian, on the other hand, went into town as much as possible in hopes of seeing Aurora again. He could have called her, sure. But he didn't want to abuse the privilege it was to have her phone number. He didn't want to scare her away. As much as he loathed to admit it, August was right. He barely knew Aurora. But he couldn't help but be drawn to her. She was under his skin, and it seemed as if there would be no getting her out.

Milah had been the only woman to ever get under his skin. He had itched for that woman, needed her and craved her. She was thrilling and always kept him on his toes. He loved everything about her. But it had been so long. He could remember her face, remember her voice, but his memories
with her were slowly beginning to fade. It scared him more than he would ever let on. But he had to let go of her. She wasn't coming back. She was probably happy, wherever she was. In the past he would have been obsessive, would have wanted her unhappy unless she was with him. But time had changed him in ways. It had hardened him and softened him in different ways. He hoped she was somewhere happy, with her son, doing whatever it was she wanted to do.

Aurora was the exact opposite of Milah. Milah had been exotic in beauty and outgoing and saucy. Aurora was soft, but bright like sunshine. Aurora was sweet and gentle, where Milah had been full of laughter and snark. Aurora had a fire in her as well, but it wasn't like Milah had been. Aurora would be the kind of girl to articulate a brilliant fight, and then give a sweet dimpled smile after the fact to show that she had won.

Killian never thought he would feel his cold heart be warm again. But ever since the first day he saw Aurora, she had gotten under his skin. She was in his every thought. When he closed his eyes, he saw her, with her bluebell eyes and pink lips and honey curls. She was untouchable, just out of his grasp.

And he was finding out that he had never wanted anything more than to possess her.

On her lunch break one day, Madame Mayor asked Aurora to stop on her way back at Dr. Hopper's office to pick up a file she needed. Aurora hadn't planned on leaving the office for lunch. She had brought her lunch just like she had everyday, and was content to just sit at her desk and play solitaire on her computer for the hour and a half of her break. And besides, it was another rainy day, and she hadn't wanted to venture out into town in it. Perhaps Madame Mayor was tired of Aurora just sitting at her desk milling about. Aurora was nervous about going out into town, but she bundled up anyways and ventured out. The heavy raindrops had slowed to a stop for a little while, though the sky was still a dark gray.

Instead of going to Dr. Hopper's, Aurora found herself at the cemetery. It was near the edge of town on the outskirts of the woods. Aurora had done her best to not visit her husband's grave too often. She didn't need people feeling sorry for her worse than they already did. And if the townspeople saw her slipping through the squeaky gate to the cemetery on a day to day basis, their pitying looks would seem heavier.

His grave was tucked at the foot of a large oak tree. Because of the rain, mud had been smeared across the once shining headstone. Aurora crouched down low and brushed away fallen leaves and mud. Once the majority of the mud was gone and she could actually read his name, Aurora lowered herself down on the grass on her knees. Cold mud stuck to her stockings, but she didn't care. She kept an extra pair in her desk drawer.

Her small hands tucked together in her lap as she stared at the stone before her. She was never vocal to Phillip when she visited her grave. He couldn't hear her. He was gone. He wasn't going to respond with his warm voice or touch her shoulder if she did speak. Sometimes she would just sit in the grass and let the silence wash over her. She bit down on her lower lip and traced Phillip's name etched into the stone.

"I miss you." She whispered quietly.

Thunder caught her attention, and she knew she needed to go.

She pushed herself to her feet, and shook her hands to get the remaining mud off. Aurora stared at his headstone for a moment, and she swallowed hard. "I don't want to live without you, Phillip." She whispered. "But I'm learning how to. For Lucy." The rain began to sprinkle down through the trees, but she remained still at the foot of his grave. "I know you're not coming back. I've
accepted that." She took a deep breath of the cold air. "I can't imagine loving someone else, Phillip. I don't want to love anyone else but you." Aurora's eyes filled with tears that she refused to let fall. "But I'm going to learn how to. For me."

Killian didn't mind the rain. Not from the shelter of the Jolly Roger, that is.

But when he had to venture out to take Madame Mayor his rent, he decided he hated it.

It had stopped for almost an hour, and then just when everyone thought the sun would come out, the dark clouds reappeared and the rain began to sprinkle in heavy drips.

By the time he reached the mayor's office, he was drenched.

Instead of just dropping it in the bin, he was able to hand it directly over to Madame Mayor.

"Well, aren't you looking lovely today, Regina." Killian drawled as he pulled the crumpled envelope out of the safe haven of his coat.

Regina quirked her eyebrow, and nodded. "Thank you, Killian." She took it the envelope and gave him a stiff smile. "I'd give you a receipt, but my receptionist has seemed to forget when her lunch break is over." Regina shook her head.

Killian suddenly realized that Aurora had mentioned Madame Mayor, and how she was a receptionist. How the bloody hell had he not ever noticed her, when she had most likely been the one to give him his receipts over the years?

"Strange. Perhaps the poor girl got stuck out in this mess." He shrugged.

"I'm hoping that's it." She rolled her eyes, and turned away. "I'll see you next time."

Killian took this as a 'get out', and did just that. Even through the rain, his eyes were alert. Aurora would be heading back here. She seemed like the kind of woman who wouldn't be late for anything. So where was she?

He meandered through town, glancing around curiously. Townspeople who had ventured out into the rain when the storm had calmed retreated back into their hiding places, leaving the town seemingly empty.

Except for one soaked figure stumbling down the street.

Killian recognized the light pink coat as the same one Aurora had worn on movie night. Only now, it was covered in mud and rain. One heel was broken off one of her shoes, causing her to limp as she hurried down the sidewalk. Killian quickly crossed the street and held his hands out as she collided into him.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" She exclaimed, blue eyes wide. Aurora's already pounding heart seemed to stop as she realized Killian was who she had run into. "Killian...I'm sorry." She stepped past him.

"I have to go. I was supposed to pick something up for Madame Mayor, but I ah..." She stammered, limping away. Her body trembled from the cold rain and mud that dripped off of her.

"What happened to you, love?" Killian asked curiously, hurrying alongside her.

She looked up at him, her blue gaze suddenly icy. Despite the squeeze of her heart at the little endearment, there was an uneasiness that came with it. "I'm not your 'love', Killian."
"My apologies. Must be the pirate in me." He grinned.

She rolled her eyes at him, and with a shake of her wet hair, stomped past him.

"Hey, 'Rora, wait!" Killian came to stop in front of her, forcing her to pause in front of him. "Let me take you home. You're a mess."

She frowned. "I have to get back to work. Madame Mayor is expecting me."

"She'll understand, I'm sure. Come on, we'll pick up what you need, drop it off, and then I'll take you home."

Aurora crossed her arms over her chest, a defiant gleam in her eyes. "I'm fine." She said firmly.

"Yes, that's why you're shaking so much." Killian frowned. "Would you stop being so bloody stubborn and let me help you?"

It was like the scene from the movie.

A man and a woman standing in the rain, their eyes full of passion.

But not for the same reasons as Paul and Holly. There was no passionate kiss, no romance in the air.

Just a lot of rain. And mud.

"I'm fine, Killian." Aurora said firmly. "I have to go."

"'Rora, you're shaking, you're a bloody mess, and you look awful." He shot back.

Aurora gaped at him, bluebell eyes wide and fiery. "And you're rude." She moved to stomp past him, but his hand grasped her arm before she could get far. "Let me go, Killian. I don't need you to look after me." She shoved his hand away, despite the warmth through her sopping clothes.

"Maybe you do." He shouted as she walked away. "Maybe you need someone to take care of you, to take care of Lucy. Wouldn't your dear husband have wanted you to be taken care of? Or would he be happy to know you're alone?"

He instantly regretted it as she froze on the sidewalk. Her shoulders lifted and fell in quick motions, and when she whirled around, her glare was visible even through the mud. She came towards him again, one heel clacking against the wet sidewalk in short stomps. Her hand connected with his cheek, hard enough to make his head toss back. His cheek stung from the chill of her hand, and when he reached up, he felt gooey mud stick to his face.

He deserved that.

"Don't you ever, ever talk about him. You didn't know him...you... you don't even know me!" She exclaimed, before her eyes grew sad. "I thought you were better than that. I never thought you would stoop so low." She glared at him as her fingers curled around the collar of his shirt and pulled him close. Her hand burned from the force behind her slap against his stubbly face. "Listen to me, Killian Jones. I can take care of myself. I am not some caged bird. Not anymore. I don't need you. I don't need anyone to protect me from the world." She tightened her grasp on his collar. "I can take care of myself." Her fierce gaze held his for a long moment before he nodded. She released his collar and took a step back, pale cheeks flushed pink from the sudden wave of emotion.
"I have no doubt that you can, 'Rora. You've obviously done just fine all these years." He sighed, shrugging his shoulders.

"I have." She was still shivering, but made no move to run away from him, to go home and get warm. Stubborn girl wouldn't come with him and let him help her dry off either.

"And you're right. I don't know you, 'Rora. Not really." Before she could speak up, he held his hand up. "I'm sorry for what I said. I don't know you, or your husband, or anything you've been through." He bit his lower lip, and shrugged. "But I'd like to. I'd like to get to know you."

Aurora furrowed her eyebrows together. "Why, Killian?" Her gaze softened, and she shook her head slowly. "Why do you want to get to know me?"

"Why wouldn't I?" He managed a small smile. "You're...you're a remarkable little lady. I have no doubt that you have no need of me. But 'Rora, you deserve to have someone there for you and Lucy. I don't know that I'm it but..." He shrugged his shoulders. "I'd like to try."

Aurora shivered, and crossed her arms over her chest. The rain was soaking through her coat. "You're asking a lot, you know that?" She murmured.

"If you don't want to, all you have to do is say the word." He stuffed his hands into his pockets, the rain beginning to make him shiver as well. "Nothing will be forced upon you, 'Rora. I'll leave you alone if that is what you wish."

Aurora bit her lower lip, half out of nerves and half out of wanting it to stop trembling. "It's not...what I wish." She murmured. "W-we could try it."

Killian grinned, and his eyebrow lifted as he studied her trembling form. "Really?"

She nodded, and managed a small smile. "So long as we go at my pace...I'll only share what I feel comfortable with."

"Deal." He grinned. "Now will you let me take you home now?"

"S-sure. I should still pick up that file from Dr. Hopper for Regina."

"Well we'd better get a move on." Killian grinned. "If we stay in the rain any longer, we'll both catch pneumonia. Maybe you could nurse me back to health."

Aurora giggled dryly. "Sure, Killian."
Archie was rather surprised to find Killian with Aurora, and had gently taken the young mother aside to question her. Killian watched with a lifted eyebrow, and couldn't help but step forward in an attempt to hear what was being said. The bug-eyed man was stammering to Aurora, and even shot him a glance over his shoulder before turning back to Aurora. She had giggled and Killian didn't know what they were saying, but he still wasn't happy about it.

But just to prove that everything was okay, Aurora returned to Killian's side and slipped her cold hand into his.

"Killian and I are friends, Archie. You don't need to worry about me. I can take care of myself." She had giggled.

Friends.

Well, what could she say? They weren't exactly an item. But they weren't nothing.

So, for now, friends would do.

Archie glanced between them for a moment before giving the pair a tense smile and finding the file Aurora needed. Once it was tucked into Aurora's coat, they headed back out into the rain. By the time they reached Madame Mayor's office, Regina took one look at Aurora's muddy, disheveled appearance and sent her home for the day.

He caught how the woman studied their clasped hands, with an expression much like Archie's had been, and yet very much unreadable.

Aurora didn't let go. She wasn't ashamed, and neither should he.

Still, Killian couldn't help but notice how people had looked at them thus far.

Emma and Mary Margaret had been wary at the bar, nervous he would gobble her up. Emma had glared at him. August outright told him to stay away from Aurora. Belle had been kind about it, as has Jefferson had been, but there was still a wariness about them. He'd seen how Lucy had looked at them, with childlike curiosity and hesitation. It was really on her opinion he cared about. If she hated him, he would back off. He didn't want to risk Aurora's relationship with her daughter becoming strained because of him.

She let go of his hand once they reached a big brick building where her apartments were. They stepped inside, and she shook off her coat and dug around in her pockets for her keys. Killian noticed how she trembled, how her pink coat was heavy and dripping from the mud and rain.

"Found them. Finally. I was worried I lost them." She giggles, moving to walk up the stairs ahead of them.

Killian follows warily, unsure if she actually wants him to come up with her. He had promised to get her home safe, and out of the rain, but she hadn't exactly invited him in. Just promised she would give him a chance in the near future.
But the sweet woman wouldn't leave a poor man soaked out in the rain, would she?

No, of course not. Once she realizes he's stopped at the bottom of the stairs, she turns and furrows her eyebrows at him. "Killian..." She murmurs, giving him a shaky little smile. "Aren't you going to come up?" She giggles softly. "You didn't think I'd let you freeze to death, did you? Come on. I'll make us some hot tea."

He shivers, and gives her a slow smile. "Thank you, 'Rora."

When they get upstairs, she pushes a towel into his hands and then scurries away. She's quick to turn on the lights and get the heater on before disappearing down the hall. His clothes are dripping all over the rug on the hardwood floor, and he anxiously swats at himself with the towel. Her little apartment looks like it belongs in a Pottery Barn catalog. He doesn't want to make a mess, but he can't really help it at this point. He can hear her moving around in a room down the hall, and by the time she comes back, he's still soaked, but no longer dripping all over her fancy welcome mat.

"Here. You can toss your wet clothes in the dryer in the closet, but until they are dry, you ought to change." She takes the towel from him and holds a pile of clothes out to him. Clean jeans, fresh socks, and a green long sleeved thermal.

Immediately, Killian knows who the previous owner of these clothes were. He takes a step back, icy blue eyes wide. "I...ah, no, 'Rora. That's okay. I'll be fine." He rakes a hand through his wet black hair. He's shocked she would offer him his clothes, that she would be okay with that. "I can just go, really, you don't have to. Maybe we could talk another day." He wants to stay with her, but he doesn't want her to feel like she has to give him his clothes. He doesn't want to force her into anything she's not comfortable with.

She actually looks offended, and her lips part in surprise. "Killian...please." Aurora tries not to take it personal, tries not to wonder if maybe he's finally realizing just how much baggage she comes with. Maybe the thought of wearing a dead man's clothes freaks him out. But they were in perfect condition, and she had boxes of Phillip's clothes packed away ready to be taken to the shelter. She wanted Killian to stay, to talk to him and learn more about him. Just in dryer conditions. "He's not using them." She shrugs her shoulders. "He would want me to give his clothes to someone who needs them. And currently, you need warm clothes."

"'Rora.." He begins.

"Killian." She's shivering, but her voice is firm. "The storm probably won't let up for a while and Lucy won't be home from school until later." She takes a wobbly step towards him, still off balanced in her broken heels. "I'd like it if you stayed."

Killian is silent, and stares down at the clothes in her hands. Aurora's stomach suddenly becomes knotted and twisted. Maybe his passionate words had been just that. Words. Things said in the heat of the moment. Perhaps he truly didn't mean them. Maybe he wanted something easier, a more simple life, a more simple girl. She swallows hard. "If...if you don't want to stay it's fine. I mean...it's not a big deal." She stammers, looking away from him quickly. "Don't do this, Aurora, don't cage yourself in. Who cares if he doesn't like you? Don't lock yourself away again."

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Killian reaches out and takes the clothes before she can go anywhere. He closes his hands around hers clutching the soft fabrics, and brushes his thumb over the back of her hand. "Only if you're sure." His eyes pierce into hers, needing to be sure that this is what she wants. "I just...don't want you to feel like you have to give me his clothes."

"I'm sure." She lifts her blue gaze, staring up at him warily. "I...I want to. I don't want you to go
"I don't want to go either." He smiles, and he can't help but feel his heart grow warm as her own smile appears. "Thank you, 'Rora."

It feels weird being in a dead man's clothes.

Not that the guy had bad taste in clothes or anything.

But knowing that the clothes you wore once belonged to the husband of a girl you're interested in who was now deceased, you'd be a little weirded out too.

Killian wanders around the spacious apartment, taking in the casual, comfy decor. It was obvious a child lived there. The window seat in the corner with the stuffed plushies and the huge bookshelf full of children's storybooks gave it away. But there was no mess, no disarray. No cluttered toys or clothes thrown about. You'd only know a child lived there if you looked close enough.

He tugs on the sleeve of his shirt, or rather, his shirt, and studies the row of picture frames neatly aligned on the top of Lucy's bookshelf. There was a picture of Aurora snuggling what he assumed was baby Lucy. Her expression was that of a girl in pure love, and the tiny baby was a perfect little bundle sleeping in her mother's arms. Another was of her husband, with a cheery smile and crinkly brown eyes that Lucy had definitely inherited. He was holding Lucy's hand and walking with her through the park. Lucy looked to be about two or three, and absolutely enamored with her father.

The next picture made his smile fade. Aurora's arms are around Phillip's waist, her body encased in a beautiful white lace dress. Phillip was holding her close, and she was laughing as he kissed her cheek. Killian's gaze lingered over this photo longer than he meant. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the blissful expression on Aurora's face, the absence of worry or exhaustion or pain making her face brighter than the sun. Her husband had the warmest expression on his face as he held her close.

They deserved each other. He didn't even know the guy, but if he made Aurora smile like that, they deserved each other. Couples like them deserved the best. They didn't deserve to be ripped away from each other. They were pure and made for each other. They were puzzle pieces that fit only with each other.

How could he come in and think he could make them as happy as they once were? How could he come in with his own jagged puzzle piece and think he could fit with them? He wasn't pure. He wasn't made for happiness. He could barely take care of himself, let alone two hurt young ladies.

And yet, he wanted to. He wanted to make them smile like this again. He wanted to learn how to take care of them. He wanted someone to need him, someone to love him. He wanted to flee from the darkness, to see what the light had to offer him, even if he didn't deserve it.

Killian swallows hard, and looks away quickly as a door down the hall behind him closes. He runs his hand over his face, and looks up as Rory appears. Her hair is piled on top of her head encased in a towel, and she wore sweatpants and a purple thermal. She pauses in the hall, her blue gaze looking him up and down.

"Good. They fit." She comments, not allowing her gaze to linger on Killian's form in her husband's clothes.

Killian can only nod. "Thank you again." He croaks out.
"Of course." Her eyes lift to his face, eyebrows furrowing together in concern at the catch in his voice, but she doesn't ask. They stand in silence for a moment, the only sound his clothes in the dryer and the creaking of the heater. He's standing near the bookshelf, which means he was looking at her pictures. No wonder he was so quiet.

"No more mud." She smiles, rather uncomfortable with the heavy silence.

Killian nods again, and cracks a smile. "Lovely."

"Lucy was a cute baby, huh?" She can't help but ask, instantly regretting it.

Killian glances over his shoulder towards the array of photographs and nods. "A beautiful little lady." He gives her a smile. "Not much has changed."

Aurora swallows hard but smiles as she glances toward the kitchen. "Why don't I make us some tea? I'm still freezing."

"That'd be nice." He stuffs his hands in his pockets, and moves towards the kitchen with her. He sits on a stool by the counter, and watches as she moves around the small space. She fills her tea kettle with water and sets it on the stove. She then reaches up into the cupboard and pulls down two mugs, one red, one blue. "Any preferences?" She asks, pulling a tin out with an assortment of tea bags varying in colored tags and scents.

"Ah, no, I'm not too picky." He shrugs, not having been much of a tea drinker.

"Orange spice is my favorite. Sound appealing?" She asks with a glance over her shoulder as she shakes her hair out of her towel. She sets it down on the counter and runs her fingers through her wet hair.

"Sure, 'Rora. That sounds nice." He taps his fingers against the counter, and watches as she moves to put the tin back and close the cupboard. She turns and gives him a shy smile before stepping towards the counter to drop the teabags into the mugs. His smile fades as he realizes she's still limping. Before it had been because of her broken shoes, but now, she should have been walking fine. "Are you okay?" He asks, pointing to her leg.

"Hm? Oh, yeah, I'm fine." She glances down at her ankle and then lifts her hand in a wave as she brushes it off. "Just a little sprain." The water in the pot begins to bubble, and she glances back at it for a moment. "That's what happens when you slide down an embankment." Before he can see her cheeks brighten with color, she turns away to pour steaming water into their mugs. She leaves the bags to steep, and jumps a little when he appears at her side.

"Here, let me help you sit. You shouldn't walk on it." He rests his hand gently on her arm.

"Oh Killian, really, you don't need to fuss over me. I'm okay." She insists.

"'Rora, trust me. It could get worse. You need to sit, and elevate it. I can manage the tea."

She hesitates, trying to come up with reasons why he shouldn't fuss over her. But everything that came to mind wouldn't convince him otherwise. She bites down on her lower lip. "But...you don't know how much sugar I like in my tea..." She says weakly.

He can't help but laugh. "Why don't you tell me then?"

Aurora stares up at his tender expression, lips pouting as she realizes she won't win, and for some reason, she doesn't want to. It feels nice to have someone help her for once, to make sure she was looked after. "Two scoops."
"That wasn't too hard, now was it? Come on." He grins.

Killian winds one arm around her waist and bends a little to scoop her up beneath her knees. She nearly leaps out of his arms as he carries her the short distance from the kitchen to her small living room. No man had touched her like this in years. No one else had ever been allowed to. But Killian's hands were firm and warm, and he cradled her carefully in his arms, making sure she was comfortable and secure. He sets her down gently on the couch, and once she's settled he immediately grabs a pillow and carefully rests her ankle down upon it. "Don't you even think about moving." He says sternly as he grabs a throw blanket from a basket beneath her coffee table.

"But Killian..." She begins, blushing over his protective attentions.

"Relax. I've made tea before. I'm sure I'll do it justice. You just sit here, okay?" He spreads the blanket out over her lap and across her legs.

Aurora can't help but find his fretting over her slight sprain adorable. As much as she doesn't think he needs to fret over her, it's rather endearing how careful and gentle he's being with her. Something in how his icy blue gaze softens as he instructs her to stay makes her want to kiss him. Funny, she hadn't had thoughts like that in years.

She blushes as he turns away to turn the flame off of the whistling tea kettle. Hopefully he can't read minds.

"How'd you become Storybrooke's mud monster?" He asks as he pours steaming water into their mugs.

Aurora blushes and slinks down against the couch cushions. "Um...it's kind of embarrassing." She shrugs, attempting to look around him to see if he's putting the right amount of sugar into her mug. He is.

He saunters over and sets their mugs down on the coffee table before heading back into the kitchen. He digs around her fridge, and Aurora quirks her eyebrow. "Um..what are you doing?"

"I'm getting you ice." He laughs simply as he raids her refrigerator.

"Please, don't. I'm already freezing enough as it is." She groans. "Elevating it is enough, I think."

"Hush." He ignores her and wraps a bag of peas he finds in the freezer in a dish towel. "This will have to do." He sits down on the couch, and gently lifts her feet into his lap. Aurora blushes, and watches curiously as he carefully slides her sock down and begins to probe at her ankle. "No breaks. Good."

She sends him a look. "What are you, a doctor?"

"Whale taught me some things." He grins.

Aurora rolls her eyes. "I'm sure he did." Killian laughs at her quip, and moves her pillow into his lap before gently setting her ankle down. He carefully holds the bag of peas against her ankle, and she winces at the sudden chill. "Really, I'll be okay. I don't need all this extra attention."

Killian furrows his eyebrows together and shakes his head. "How about you let me take care of you, okay? I think you deserve someone to look after you." His tone almost sounds like hes...offended.
Aurora swallows hard, but instead of shooting him a biting comment or pushing him away, she nods slowly. "It's been a while. It sure is a nice change." She murmurs.

His icy blue gaze lifts to hers, and she can't help but smile at the tender look in his eyes. He liked being needed, apparently. "If you really want to know what happened to me, I was visiting Phillip's grave." His smile fades instantly, and she giggles softly. "I don't too often. I used to almost every day right after he died." Her shoulders lift in a slight shrug. "It started raining and as I started to leave, I slipped down the embankment. You know how the cemetery is kind of on a bit of an incline? Yeah. I slid down that." She rolls her eyes, cheeks turning pink. "And now I have a ruined pair of shoes and a muddy coat. Oh, and a sprained ankle." She rolls her eyes, and reaches for her mug of tea off the coffee table.

She takes a sip of her tea, noticing that he'd made it exactly how she liked it. She smiles, and brushes her fingertips across the rim of it. "Perfect."

"And you doubted me." He teases, adjusting the bag of peas on her ankle.

"Forgive me?"

"Of course." Killian reaches for his mug, and she watches curiously as he drinks it. "Mm. That's delicious." He takes another sip and glances at her. "A little sweet for me, but it's nice. And warm."

She nods in agreement. "I take it you're not much of a tea drinker?"

"Ah, what gave that away?" He teases.

"Well, whenever Jefferson or Belle comes over and has tea, they could spend a good deal of time commenting on the tea. It's aftertaste, how much sugar it needs, all the varying types, the origins of different teas, so on and so forth. But you, you just say it's nice and warm." She giggles.

"Hey, I like tea. But not everyone can like it as much as Belle or Jefferson."

"No one on the planet likes tea as much as they do." Aurora grins.

Killian chuckles and takes another sip of tea. He can't help but find Aurora adorable as she snuggles down with the blanket he had laid over her and her small hands cupping her mug. She seems so utterly comfortable in his presence, when he had thought she'd be a fluttering mess. This girl certainly was full of surprises.

"I'm glad Jefferson has Belle." She says softly. "Do you...do you know about..."

"Aye, I do." Killian answers quickly, his eyes softening. "They've been through a lot."

"Understatement." Aurora murmurs.

"How long have you known them?" Killian asks.

"Mm...for as long as I can remember." She purses her lips as she sifts through her memories. "Belle and I went to college together at Yale. Then she went and became a nurse and moved here. Phillip and I were visiting her when we met Jefferson. That was ah, right after everything happened. It was still hard for him."

Killian nods. "I met them after all that. I met the new Jefferson." He quirks his eyebrow as he looks over at Aurora. "He was pretty bad, heh?"
Aurora blows on the surface of her tea. "Bad is an understatement." Her thumb brushes along the edge of the hot ceramic mug in a lazy fashion that he can't help but notice. "I remember Phillip and I would get calls in the middle of the night to come help find him when the...well...dark thoughts would take over and he'd disappear." She shakes her head slowly. "I'm just so proud of how far he's come."

"Agreed." He mumbles. Killian glances around for a moment before looking back towards Aurora. "Can I ask you something, 'Rora?" He asks warily, blue gaze flickering towards hers.

"Sure, Killian. Of course."

"It may not be any of my business...but I can't help but be curious." He tears his gaze away from hers, and bites on his lip again. "Could...could you tell me about him?"

Aurora's eyebrows furrow together. "You mean Jefferson?" He and Killian were awfully close, and Killian himself had just said he knew about Jefferson's dark past. But perhaps there was more her friend hadn't told Killian? Perhaps Killian was in the dark about some things.

"No." Killian adjusts the bag of peas on her ankle, forcing himself not to look at her. "Him. Your husband." He clears his throat. "If you're not comfortable with it, you don't have to answer..."

"No, no, it's fine. How else are we supposed to learn about each other if we don't ask each other things?" She manages a small smile. But still, Aurora's throat grows dry, and she takes a quick gulp of her tea. "Um. What do you want to know?"

Killian shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know, 'Rora. How did you guys meet?"

Aurora purses her lips again, and she runs a hand through her damp hair. "Our families knew each other before we were even born." A soft giggle escapes her. "My father and his father used to joke that we were betrothed, since our families were so close. They knew someday we'd end up together." She smiles fondly at the memory. "He and I did everything together. Phillip knew me better than anyone, and I had never known anyone like I knew him." Her eyes have a faraway expression, and she smiles. "You never saw one of us without the other. No matter where we went, no matter what we went through, no matter what, we always had each other. It seemed so easy, that we grew up together and then fell in love. It felt like a fairytale, like we were the lucky ones." She laughs softly. "We were so young and in love, ready to take on the world together."

She blushes when she blinks back to reality and finds Killian staring at her intensely. He doesn't respond, doesn't say anything at all. She doesn't even know if he blinks. He just stares at her. "You don't have to be shy, Killian. You can ask me whatever you want. I'll answer you truthfully." She promises, sending him a reassuring smile.

Killian licks his lips, nodding slowly. He doesn't know what else to ask, really. The faraway, dreamy look she had just gotten in an instant said everything. She had been in love with the guy for so long, and still was, and probably always would be. She deserved to be a princess, to have her happily ever after. Why would she ever want anything with him? He was just a bartender. Nothing special. He had his own issues and bad past. He wanted her, sure, but it still shocked him that she was willing to give him a chance. A nothing like himself.

She's waiting patiently, an expectant smile on her face. He blinks out of his thoughts, and looks away slowly. "Ah...what was he like?"

Aurora smiles. "Warm. Lucy is a lot like him. He always had a smile for everyone he met. He was always willing to go the extra mile to be sure you felt happy, and loved, no matter who you were." Killian watches her thumb trace around her mug again, distracting himself with the simple
movement as she speaks. "He worked in criminal investigation. Protecting people and bringing forth justice was his passion. He loved taking care of other people, and helping others." A soft giggle escapes her. "Nothing happens here in Storybrooke, but he wanted to make this our home. He loved the people, loved the small town, and thought this would be a good place to raise our family." Pain stabs at her heart. "Well, Lucy." She shrugs. "So he'd travel up to Augusta and work all day, then come home and be...a father and husband." She smiles faintly, and runs her fingers through her wet hair. "He never complained much, never took his stresses out on Lucy or I. You wouldn't even know how hard his job was. He was...well...perfect."

How could he compete with a perfect man? The way Aurora spoke of him made it sound like he put the stars in the sky. Killian looks away towards Lucy's window seat with her pictures neatly arranged on the bookshelf. Smiling faces. A happy family. So how had it all been torn away? How had the perfection become tainted and harsh? "'Rora...what happened to him?" Her breathing shifts, and her body stiffens. He watches as her lashes flutter and her lips part. Quickly, he shakes his head. "It's okay, 'Rora. You don't have to tell me...Your pace. We'll go at your pace." He stammers.

She shakes her head, holding her hand up to silence him. "He was shot to death." She deadpans. Aurora refuses to look up at him, and he'd rather she didn't. Her broken voice is enough for him. "He was passionate about his latest case. The woman who had been killed was married, had a little boy. Phillip wanted justice, for the man to go to prison. Apparently her husband was her killer. Phillip couldn't imagine something like that happening to a family, couldn't imagine a child growing up without their parents." Aurora's shoulders lift into a weak little shrug. "He found out the man had been convicted of many other crimes as well, which only fueled his need for justice even more." She shook her head, blinking a few times to fight off the tears that burned her eyes. "So, Phillip headed out to his car to drive home late one night, and...this guy appeared out of nowhere and shot him to death."

Her voice crackles, and Killian reaches out to rest his hand over hers. She looks down at his hand, and manages a small smile. "They believe it was the man in question who killed his wife, but the security tapes didn't show his face. After Phillip's death, I found out he and his partner had been receiving threatening notes for a while concerning this case. If they didn't back down and leave the case alone, something bad would happen. They never thought much of it, since they were so close to finding him."

"Were you and Lucy ever threatened?" Killian asks, his blood growing hot at the thought of anyone trying to harm Lucy or Aurora. He was suddenly ready to post himself outside their door, to protect Lucy and Aurora to be sure no one ever hurt them. It was a strange feeling, but a fierce one.

"No, no." Aurora answers quickly. "We have never been threatened. No one's ever come after us or Phillip's old partner."

"Did they ever find him?"

Aurora is quiet for a moment before she lifts her blue gaze to his. "No. They never found him. He's never come back on the radar, either. It's like he disappeared." She smiles sadly at Killian as he withdraws his hand from hers and clutches it into a fist. "I know justice will be served in the end. Something good has to come from something so...so bad. It took me a long time to accept that, but I finally have. Each day is a gift. Phillip taught me that. He treated each and every day as something special. He always made sure Lucy and I knew we were loved, that we were special and beautiful and strong. And I have to believe that my baby girl and I are destined for more than this, for something wonderful that would make him proud."

Killian's eyebrows knit together. He can't understand how a woman who went through so much
could have such an outlook. Her husband was killed in cold blood and she still has hope that
something good could come from something so traumatic. She didn't seek comfort in drinks or
drugs or physical touch. She persevered, continued on in hopes of something growing from the
ashes of her life. She certainly was stronger than he ever would be. "I'm so sorry, 'Rora." He
whispers.

"You don't need to be, Killian. You didn't do anything wrong." She shrugged her shoulders,
giving him a slight smile.

"I just... don't know what else to say." He mumbles.

Aurora bites her lower lip, studying how his jaw clenches and unclenches. "Jefferson said you've
been through a lot, that you would understand my...pain." He flinches at her question, the bag of
peas nearly falling from against her ankle. She winces from the chill of it, and he holds it steady as
he processes what she had said.

"Aye. I understand loss." He mumbles quietly. He didn't want to talk about it. He definitely did
not want to share with her about his past. But the longer he stares at her, the longer her dewy blue
eyes focus on his, he needs to. She had just laid out her past for him, had explained a traumatic
situation she didn't deserve to go through. How could he brush it off and say he didn't want to talk
about it? He swallows the lump in his throat and looks away. If he was going to tell her, he
refused to look at her. "It was a long time ago. I lived in another city, or, well, many different
cities. I've been all over," He shrugs. "I fancy myself a traveler. Or rather, I used to. I, ah, I didn't
have a great childhood. Abusive dad, mom died when I was young. As soon as I was able to, I
ran away. Sperm donor hasn't ever come looking for me."

Aurora's eyebrows furrow together as she adjusts the blanket over herself. Killian sipped from his
mug before setting it down on the coffee table. His warm hands came to rest on her legs, and he
sent her a glance to be sure the placement of his hands was appropriate. She nods slowly,
encouraging him to go on.

"August tried to stop me, but obviously nothing could. I rarely ever stayed in one place for a long
time. I'll spare you all the explicit details," He laughs. "But in a nutshell, I was a thieving
adventurer, like the heroes in children's books. Or at least, I tried to be." He smiles faintly, the
foggy memory of his mother's warm voice as she read stories to him and August to drown out his
father's antics in the background. He's suddenly a million miles away. "Then I met her. Milah."
Her name on his tongue felt foreign. He hadn't uttered it in years, hadn't let himself think about
her. Aurora can't help but smile as his icy blue eyes soften, and his lips curve into a smile. "She
was...wow." He breathes. "An incredible woman." He lifts a hand and rakes it through his drying
hair. "She was vibrant and witty and...so gorgeous. She was wild and unbelievably...Milah." He
blinks out of his thoughts, realizing who he was talking to and where he was. A chuckle escapes
him. "She was a wild thing, much more than your Holly Golightly. And I wasn't at all tame then.
Can't say I'm really tame now." He grins, sending Aurora a wink. "We went all over together. She
was older, but young at heart. Still, she held her ground. She was...fierce. She never let me win."
He laughs, shaking his head.

"She sounds like quite the woman." Aurora murmurs, smiling warmly at him. Watching Killian
talk about this woman should have made her jealous. But instead, she was happy that he had
experienced love. After his short quip about his childhood, he deserved to feel love that made him
smile like he was now. Despite how happy their stories both began, she knew neither of them had
a happy ending. She takes in a deep breath before asking her next question. "What happened to
her?" Aurora asks, her smile beginning to fade.

Killian shakes his head, his smile instantly disappearing. "She was married, and had run away
from her husband. She told me a day after we met that she had a husband and a kid, but
'Rora...she begged me to take her away. Literally begged me. How could I refuse her? Even after a day together, I was wrapped around her finger. She needed me to save her, to take her away. Her husband was a coward, a laughingstock little wimp of a man. She needed me.' He bites his lower lip. "But it caught up to her. She wanted her son, wanted him to come away with us. Now, I've never been a father figure. I wouldn't even know what it's like to be a father. August had been the man in my life to teach me things, to raise me. Our father was too drunk and screamed too much. We didn't learn anything from him. But for Milah...I wanted to. I wanted to learn, to help her. That kid was a piece of her. And I loved Milah fiercely. I actually thought I'd want to settle down, for her. For him." He sighs. "Milah was guilty. She had to leave me, she promised she would sort things out with her husband. She needed to be a mother, to do things right for his sake. She promised to come back." His eyes focus on the bag of peas on Aurora's ankle, expression growing stony. "She never did. Probably found true happiness with her husband and son. Maybe she realized I was the wimp and her husband was the real man. Just as well, I spose." He barked out a bitter laugh that made Aurora nearly jump out of her skin. "What would I know about family anyways?"

Aurora's lips purse. As much as she wanted to feel sorry for him, the woman had done the right thing in going back to her family. Still, knowing Killian had felt such grief made her heart ache. He deserved happiness, to have family and to know he was loved. He didn't deserve to be left in the dust like this. She sits up a little straighter and sets her mug aside as she leans forward. "You've never tried to find her?"

"There's no point, 'Rora. She left me. And I promised I wouldn't chase after her. I promised to give her time." Killian runs a hand through his hair again. "It's been nearly thirteen years. How much more time could she possibly need?" He scoffs, glancing over at her.

Aurora crosses her arms over her knees, her shoulders lifting in a slight shrug. "I don't know, Killian." Slowly, she reaches out and touches his shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"Wasn't your fault." He sent her a smile.

Aurora rolls her eyes, and giggles softly. "Well, how did you end up here? What corner of this tiny town were you hiding in?" She teases.

"I suspect you never visited the White Rabbit. Lovely bar. I went on a little bender across the USA, but that all ended when my gas tank finally hit empty just outside of town. And rather than spending money on gas to fill it up, I spent my last bit on rum. Lots and lots of rum."

Aurora quirks her eyebrow. "Drowning your sorrows?"

"Aye, love." He grins. "Jefferson found me, let me sleep in the back room. He and Belle would be the ones to clean me up when I'd nurse a bottle of rum too often. When I'd sober up, they'd make me mop up the bar and do the dishes and such. Quite stern, those two."

"After everything they've been through, of course they'd be stern on you." Aurora sighs.

"Anyways...eventually I got my head out of my arse and Jefferson and I decided to open up our bar. Two bars in such a tiny town is practically unthinkable, but hey, we have fun." He chuckles. "I'm not the man I once was. I may be an overgrown child at times, but I'm not...I'm not the old me any longer." He sighs. "I've got a life now. And someday, I'll go on more adventures. Just, perhaps a little more responsibly."

"And what about August? How did he end up here in Storybrooke?"

Killian laughs. "My dear big brother was searching for me for quite some time. He too had
"Wait, your father? You two didn't have the same father?" She asks curiously.

"No. Our mother got pregnant in high school with this guy. Apparently he wanted to help, to take care of her, but she pushed him away and did it alone. Suppose I get that from her." He shrugs his shoulders. "Then my mom met my dad, and while he seemed great at first, he definitely proved himself to be the opposite after marriage." Killian's lips form a thin line. "My dad hated August, hated me, hated everything. Everything was our fault, never his. And...he took it out on us. After our mother died, he grew more aggressive. Which is why I ran away when I did. August did shortly after, but of course, he went on to do more noble things with his life. I kept in touch with him sometimes. But not often enough. We were both chasing after dreams. But August did it right. College, getting a job, Emma. He didn't waste his life. Well, perhaps he did in searching for me." Killian laughs again. "Emma helped him find me. They'd met the right way, the way couples are supposed to meet. They'd been classmates in high school, always crushed on each other, and then they bumped into each other in a coffee shop when they both were in college. They got married, she helped him find me, and once they did, they settled down here and started their little Booth family." He makes a vomit sound, causing Aurora to swat his arm.

"That's sweet, Killian. Especially for Emma." Aurora huffs. Her friend had always had her walls up, and August had torn them down and showed her love and genuine care. They deserved all the happiness in the world.

"True, true. We've all got out troubles, don't we?" He mumbles. "We all need someone to rely on to pick us up when we're down. Lucky for you, you've got Lucy and an entire town to look out for you."

Aurora slowly withdraws her hand from his arm, blue eyes falling away from his gaze. "What about you?"

"What about me, 'Rora?"

"Wouldn't you say I've got you too?" She murmurs shyly, refusing to look up at him.

Killian is quiet for a long moment, before reaching out to take her small hand into his. "Yes, 'Rora. You have me too."

"And don't you need someone too? Someone you can rely on?" She watches curiously as her fingers thread together with his.

"I suppose August and Jefferson would fall into that category." He murmurs, waiting for her to say what he suddenly longed to hear.

Aurora takes in a deep breath. "You have me too, Killian." She murmurs, dark lashes fluttering as she studies their hands. "If you need anything, you can come to me. I can help you. After...after everything you've told me today, I want to be there for you too." She looks up at him, her free hand coming to smooth over his that clutches hers. "I just have one question."

"And what is that, 'Rora?" He asks in a low voice.

Her lips part, and she takes in a shaky breath. "What...what exactly is it that you want, Killian?" Aurora stares up at him, blue eyes wide. "From me, I guess. What...what do you expect out of our...friendship or relationship or whatever you want to call it...what do you see happening? What is it you want?"

Killian stares at her for a long moment, considering her question. Indeed, what does he want? He
swallows hard, and lowers his eyes to the bag of peas against her ankle in his lap.

"I don't really know, 'Rora." He sighs. "Ever since the moment I saw you...met you...I had to know more. I had to know you. You're...you're a wonderful woman, Aurora. I didn't want to involve myself with you once I knew about your husband, but I can't help it anymore." He bites his lower lip. "I want to try this. To try...us. As more than friends."

Aurora breathes in a sharp breath, and her expression grows firm. "I need to tell you something right now, then." She murmurs, her fingers tightening around his. "It wouldn't be just...you and I trying this out. It wouldn't be an easy, normal relationship." She stares at him fiercely. "It would be you, me, and Lucy. She comes with me." Aurora watches him absorb this information, watches the expression on his face change ever so slightly. "So...if you really think I'm worth it, if you really want to try...whatever this is. You have to be willing to try with Lucy too. You have to be sure you're ready for something like that." Aurora bites her lower lip. "I can be there for you, I can help you and be your friend and you can be mine, but if you want anything more than that, you have to accept the packaged deal."

Killian considers this, his mind flickering to images of dear Milah and the faceless boy he was almost ready to call his own. That was his past. Milah wasn't coming back. She was happy with her husband, with her son. She didn't need him any longer. Killian's hand tightens around Aurora's. "It won't be easy, 'Rora. And I know that." He gives her a wary smile. "I would never want to hurt you or Lucy. Let's...let's just take it slow. Spend time together and see if this is what we want. If it's what we all want."

Aurora stares at him for a moment, confusion evident on her face. She shakes her head slowly, and pulls her hand back. He watches curiously as her fingers fumble with the blanket, as she begins to grow nervous beneath his gaze. "Even after learning all that...you...you still want me?" She whispers quietly. It's hard for her to wrap her mind around it, to think that someone else could want her, could want Lucy. Another man's child and wife. No one had ever gotten close like this.

"I'm surprised after all I've told you that you're still interested in my company." He chuckles. But the pain on Aurora's face forces his smile to disappear. Killian tightens his grasp on her hand. "Sweetheart..." He murmurs, tilting his head until he finds her blue gaze. "Is it really so shocking to think that someone could want you, even knowing all that?"

When she nods, he's sure his heart breaks for her. Aurora was spirited and kindhearted and absolutely warm and absolutely stunning. She was unlike anything he'd ever encountered. There was a slow burn deep within her. A fire that could be contained, but unleashed at the drop of a hat. The fact that no man had come around in five years was mindboggling to him. It seemed ridiculous to him that the reason for that could be the fact that Aurora had a child. Lucy was a beautiful girl. She wasn't an annoying little brat like other kids he'd encountered. She was special and vibrant and kind. She could take care of herself, but she still needed someone.

As did Aurora.

And he was finding that he truly did want to be the one they needed.

Because maybe, just maybe, they were exactly what he needed in return.

His hand lifts, and she stiffens as he curls his fingers around the back of her neck. "Killian..." She says his name in a quick stammer, blue eyes widening as she begins to pull away from him. But he tilts her head down, and presses his lips against her forehead.

Tears spark in her eyes, and she quickly closes her eyes on the hot droplets that threaten to fall. "'Rora...I'm willing to try if you are. If you don't want me in your life, in Lucy's life, just say the
word and I'll leave you both alone forever." His words are slightly muffled into her forehead, and he breathes in her sweet scent before pulling back, allowing her to look up at him. He can't imagine losing her now, not after everything they've shared. "I'll go back to just being the pirate guy and you don't ever have to see me. You don't even have to be my friend if you don't want to. I just...I need to know, 'Rora. Are you willing to try?"

She lifts her head to look up at him, and he notices the redness of her eyes and the tears that hover in her blue gaze. He instantly has this strange urge to kiss her tears away, to bring her into his arms and comfort her like he never had to for Milah. Milah never let her emotions show to him, never let herself break in front of him. The first time he ever saw her cry was when she left, when she went back to her family. He couldn't even remember how he reacted then. Was it like this? Did he want to draw her into his arms like he currently wants to do for Aurora? No, he can't even remember. Killian brushes his fingers gently over Aurora's warm neck, watching her stare up at him.

"I'm scared, Killian." She confesses quietly. "There's never...been anyone else since Phillip." Her eyebrows furrow together in worry. "What if I can't...love you...like you deserve? I'm scared of hurting you. I...I'm just...scared."

The 'l' word nearly makes his heart stop, but he brushes it off. "You don't have to be anymore, 'Rora. I promise, we'll go slow. I mean it. The minute you get uncomfortable, you tell me. Talk to me, 'Rora. Let me be there for you." He smiles. "Truly, if you become sick of me, push me away, tell me to leave and I'll do it. But don't be afraid to tell me what's going on in that beautiful head of yours. Okay? I'll do whatever I can to make your fears go away."

He's practically babbling to fill the silence, but it's comforting nonetheless. Aurora shakes her head slowly, in awe of how much Killian wants to be part of her life, to actually give them a chance. It doesn't seem possible. After years of men looking away from her, from men avoiding her like the plague, a man who's dealt with loss is thrown in her direction out of nowhere, and suddenly wants her. He's practically a stranger, but he knows enough about her to be more than a stranger, and yet, he wants her all the same. It's mindboggling.

"If you're sure you can handle it..."

"I'm not saying I can." He chuckles. "But I want to try."

Aurora feels a smile tugging at her lips. At the sight of her smile, Killian's own grows, and he lifts his eyebrow curiously. She takes a deep breath and braces herself before she's suddenly leaning forward. Her lips press against his cheek, which is an action that surprises them both. He's stubbly, and the feeling is scratchy against her lips. But she finds she doesn't mind. It's rather a nice feeling, actually. When she pulls away, he's grinning at her from ear to ear, causing her cheeks to turn pink and a giggle to escape her.

"That's much better than the slap you gave me earlier." He laughs, lifting his eyebrows teasingly.

"Hey, you deserved that."

"Aye, I sure did." He chuckles. "But... did I deserve that?" He asks with a cocky tilt of his head. Aurora couldn't help but giggle. "Surprisingly, yes."

Killian gives her a cocky grin before glancing behind him out the window. "The rain is finally slowing down." He looks back over at Aurora. "When do you have to go pick up Lucy?"

"Oh!" Aurora gasps, realizing that time had gotten away from them. Her eyes fly to the cuckoo
clock on the wall, a gift from Belle one Christmas, and realize the time. "In about a half hour. I'd better go change."

"You look fine." He chuckles.

Aurora rolls her eyes. "I can't pick up my daughter looking like a slob. Just give me a minute. I'm sure your clothes are done in the dryer if you want to check." Before he can respond, she gives his hand a squeeze. "If not, don't worry about it. Phillip rarely wore that outfit and I doubt anyone would even notice."

Killian hadn't even thought of that. He glances down at his, no, *his* shirt, and smooths it out. "Just be careful walking on your ankle." He helps her up to her feet, setting the pillow, peas and blanket aside with his free hand. "Easy." He smiles.

Aurora rests one hand on his chest carefully, balancing herself before nodding. "I'm used to injuries like this. I used to dance ballet when I was younger."

"Really? I'm not all that surprised. You practically float." He grins.

Aurora nods in agreement. "Years of practice." She pats his chest gently before pulling away to head down the hall to her bedroom. Before she gets too far, she turns. "Hey, Killian?"

"Yes, 'Rora?" He asks, carefully folding up the blanket and setting it aside.

"Do you want to have dinner with Lucy and I tonight?" She leans against the doorway of the hall, bluebell eyes focused intently on his face.

"I...ah, sure, that'd be great, 'Rora." He shoots her a smile almost shy in nature that makes her smile. "I hope she likes me."

Aurora rolls her eyes. "She already does."

August is rather surprised to find Killian walking arm in arm with Aurora down the sidewalk towards Storybrooke Elementary. As is every other parent waiting to pick up their kids. Nearly every eye are on them, but surprisingly enough, they don't even notice or care. They are huddled together under an umbrella with anxious, shy smiles on their faces. Aurora seems a little out of place at Killian's side, like she was never meant to be there in the first place. But somehow, it isn't as bad as August had originally thought it would be. They...fit. Somehow.

"Hey." He quirks an eyebrow as they approach. "You two an item now?"

Killian catches August's wary gaze, and before he can snark at his brother, Aurora pipes up in a sweet voice. "Sort of." She smiles warmly at August, never releasing her hold on Killian's arm. "We're...getting to know each other and seeing what happens."

August catches Killian's proud smile. There's a softness in his brother's eyes that hasn't been there in years. "We had a lovely chat today." Killian shoots August a look that practically says it all. *She knows, and she still wants me.*

The surprise is evident on August's face, but he smiles anyways. "Well, I'm happy for you both. But if he hurts you, Rory, you just let me know and I'll sock him for you."

"He won't." Aurora murmurs, tightening her hold on Killian's arm.

The bell rings, and children are let out of the school. Henry comes running up to August and
throws his arms around his father happily. "Hey guys!" He exclaims, grinning up at Aurora and Killian before tugging on his father's arm. "Come on, I need to get home and get my homework done so mom will let me finish Operation Zebra."

"Operation what?" Killian asks with a quirk of his eyebrow.

"It's top secret." August says firmly as the father-son duo turns to walk home. "Hush hush and whatnot."

"Better not spoil the surprise, Killian." Aurora teases.

Lucy steps out of the school building and pulls her hood up over her brown curls. She spots her mother and breaks out into a run. Her steps slow as she sees who her mother is standing with, but she smiles as her mother lets go of Killian and extends her arms out for her daughter. Aurora kneels so Lucy can wrap her arms around her better, and she lifts her up in a warm embrace like she used to when Lucy was smaller.

"Hi sweetheart. How was your day?" Aurora can tell already that something isn't one hundred percent right with Lucy. She hasn't let go of her mother, despite the fact that her dripping boots dangle against Aurora's jeans.

Lucy grumbles into Aurora's shoulder. "I got a B on my math test."

"A B is great, Luce! You're getting better!" Aurora chuckles.

"It's not an A." Lucy pulls away and Aurora sets her down on her feet.

"You'll get there, sweetheart." Aurora murmurs gently, brushing a curl out of her daughter's face.

Killian watches the exchange curiously, his stomach a nervous bundle of knots. He doesn't know what to say, how to act or what to do. Lucy lifts her dark eyes to his face, and she manages a small smile. "Hi, Killian."

"Hey there, lass." He manages, knowing she liked the piratey act he played off of. "A B is stellar. Math was always my hardest subject too."

She shrugs her shoulders, standing closer to Aurora to be under the protection umbrella. "I can do better."

"You can, and because of that I know you will. But honey, be proud of yourself. I am." Aurora brushes Lucy's hair out of her face and smiles.

Killian nearly chimes in agreement, but it seemed like too much too fast. Slow. He has to take it slow. He takes a deep breath, the cold air suddenly warm and stuffy. He finally realizes that people still waiting for their children to come out are gawking at them. Killian instantly frowns and reaches out and touches Aurora's arm to catch her attention. "We'd better get out of this weather."

"Yes, come on. The rain might start up again." Aurora wraps an arm around Lucy's shoulders. "Killian is going to make us his special macaroni and cheese recipe tonight for dinner. We should be so privileged that the Mac'N'Cheese King is cooking for us. And we can even make that strawberry lemonade soda you love so much."

Lucy looks up at Killian, her big doe eyes curiously studying him. Killian swallows hard, hardly able to believe how nervous he is under the gaze of a ten year old little girl in pink polka dot rain boots. He gives her a smile and nods his head. "To celebrate."
"What are we celebrating?" Lucy giggles, glancing towards her mother.

The adults hesitate, and look towards each other. "Your B." Killian offers with a grin.

"And...new beginnings." Aurora murmurs, her arm slipping back through Killian's.

Lucy quirks her eyebrow and a smile forms over her lips. Killian waits with bated breath, his fingers fidgeting at his side, although Aurora is much calmer beside him. If she knows Lucy, and she does, better than anyone, she knows exactly how her little girl will react. Aurora gives Lucy a short nod, and Lucy reaches her hand out towards Killian.

Killian extends his free hand towards Lucy, and her smile grows as she curls her small fingers around his. "Come on, then. Let's see if you're really worthy of Mac'N'Cheese royalty or if you're just a measly little pirate." She teases, giving his arm a little tug as they start walking away from the school and the eyes that stared.

"I hope I can prove myself to you, lass." Killian chuckles.

"I knew she liked you." Lucy stage whispers, glancing towards her mother.

Aurora's cheeks instantly turn pink. "Lucy!" Killian laughs, and gives Lucy's hand a squeeze before looking over at Aurora. She gives him a shy smile as he balances her and the umbrella in one hand and Lucy in the other.

Aurora knows it's dumb to get herself attached to him, even after everything they told each other. But she can't help it. She is. It's been too long since anyone made her stomach flutter like Killian did. She deserved to be happy. Phillip would want her to be happy. And if Lucy is comfortable after everything she and Aurora had discussed, that should seal it for her. But the fear still crept into her heart. The doubt still gnawed at her heart that she would do something to push him away, that he would run the first instance he got.

Killian notices how Aurora stiffens at his side, and he can't help but lean over and kiss her temple before returning to his conversation with Lucy. Aurora feels her heart skip a beat, and she clutches his arm a little tighter for fear of him slipping through her fingers.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took such a long time to get out! I wanted to be sure the story was going in the right direction and that I conveyed the right emotions in this chapter. I hope you all enjoy! That and I was just lazy and the chances I got to write, I didn't. Oh well.

Things may seem all sweet and fluffy for now...but I've got some things planned. Angst coming soon.

Your reviews are what keep me going, so please don't hesitate to send me some. :D

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!