

The Path That Moonbeams Make

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The Path That Moonbeams Make

by [KnifeEdge](#)

Summary

Emma likes to sleep with her window open. She never quite realized who she'd be inviting in. All things considered, however, Captain Hook showing up in her bedroom after midnight is hardly the worst of his offenses. Emma knows how to handle Hook.

(AU post "Welcome to Storybrooke")

Notes

Dedicated to my amazing beta and editor, PeaceHeather: thank you for reading over my shoulder, for all your encouragement and attention to comma placement, and for helping me figure out how to solve the end.

Also, thank you for giving me all your feels. I will now add them to my pirate hoard.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Emma is awake before she's even aware she was asleep. Her eyes open, but she remains still, unsure of what disturbed her. It's an old defense mechanism, built during long years of sleeping in unfamiliar locations near unfamiliar people who she learned quickly not to trust. Even now, in her own bed, in her own room, in her mother's apartment (and how weird is *that*), she can still startle awake easily if something triggers her inner alarms. She can tell already that there's something out of the ordinary, so she lays perfectly still, keeping her breathing even, and listens.

Mary Margaret—*Snow* or Mom or whatever it is Emma is supposed to call her now—and David/Charming/Dad/whatever are having a “romantic night out” at Granny's B&B. They'd said something about wanting some *alone* time, and Emma had promptly stuck her fingers in her ears and sang “*la la la, I'll see you tomorrow.*” Twenty-eight years on her own and now she's living with her parents and being traumatized because they're having sex; her life is *weird*. Henry is staying with Neal for the weekend, also at the B&B, trying to make up for lost time. In any case, Emma is the only one home and the apartment is utterly still and silent except for the fluttering of curtains in the breeze drifting in through the open window.

The weather had turned warm earlier in the week. Not Florida warm, which Emma sometimes misses, but warm enough to indulge in opening her bedroom window. She sleeps three stories up, which gives her an excellent view over the rooftops of Storybrooke, with a glimpse of the harbor in the distance and, from where she lays in bed, a wide swath of starry sky with the moon drifting above the ocean. The moon seems extra bright tonight, and a pale beam falls across the foot of her bed.

Other than the curtains, however, nothing moves. She listens harder, wondering if the noise came from downstairs. Slowly she sits up, reaching for the side table where she keeps her revolver. A glint of moonlight on metal catches her eye and she turns toward it.

There is a shadow beneath the window where no shadow should be: a dark, slumped shape that seems to be propped up against the wall. Emma slowly reaches for the gun, and as she does she catches the gleam of metal again on the floor beneath the window. She can just make out the silver curve of what can only be a—

“Hook?”

Cautiously she slips from bed, glad that she'd put on pajama bottoms in spite of the warmer weather. Her hand hesitates over the gun, unsure; she still can't make out his features. The shadow remains still, however, his hook laying quietly on the floorboards, his arm resting against what she assumes is his leg. Finally she reaches for the bedside lamp and switches it on.

The lamp light is dim and partially blocked by the bed, leaving him still draped in shadow, but it is, indeed, Hook. He's lolling against the wall, his head tilted back so she can just make out the long line of his throat and the dark stubble that covers his jaw. He has his good arm tucked around his waist and one leg stretched out in front of him. The other is bent at the knee.

"Hook, what the hell are you doing here?" She pads around the end of the bed to where he's laying. He must hear her approach because his head rolls in her direction, then slumps forward on his chest.

"Open window, darling. Might as well have issued me an invitation. I couldn't resist," he says. His voice is low and rougher than she's used to hearing. He gives an odd little laugh and a groan into his own chest hair.

"Are you drunk?" She stands over him, glaring. He's pulled some really stupid stunts in the short time he's been in Storybrooke. She feels like she's always catching him in the middle of some scheme or another, all of them geared toward killing Mr. Gold. However she also knows that Gold, as long as he's *in* Storybrooke, is more than capable of protecting himself. Which means that the pirate is more private nuisance than public menace; as long as he doesn't involve any more innocent civilians in his plots, she's reluctant to actually lock him up.

Belle (or is it Lacey now?) hasn't shown any interest in charging him for what happened to her, and Gold's idea of revenge is a little more scary than legal action. And if Emma were to arrest him she'd have charge him with attempted murder for Gold, then arrest Gold, Hook, Snow *and* Regina for murdering Cora. Her one little jail cell isn't nearly large enough to hold all the big bads in Storybrooke, plus her own mother. So, Emma does her best to keep the peace without making anything worse than it already is. It's a fine line to walk but she's determined to try. Nothing is so clear-cut since she broke the curse.

All things considered, turning up drunk in her bedroom is hardly the worst offense he's ever committed. And at least it's *her* bedroom. Emma knows how to handle Hook.

She reaches down and grabs his left arm above the prosthetic brace. "I have no idea how you managed to get up here, buddy, but you can just go right back down again. Seriously, you have *got* to stop pulling these stunts."

He groans, but lets her hoist him to his feet. Then he slumps towards her unsteadily and she finds herself with both arms full of close to six feet of dangerously attractive, leather-clad pirate. He is, unsurprisingly, heavy as hell. Somehow he manages to keep his hook from accidentally stabbing either of them, even as he wraps that arm around her back to help balance himself.

"Why should I stop when they keep landing me in your arms, darling?" His voice is a dark chuckle against her ear. She ignores the goosebumps that skip up the bare skin left exposed by her tank top. Up close he smells like rum and spices, faintly of sweat and salt, and entirely, unapologetically *male*. It is absolutely unfair that he should smell like sin, when he's still wearing the same clothes he was wearing the first time they met. But he smells clean and so damn *good* that she wants to bury her face in his neck and inhale him like a drug.

Instead, she steels herself, erects every wall she has and pushes him toward the bed. With him being *completely* uncooperative, she manhandles him as if he is a large piece of furniture, then tips him toward the mattress and lets go. He plops back on her rather feminine quilt with another groan, looking both comically out of place and dangerous as hell. She half-expects him to sprawl across the bed and give her a drunken leer; instead, he sits hunched over, his probably artfully tousled hair falling across his forehead, and addresses her feet.

“I love a woman who isn’t afraid to shove a man into bed.”

Well, that was predictable. Emma huffs a sigh. “Right. I’m going to go get you some coffee or something to sober you up. Just ... stay there, okay? And try not to do anything that’ll piss me off?”

“As you wish.” She can practically hear the smirk in his voice, so she spins on her heel, ready to go make a pot of coffee and force it down his throat, or possibly crack him over the skull with it—she hasn’t quite decided which, yet—only, as she reaches for the doorknob, she realizes that her hand is wet. Sticky, in fact. And when she holds it up in the dim light she sees that it’s smeared with blood. So, too, is her white tank top. She knows it’s not hers, though there’s an odd feeling in the pit of her stomach.

“Hook?”

He’s still sitting hunched over, his back to her, and she realizes she hasn’t gotten a good look at his face yet. Emma comes back around the end of the bed. “Hook, do I want to know whose blood this is?”

Hook gives another mirthless laugh, then tenses up. “Damn,” he groans, much as he did the night he’d been hit by the car, and that’s all it takes to tell her that it’s his.

Her heart gives a strange little lurch.

She reaches for his face, and he doesn’t resist as she tips it up toward the light. A fresh bruise blooms across his left cheekbone and blood drips from a cut near his hairline. His teeth are set in a pain-filled grimace that tries valiantly to be a smile and his eyes crinkle around the edges when they finally meet hers. It’s enough to put her back up again. If he’s smiling at her, it can’t be too bad, can it?

Emma scowls. “Where are you hurt? And don’t you dare give me any of your crappy pick up lines.”

He smirks at her. “You wound me, Swan.”

“You’re already wounded, and I know for a fact that, this time, it wasn’t me that kicked your ass.” Although his right arm is clamped tightly around his torso, at her touch he moves it away so she can see. His vest is sliced clean through: a vicious slash that she knows only a very sharp sword would make. The shirt beneath is black, now saturated and shiny with blood, the fabric glued to his skin. “Lay back,” she tells him.

He arches an eyebrow as if he's got another line ready, but silently complies. His face pales to the color of bone as he stretches out atop the quilt. Vaguely recalling a first-aid class she'd taken several years back, she shoves a couple of pillows beneath his boots to elevate his feet. Then she sets to work on his clothes.

Emma unbuckles the wide leather belt and lets it fall free, then fumbles with the intricate brass frogs holding his vest shut. "Other side," he murmurs, his blood-smeared hand moves to assist her with the intricate clasps, and that, more than anything else, prompts her to hurry up. Once his vest is open, she gingerly begins to pull the hem of his black linen shirt free from his trousers.

"Knew you couldn't wait to see me naked, Swan," he says. She ignores him because she can hear the pain he's attempting to mask with flirtation.

Carefully, Emma lifts his shirt, peeling it slowly away from the wound. Fresh blood pumps slowly over her hands and Emma feels her own pulse speed up in response. This is not good. His clothes took the brunt of the slash—the thick leather of his vest providing a modicum of protection from the blade—but the result isn't pretty. He's been cut diagonally from ribs to navel, the worst of it just beneath his ribcage where the skin is laid open to the muscle beneath. Any lower or deeper and he'd have been holding his own innards in.

"Jesus." She glances around and grabs a towel that she'd dropped earlier beside the bed, pressing it to the wound. "I need to call—"

"No!" He grabs her wrist. When she looks up at him she realizes that her own vision is dark around the edges, her breathing shallow and far too fast. Their eyes meet, his will clashing against hers as if they were battling with steel. "No one must know I'm here."

"Hook, you're—"

"I've had worse." He gestures with his hook and she supposes that having your hand lopped off probably counts as worse. This is ugly, true, but there doesn't appear to be any major muscle or organ damage. It's a cut, not a stab wound. The blood flow from his abdomen is heavy, but sluggish. Some stitches to help close it and he'll probably be all right, provided it doesn't get infected. Although, his shirt *is* soaked with blood and she has no idea how much he's lost already. Any amount seems like too much.

"You could be in shock, or ... suffering from too much blood loss. We should call an ambulance, get you to the hospital."

He barks another laugh, then his jaw clenches in pain; it's only with visible struggle that he manages to relax it. "You might as well send for the gravediggers, darling. Do you really think he's not going to be watching the hospital, waiting for my carcass to be dragged in so he can finish the job?"

Emma doesn't have to ask who *he* is; the loathing in Hook's voice tells her everything she needs to know.

"Rumpelstiltskin."

Hook's hand tightens on her wrist, slippery with his own blood. "Aye. He doesn't know I'm here and he won't suspect it as long as you stay put. He'll be lying in wait to see if you leave the house, then follow you to me."

"Why would he—?"

Hook gives her a look that somehow manages to be smirky and sultry at the same time, even through the bruises and blood. Emma can't help but think that this ability is *tragically* unfair. "Perils of being sheriff, darling. You go where the trouble is."

"Yeah, well, right now trouble is trying to *bleed to death* on my *bed*." She'd shake him, if she wasn't so worried she'd just hurt him more.

Hook's gaze is measuring. Emma looks away, unwilling to let him see how terrified she really is. His grip on her wrist gentles, his thumb stroking lightly over her pulse point. She can't tell if it's deliberate or not.

"Can you sew?"

"I failed Home Ec in junior high," she tells him flatly. "My throw pillow fell apart at the seams."

"Practice makes perfect, lass." His smile is probably meant to be encouraging, but it's more grimace than grin. "Fetch us a needle and thread?"

Just the thought of having to jab a needle into his flesh makes her feel queasy, and Emma's usually not the queasy sort. "I could ... I could call Dr. Whale, see if he'll come by."

"And does the good doctor usually make house calls at this time of night?"

Emma considers what she knows of Dr. Whale's extracurricular activities. "Not usually of the surgical sort."

Okay, so maybe calling in Dr. Frankenstein isn't the best idea, Emma admits to herself. The last time she needed him to operate on someone, they'd had to have Ruby chase him clear across Storybrooke. Besides, it's Friday night; it would be a miracle to find him sober. The hospital is out, the doctor is out—her hands are shaking. She's had first some first-aid training; she knows she has to stop the bleeding.

Deep breaths, Emma. You can do this. Stitch him up, then figure out what to do next.

"Fine. I'll ... I'll see if I can find a needle. Keep pressure on that."

Hook clamps his arm over the towel and nods tightly.

Emma hurries downstairs in search of a needle.

A quick note on the apartment layout: I've taken a few artistic liberties with the layout of the upper floor, since, to my knowledge, we haven't seen Emma's room at Snow's yet. Essentially it's a loft room, just under the eaves. The bed faces the window, and there's a half-bath in the corner. This may or may not be relevant to your interests.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma awoke in the middle of the night to find an injured Hook slumped beneath her window.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Editor: Peaceheather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She washes her hands and arms in the kitchen sink, the water scalding her skin to a glowing red. The first aid kit is in the bathroom, and Mary Margaret's sewing basket is sitting out on top of her craft supplies, so she grabs that on her way back up the stairs.

Hook hasn't moved, though his head swivels to watch her as she hurries back to his side. "I don't suppose you've got any rum?"

"In this world, we use disinfectant," she says, hoping they *have* enough disinfectant for this sort of thing.

"For *me*, lass. I've a feeling I'm going to want it before we're through."

"You've lost too much blood," she tells him, sorting through the sewing kit. "Alcohol will just thin what you've got left. I don't want you bleeding more than you already are. I've got some pain killers, though." She digs through the first aid kit and comes up with a bottle of extra-strength Tylenol. "I doubt they'll do more than blunt the edge."

He eyes the bottle skeptically, then shakes his head. "I'd prefer rum."

"Sorry," she says, even though she isn't.

There's an assortment of needles, although most of them are delicate little things completely unequal to the task of sewing up flesh. Towards the bottom she finds an unopened package of upholstery needles, though, some of them longer than her finger, and three of them curved and sharper than his hook. She rips the package open and holds one up to the light.

Hook grunts. "That'll do. Whatever thread you have that's thickest, as well."

Emma tosses aside the tiny spools of cheap stuff until she finds a larger spool of heavy duty thread. She has no idea what project Mary Margaret bought it for, but the color is a rather brilliant shade of hot pink.

“Over my dead body,” he says, when he catches sight of it. The look on his face is priceless.

“Seriously? What, you’re worried your stitches are going to clash with your eyeliner?”

His eyes narrow.

“Your life is on the line.” She waggles the spool of pink thread at him, and arches an eyebrow. “Do you *really* have a choice?”

He rolls his eyes, but a grin flickers across his face like heat lightning. “Bad form, Emma, kicking a man when he’s down. How long have you been waiting to throw that back in my face?”

“Take a guess, Mr. When-I-Stab-You-With-My-Sword.”

“Touché.”

Emma threads the needle, willing her hands not to shake. It only takes her three tries. She feels completely at sea here, and tries to remember every first aid class she’s ever taken and every doctor show she’s ever watched on TV. She doesn’t have a lighter, so she swabs the needle with alcohol, then soaks the thread in it, too, just to be sure. There’s little packages of disinfectant wipes in the first aid kit and she rips one open with her teeth, then scrubs her hands with them.

Her throat seems to swell shut, though, when she looks at the towel now partially soaked through with his blood. The darkness at the edges of her vision closes in again, and there’s ringing in her ears. “Hook, I—”

His hand, sticky with blood, clasps her wrist tightly. “Emma,” he says. “Look at me.”

It’s a struggle, but she does. His eyes are calm as he gazes back at her, his mouth unsmiling and serious. “You can do this.” He believes it. Normally she finds herself confused by the layers of half-truths he dresses his words in, but this is straightforward and true as steel. He believes that she can do this, and because he believes it, she finds herself almost believing it, too.

Emma nods and reaches for the towel. It comes away from the wound with an awful sound, like something wet tearing. She chokes down the bile that rises in her throat and takes a deep breath. Then she gently wipes away as much of the blood as she can and reaches for the bottle of isopropyl alcohol. “Do I need to warn you that this’ll sting?”

“Is this revenge, Swan?”

In answer she douses the wound, and watches him go rigid on the bed, his teeth clenched hard and his eyes shut tight with pain. He doesn’t scream, she’ll give him that, though she

hears something rip and glances over to see his hook buried in her mattress. Mary Margaret is going to have a fit later, she's sure. Still, better the mattress than her, she thinks.

Slowly his muscles unclench. Panting slightly, he turns his face toward her, his expression sour. "You're a cruel woman."

Emma contemplates the wound and the needle and tries to distract herself as she jabs it through his skin, starting at the lower corner. He hisses through his teeth while she clumsily ties a knot.

"Let me remind you that you're the one who decided to climb through my window. If you wanted sweet and gentle, you should have gone to Belle. Oh, no, wait—you *shot* at her, knocked her over the town line, and now she's *forgotten* that she's supposed to be sweet and gentle to ugly beasts like you."

"Ugly, am I?"

"Beauty is only skin deep, Hook. Right now, I can *see* under your skin and trust me: it is *not* pretty."

He chuckles weakly. "By all means, keep telling yourself that you don't like me, sweetheart. You and I both know the truth."

"Hold still," she says. "This is hard enough without you jiggling around."

"I don't jiggle," he says, voice petulant as a little boy's. Emma makes another stitch, hating the way the needle slides through flesh, hating even more having to pull the length of thread through the skin. She's had stitches before, though not quite this many at one time, and even with anesthetic it's never pleasant. She's honestly surprised he hasn't passed out by now. His face is nearly as pale as the sheet, tinged a bit with gray, and the knuckles of his hand show white beneath the blood. He's clenched his fist tightly into her quilt, but she can't find it in her to worry about the stains now. That can be dealt with later, when he's patched up and packed off somewhere else.

Emma makes her stitches carefully, aware that failing this project will result in something much worse than an F on a report card that no one had ever really cared about, anyway.

"A bit faster, if you please, darling. I'm hardly delicate," he says, three stitches in. Emma jabs him a little harder on the next stitch than she'd meant to, and then tries not to feel bad when he swears softly under his breath.

He helps her out by opening his mouth again. "I must say, this isn't quite how I pictured sullyng your bedsheets."

"Considering how much time you waste chasing after Gold, I'm surprised you spent any time picturing my sheets at all."

"Oooh, jealous, are we?"

"You know, this would be easier if you would just pass out or something," she mutters.

“And miss a moment in your company?”

Emma lets the side of her mouth that’s facing away from him quirk up into a smile. She can’t tell if it’s bravery or bravado that prompts him to flirt in the face of death. Still, it’s a welcome distraction from what she’s doing, and her hands are steadier now. As long as he’s flirting he’s still alive, she reasons, and that’s what counts.

“Since you’re feeling so chatty,” she says, “why don’t you tell me about Neverland?”

He grunts. “I’m afraid I’m not feeling quite *that* chatty.”

Emma arches a brow. “Weren’t you the one who said that the stories I know are all wrong? I used to read about Neverland when I was a kid. So, c’mon, tell me what it’s really like.”

He’s quiet for a moment. Emma pauses in her sewing long enough to take a peek at his face. His eyes are shuttered, his expression closed off, mouth pressed into a thin line. Then something shifts and he grimaces. “I’d far rather hear you tell me the story you *think* you know.”

“Well, there’s Peter Pan. The Lost Boys. Captain Hook and Mr. Smee — although in the stories I’ve read the crocodile is actually a crocodile, not a pawnshop owner who likes to make deals.” When he doesn’t respond she continues. “Um ... what else? Neverland is this island somewhere, and you have to fly to get there, and no one there ever grows up. There’s Indians and fairies, lagoons full of mermaids. Lots of adventures. Am I wrong so far?”

He is silent for so long that she looks up, suddenly afraid he’s passed out, but his eyes are on the open window. His mouth tightens again and she watches, fascinated, as a muscle tics in his jaw.

“Not entirely,” he says, finally, though his gaze is still on the stars.

“So, does Peter Pan exist?”

He’s quiet again, then he turns his head to look at her. “No,” he says. “Peter Pan doesn’t exist.”

She only sees it because she’s looking so hard for it: he’s almost, but not quite, telling the truth. Or maybe he’s almost, but not quite, lying. With him, it’s sometimes hard for her to tell, and the last person she had so much trouble reading was Neal. Emma hates the implications of that, so she goes back to stitching him up, falling into a rhythm of needle, thread, and flesh.

When he speaks again, it surprises her so much she almost drops the needle. “It can be quite lovely, you know.”

“What?”

His eyes take on an odd faraway look, as if he’s gazing at a memory that is both bright and terrible. “Neverland. There’s a mountaintop where the stars come in every color you can imagine. They shine so close and sharp that you feel as if you could reach out and pluck them

from the sky and put them in your pocket like gems. The ocean there is so blue that sometimes you cannot tell the difference between the sea and the sky, or whether you're floating or flying; and so clear you can count the tiny crabs that scuttle along the bottom." Hook scowls, suddenly, and closes his eyes. "It's the most dangerous place I've ever been."

"You just said it was beautiful."

"Aye, but often the most beautiful things are the most perilous as well. The true danger of Neverland is that you may never want to leave. It makes you forget, and anything that makes you forget who you are and what you want, that traps you forever, is dangerous." His voice is quietly intense. She wonders how much he lost to Neverland, and whether he's managed to get any of it back. Emma thinks maybe he's shared more than he meant to, and it makes her feel guilty, as if she's used his pain to get something out of him.

"I grew up in the foster care system," she says, and it comes out like an apology. She winces, but continues, picking her words as if they are shards of broken glass. "It wasn't all bad. I mean, most of the families were really ... nice. I guess. There was one family, when I was eight or nine, and they had this great house. Really great, you know? Big. Lots of rooms. Pool in the backyard. They even had a treehouse and sometimes I'd go up there and I'd watch the stars and wish that I could stay there forever."

She makes a few more stitches, estimates she only has a handful more to go. Then she'll clean him up better and disinfect it again. She'll need gauze—

His fingers brushing gently through her hair startle her. "They had a child, didn't they? Not long after you came to live there. They forgot about you, shut you out." He tucks an errant strand behind her ear, and she could *swear* that she sees a strange sort of sympathy in his gaze.

Emma stares at him, her heart thudding in her chest so loudly she's sure he must be able to hear it. He's right, of course. Less than a year after they'd taken her in, the woman had gotten pregnant. They'd kept her on until a new foster home could be found, but with a new baby on the way—a miracle baby, they said, completely unexpected—Emma had no longer been wanted. There is no way he could have known that, however.

"Lucky guess," she mutters.

His sympathetic smile doesn't falter. "Actually, no."

Emma looks away. She hates the way he reads her so easily. Probably nearly as much as *he* hates that she can tell when he lies.

She finishes up the last few stitches, then ties the thread off tightly and snips the remainder with a pair of small scissors. The bleeding has slowed to a mere trickle, so she uses the disinfecting wipes to clean up the fresh blood from the stitches, and wipes up his abdomen as best she can. She packs gauze over the seam and tapes it down, trying (without much success) to avoid the dark trail of hair that runs down the center of his torso to disappear into the waistband of his pants.

Emma's aware of his heavy-lidded gaze on her, and the way his stomach muscles jump a little whenever she touches him. Now that the worst of it is over, his scrutiny makes her nervous, which immediately makes her slam her defenses back into place. Of course, with him it's probably futile, but it makes her feel better. Stone faced, Emma finishes cleaning him up.

"Let me see your head," she says, and he turns his face obligingly so she can examine the cut near his temple. It's not deep, barely a scrape really, but there's a hell of a bruise forming, and his left cheekbone looks awful. She prods it gently to see if it's broken. Nothing moves weirdly under her fingertips, though he winces when she touches it. "What the hell did he do to you?"

"I could be mistaken, but I think he was trying to kill me," Hook says. "The feeling was mutual, I assure you." He ought to look like someone beat him with an ugly stick, but the bruises only serve to make him look even more menacingly attractive. *So not fair.*

"And yet, you're strangely not dead. I get the feeling that Rumpelstiltskin doesn't really know the meaning of the word *mercy*."

Hook's smile hangs crooked. "Perhaps I killed him first."

"If you did, you wouldn't be worried about going to the hospital," she points out. "You can't kill him here in Storybrooke. Not without the dagger, and I know for a fact that he's hidden it away somewhere no one will find it. You're not stupid enough to attack him outright, so he found you and ... what? Why'd he let you go?"

He smiles softly, his entire face lighting up as he gazes at her. "Clever lass." From him it sounds like the warmest praise she's ever received, which is why she doesn't trust it one bit.

Emma scowls. "You're not going to tell me, are you?"

"Oh, it's far more fun when you guess," he says. He tries to shift then, and groans when it pulls on his stitches.

"Idiot," she says, but it comes out fonder than she intended. Her room is a mess. There's blood all over the sheets and the quilt—which she really hopes isn't something Snow made, because if it is her mother is going to *kill* her. There's first aid stuff and sewing supplies scattered on the bed, a blood soaked towel on the floor, and Emma herself is wearing far more of Hook's blood than she ought to be. "I'm going to help you get that shirt off. Think you can refrain from making any more innuendos, buddy? Or am I gonna need to gag you?"

"I'll be a perfect gentleman."

"Liar," she says.

Hook proves her wrong, however, and saves his strength for helping her extract him from his mangled leather vest and linen shirt. Then he's bare from the waist up except for a silver chain around his neck, and the complicated leather brace that holds his hook. If it weren't for

the blood on his hand, the bruises and the bandages, he'd look like a leather fetishist's dream come true, sprawled across her bed.

He has a few old scars scattered across his shoulders, arms and chest. Some look like they could have rivaled his newest injury. She wonders who sewed him up before. She wonders if it was Milah. Whoever it was had been pretty good at it, or maybe he's just one of those people who heal cleanly.

Emma pushes those thoughts out of her head. "How's the pain? Do you want those painkillers?"

"Shall I tell you about the time I had to remove an arrowhead from my thigh with just one hand and my teeth?" He quirks an eyebrow upward in challenge, clearly trying to impress her with how manly his pain tolerance is.

"I think I'll pass," Emma says. She tries not to think about the other things he can probably do with one hand and his teeth. He's pale, certainly, and a little gray around the edges, but he doesn't look like he's gone into shock. She wonders if that's normal for someone from his world, or if it's just because Hook doesn't have it in him to give up.

"Would you be so kind?" He holds up a leg and wiggles his foot at her imperiously. Despite being half-dead from blood loss and in total agony, he manages to put the promise of a full night's worth of seduction into his smile. *Idiot*. Emma rolls her eyes but pries his boot off anyway, then the other, and dumps it beside its mate.

Something about seeing his boots beside her bed, and his clothes strewn about her room, makes Emma pause. It finally dawns on her: he's going to be staying the night in her bed.

Whether she likes it or not.

Chapter End Notes

I mentioned this in a reply to someone else at the end of the last chapter: This story is actually finished, and will be twelve chapters long. I'm posting them as I finish editing them, which takes about a day or so. You can expect regular updates.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma stitched up Hook's wound and realized that he'll be spending the night in her bed.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

(and you can blame/thank her for inspiring me to expand the hand-porn section.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Emma takes momentary refuge in the bathroom. Her tank top and pajamas are streaked with blood, and she's—*gross*—gotten some on her face and in her hair, too. Turning the water to the hottest she can stand, she scrubs herself clean, scrapes the blood from beneath her nails, and then washes it out of her hair. When she's finished, Emma leans against the counter, hands braced on either side of the sink and stares at the faint ring of red around the drain. The after-rush of adrenaline leaves her feeling shaky and unsteady on her feet.

He could have died, could have bled out in her room while she slept; or worse, could have died out on the street somewhere. Emma feels sick just thinking about it. He *still* could die. He's lost a lot of blood and there's always the risk of infection. She'll have to call Mary Margaret in the morning and have her pick up some stuff on her way home—and, man, is *that* a phone call she's not looking forward to making. They'll need to move him, eventually, somewhere safe where Gold can't find him, at least until Hook's healed and able to take care of himself. Storybrooke isn't that big, however, and the list of places where Gold *won't* look is depressingly small. Besides, Gold has magic at his disposal; it's a miracle he hasn't found him already.

There's nothing to be done for it at the moment, so Emma gathers some clean sheets from the linen closet, and wets a clean washcloth from the sink, then returns to the bedroom. While she was gone, he's managed to lever himself out of the bed and into the wicker chair she usually keeps tucked into the corner where the ceiling slopes lowest. His hand is pressed to the bandages and he's panting, slightly, again. He's also removed his hook and laid it on her nightstand, next to her gun.

She kneels beside him and takes his hand, sliding his rings off and wiping them down, one by one, before placing them on the nightstand. Then she uses the wet cloth to clean his hand for

him, steadfastly refusing to look at his face while she wipes down his arm and wrist. Emma has to scrub gently to remove the dried blood from his knuckles and the creases of his palm, and she takes her time cleaning between each of his fingers. It's a shame he only has one hand, she thinks. He's got long fingers with broad, flat fingertips and short, blunt nails. His palm is wide, calloused in unexpected places from wielding a sword and hauling on ropes.

Emma can feel him watching her and she can't help but feel self-conscious. She's intensely aware of the warmth of his skin, the way his fingers curl slightly to touch hers as she works, and the way his breathing hitches every so often.

"You shouldn't move around so much," she says as she finishes, just to fill the tense silence. "If you tear those out I'm not stitching you up again."

It's a lie, and they both know it, but he lets it be. His voice is huskier when he speaks. "I thought it would be easier to fix the bed if I weren't in it. But I've no objections to being tied to *your* bed, darling."

She chooses to ignore that one—as well as the odd wobbly feeling in her legs—and instead gets up and strips the bed, wadding up the bloody sheets. Thankfully, none of it seems to have seeped through to the mattress, so she makes the bed up quickly, covering up the new puncture mark he'd made in it with his hook.

Emma adds his bloody clothes and the towel to the stack of dirty laundry, then takes it all to the downstairs bathroom and dumps most of it into the tub. She turns on the water and fills it enough so that everything can soak, hoping that she can remember to get it all into the laundry before Mary Margaret gets home in the morning. Hook's leather vest cleans up a little easier, and by the time she's finished it looks almost as good as new, except for the slash through it. Emma drapes it over a towel bar to dry, scrubs herself one more time, then changes into a clean pair of pajama bottoms and a black tank top that she'd thankfully left in the dryer.

When she returns to her room, he's still in the chair; his face is pale and exhausted. He looks so tragic that she doesn't even have the heart to snark at him. "Ready to get back in bed?"

"Thought you'd never ask." There isn't even a hint of innuendo to it, and for some reason that makes her heart speed up to double-time. Carefully they shift him back onto the bed, and Emma regards his leather pants dubiously.

"I think David's got some sweatpants that'll fit you."

Hook raises an eyebrow. "*Sweatpants?*"

Emma laughs in spite of herself. "Yeah, I guess that does sound pretty gross, huh? They're just cotton pants, kind of like these." She gestures at her own pants. "They'd be a lot more comfortable to sleep in."

"And you'll be my valet?"

She narrows her eyes at him. "It's not like I've never seen a naked man before."

“Ah, but you’ve never seen *me* naked before, and I’m hardly in a position to enjoy your inevitable reaction.”

She could make a joke—several come to mind, and the urge to ask him what else he’s had cut off is nearly impossible to resist—but his face has taken on that grayish cast again after having moved twice, and his flirtation lacks its usual *oomph*. Right now he looks battered and sore, and like he’s in more pain than he’s willing to let on.

“I’ll try to restrain myself,” she says, instead, her voice dry.

Emma feels weird going through Mary Margaret’s laundry basket, but toward the bottom there is a neatly folded pair of dark sweats that would never fit her mother. For a moment she considers calling them now. Mary Margaret and David would be over here in a heartbeat if they knew Hook was upstairs, in her bed. The clock on the wall, however, informs her that it’s three in the morning, and she doesn’t want to wake them. With everything that’s happened, Emma doesn’t begrudge them some time alone to deal with it. Besides, she can handle Hook.

When Emma returns to the bedroom, she’s gotten her wish: he’s asleep. His breathing is regular, his color slightly better, but when she takes his pulse it seems weak. Emma chews her lip, debating. Then, deciding that it’ll be easier to do this if he’s not awake to sling innuendos at her the whole time, she reaches for the buttons on his leather pants.

Now that the icky chore of sewing him back up is done, it’s harder to ignore the fact that he’s ridiculously attractive, mostly naked, and in her bed. Attempting a clinical detachment that she doesn’t really feel, Emma sets to work. Each button undone reveals another inch or two of his abdomen, and it’s immediately clear that he’s bare beneath all that leather. She hesitates over the last one.

“Oh, don’t stop now, love, you’re just getting to the good part,” he says, and Emma leaps back from the bed as if burned. He’s looking up at her again, his eyes twinkling beneath his dark lashes.

“You were *asleep*!” It comes out like an accusation.

“I was,” he agrees. “Then you touched me. What can I say, Emma? You’re a stimulating woman.” He gives her a smile that ought to be illegal, if only so that she can arrest him for it.

“I’m about to stimulate *something*, that’s for damned sure,” she mutters under her breath.

He laughs softly, clearly unable to help himself. “You have mettle, Swan. Have I mentioned how much I love that?”

“Yeah, well, you just keep on testing it, Hook; see how far it gets you.” She crosses her arms and gives him her stoniest glare. “Now, I’m gonna help you get those pants off, and you’re gonna keep your mouth shut, or else I get to pick the body part you lose next. Got it?”

Hook just smiles at her, unrepentant, but he shuts his mouth.

Since the buttons on his trousers are undone, she reaches for his pant leg, her gaze no higher than his knees. His pants are practically a second skin, so it takes a bit more effort on both of their parts than she'd like to get him out of them, and the minute he's stripped she throws the sheet over him. There's no way he's got enough strength to get him into anything else. He's sweating now from exertion, his skin clammy when she goes to feel his forehead, and she's certain the dark circles under his eyes are from more than just smudged eyeliner. She tosses a clean blanket over the sheet to make up for the missing quilt.

"You need medicine. Liquids. Antibiotics. And probably a blood transfusion."

"I only need rest," he says, panting a little. "Trust me, I've survived far worse."

She can't help but believe him. He has an amazing amount of endurance; she's never met anyone who could take the beatings he does and then get back up so quickly. Hook is not the kind of man who gives up, on anything, ever. If he wants it, he fights for it with every breath in his body.

She pads over to the window, looking out at the stars and ocean beyond, wishing for something she's unsure how to name.

Beneath her window Storybrooke sleeps peacefully, lights off in almost all of the windows so late at night. Over the harbor, the moon hangs full and bright; Emma spares a thought for Ruby, then looks down at the street below. If Rumpelstiltskin is watching her house, he's not being obvious about it.

Emma suddenly frowns as she looks down the sheer side of the building.

"How the hell did you get up here?" she says, turning back around.

"Hmmm?" He's barely awake, now, his voice a sleepy rumble. Something about that, combined with the sight of him naked, in her bed, does funny things to her stomach. Emma slams a lid on the feeling and narrows her eyes.

"You could barely *stand* when I woke up." She props her hands on her hips and gives him the stare she usually saves for interrogating bail jumpers. "How the hell did you get up here? I know you didn't come in the front door, you'd have had to break it down to get in. But *why* would you come through the window?"

His mouth quirks into something that might resemble a sleepy smile, if it weren't so self-mocking.

"Oh, there's a bit of the boy in this old pirate, yet. As I said, I never could resist an open window. Time was, that was how I entered all ladies' chambers."

"And escaped from them, too, I'll bet. Pretty sure you didn't waste your strength out of some misplaced sense of nostalgia, though. So, how did you get up here?"

His answering chuckle is dark. "All it took was the happy thought of seeing your face one last time—"

“Do you have to have a line for *everything*?” Emma throws her hands up in exasperation.

“I was on the bloody rooftops already,” he says with a touch of temper, and she realizes that if he’d been sleepy before, he hasn’t been since she started asking questions. “Best place in town to spy from, really. That’s where the crocodile found me. Your window was open, princess. I needed sanctuary. End of story.”

His tone says he’s done with this conversation.

Emma turns away again to study the window. The face of the building is rough brick, free of drainpipes or trellises that would make a climb from the ground possible for an uninjured man with two hands. Her window faces onto the street, so he couldn’t have jumped across to it. The houses on either side *are* close, though. And the one to the right has a roof just a few feet below the level of her window. Still, Emma’s not entirely sure *she* could have made the leap from that roof to her building, let alone her window, and Emma’s had to do a couple of rooftop chases in her line of work. Maybe he came across from the other direction, and dropped from her roof to the window?

She’ll have to wait until he’s stronger to try to pry the truth out of him. Of course, she knows that once he’s stronger he’ll guard himself even more carefully.

He’s a lot like her in that way, even if his walls are built mostly out of innuendo. Emma knows a false front better than anyone else, and sometimes she feels like she can see straight through his facade of smooth-talking charmer to the damaged man underneath. She doesn’t know the exact details of what happened between him and Gold and Milah, but he’s carried this wound as long as he’s carried his hook, and it has festered, untreated, for all that time. Emma knows this because she’s carried a hole in her heart for a long time as well. She also knows that her compassion for him is dangerous.

It’s why she chained him up on top of a beanstalk, after all.

Emma doesn’t know for sure, but she suspects that it’s the same reason he left her locked in Rumpelstiltskin’s cell.

When she turns back toward the bed, he’s propped his head up on the pillows and is watching her quietly, his face neutral. She returns his gaze steadily. He is damaged, she thinks, but not broken. And if that can be true of him, maybe it can be true for her, as well.

She shakes herself, and steps away from the window, closer to the bed. “No sign of Gold. But then, I suppose if he doesn’t want to be seen, he won’t be. I should ... Do you want anything? Orange juice or something? That’s what they give you when you donate blood, I think.”

“Will you put rum in it?” he asks, with more of his usual roguishness. He looks almost exactly like Henry when he’s trying to weasel something out of her: extra hot chocolate or a later bedtime or another ridiculous mission for Operation Snake-Of-The-Month. And she hasn’t been a mother long enough to have built up any kind of defense against that sort of look—something Hook undoubtedly knows.

Emma smiles without quite meaning to. “If you’re good and don’t move while I get it, sure, what the hell, I’ll put some rum in it.”

“Then we have an accord,” he says with a grin, and even though he’s basically naked, missing the hook and battered all to hell, he still somehow manages to look every inch the pirate captain. Emma rolls her eyes.

“You’ve stopped wearing your necklace,” Hook says, suddenly, as she moves toward the door.

“Huh?”

His eyes are dark, his expression neutral again. “The swan necklace. You’ve stopped wearing it. And you’re not quite accustomed to it being gone, are you? You keep reaching for it, which means you wore it for quite some time, but you only do it when you’re tempted to trust me.”

Emma catches herself before she can touch her chest where the pendant used to lie, and realizes she’s been unconsciously rubbing that spot all evening. Hook is watching her, as if waiting for a response.

“I’m gonna go get you some juice,” she says, and practically runs down the stairs.

It’s at least ten kinds of wrong that he can read her so well, she thinks as she slams open the door to the fridge to get the orange juice. *No* one sees through her facade as well as he does. No one has *ever* seen through her facade as well as he does. Not her mother. Not even Neal—although, to be fair, she’d barely had one when she’d first met Neal, and now he can’t seem to read her at all. Instead, Neal makes assumptions about her feelings that would piss her off if she actually cared about any of it. Only she doesn’t. At least, not where Neal is concerned.

But Hook? Hook pisses her off. He’s flirty and far too attractive, not to mention the most perceptive person she’s ever met. It’s impossible. *He’s* impossible. She wants to hit him, or chain him up to something, or figure out how to put the pieces of him back together, or just ...

She fishes a bottle of rum out of the liquor cabinet and stares at it gloomily. She just has to get through this night, make sure he survives, and then in the morning she will figure out what to do with him.

Emma is debating exactly how much rum to put in Hook’s drink, when there’s a loud knock at the door.

Warily, she stares at it. It’s after three in the morning, and Mary Margaret wouldn’t knock. If something had happened to Henry, Neal would have called, wouldn’t he?

Her gun is still upstairs by the bed, so she picks up the rum bottle instead and pads quietly toward the door. When she looks out the peephole, she’s not entirely surprised by what she sees: Rumpelstiltskin, looking immaculate as always in one of his shiny, tailored suits, is standing outside her door, both hands on his cane.

He meets her gaze through the peephole and smiles.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not ashamed to say that I love comments and do a little happy dance every time I get them.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma finished cleaning up an injured Hook and got him into bed. She'd gone downstairs to get him a drink when there's a knock on the door: Mr. Gold is paying her a late night visit.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

(You can find her fic over on FF.net. She's got some OUAT fics, and some amazing Buffy fics: <http://www.fanfiction.net/u/3037374/PeaceHeather>)

Emma unlocks the door, slides back the wooden bolt August had installed, and sets her poker face.

“Gold. Little late for a social visit, don’t you think?”

“Miss Swan. Please, forgive me for calling at such an hour, but I saw you at your window a moment ago.”

Emma normally finds accents charming, if not downright sexy. Hook’s, for instance, has the nasty habit of making her toes curl in her boots sometimes. Gold’s accent, however, *oozes*. It slimes its way over her doorstep and into her apartment, and she wishes she could just shut the door in his face.

He’s Henry’s grandfather, she reminds herself.

“Yeah,” she says, and makes a face that she hopes says *thanks-for-your-concern* and *get-the-hell-off-my-doorstep* in equal measure. “Couldn’t sleep.”

Gold studies her, beady little eyes taking in her messy hair, pajamas, probably the circles under her eyes. His gaze lingers on the bottle of rum still dangling from her fist. “Drinking alone, Miss Swan?”

“Nightcap,” she says. “Something I learned in Florida; they call it a Cuban Screw. Spiced rum and OJ. Knocks me right out.”

His eyes flick past her to the kitchen where she knows there is a single glass and a jug of orange juice sitting out on the counter. “Indeed.”

“Did you want something? Or is there another reason you were lurking outside my apartment at three in the morning and watching me through my window?”

Gold gives her a smile that is not a smile. Whatever it is, it’s too sharp and cold and nasty to go anywhere near pleasant.

“The pirate,” he says.

Emma blinks at him. “Hook? What’s he done this time?”

Gold regards her for a long moment, and Emma fights the instinct to squirm like a bug under glass. The fact that he’s trying to *make* her squirm infuriates her. She raises an eyebrow, sets her face in stone, and waits.

“He’s been snooping round my shop again. I caught him skulking on the rooftops a couple of hours ago, spyglass in hand.”

Emma studies Gold the same way he studied her. There’s not a scratch on him. His hair is in place, there’s not even bruising around his knuckles where they lay quietly over the head of his cane. Still, she’s aware that appearances with him are particularly deceiving. “So, where should I send the ambulance?”

His smile widens, and she can’t help but think of Hook’s name for him. He does, in fact, bear an uncanny resemblance to a crocodile. “I assure you, he was alive when I last saw him, and in mostly one piece. I merely gave him a warning. I will no longer tolerate his presence, and turnabout is fair play.”

“If you want to file a restraining order, you can stop by the station in the morning,” Emma says.

“Oh, that won’t be necessary, dearie. You’ll see to it that he steers clear of me and mine.”

“You seem pretty certain of that.”

Gold’s smile morphs into a cheshire grin. “Oh, I am. He’s dangerous, deranged, and he’ll harm anyone who he thinks I might care for. You saw what he did to Belle. You think he wouldn’t go after my own blood, if he thought it might hurt me? My son? My *grandson*?”

It’s on the tip of Emma’s tongue to refute that statement, because she knows, instantly and with the sort of assurance that tells her that the sun will rise in the morning, that *he’s lying*. For some reason, Gold knows that Hook *won’t* harm Neal or Henry. She doesn’t say this, however; doesn’t even let it show on her face. Instead she lets concern flicker across her features. “If I see him, I’ll make sure to pass along the message.”

“You do that,” Gold says. He turns to leave, then spins back on one heel with far more grace than a man with a perpetual limp should possess. “Oh, and Miss Swan? You might want to take my warning to heart as well. Hook may be handsome, but he’s no prince. He’s only after

one thing—his precious revenge. He’s nothing more than a raging beast; it would be doing him a kindness to put him out of his misery.”

“Takes one to know one, huh?” Emma smirks. Gold’s grin slips a notch or two and his eyes narrow. “Look, it’s late. I’m tired—finally. I’m gonna go have my drink and then I’m going to bed. If you want to file a restraining order, stop by the station during work hours. In the meantime, if you’ll excuse me?”

“Of course. Good evening, Miss Swan.” He sketches a perfunctory bow.

Emma gives in to impulse and shuts the door in his face. Then she locks it. Loudly.

Once she hears his footsteps limp down the stairs, Emma returns to the kitchen. She grabs a second glass, splashes a liberal amount of rum in both, tops them off with orange juice, and goes back upstairs.

Hook is sitting up in bed, his hand clasped to the bandages, hook snapped back in place. He’s twisted slightly toward the door. Obviously, he had heard Gold downstairs.

“You moved,” Emma says, then shrugs. “More rum for me. Yay.”

“Apologies, darling,” Hook says. His eyes dart over her quickly, as if trying to see if she is carrying Rumpelstiltskin hidden in a pocket. Not that she has any pockets in her pj’s, and even if she did, Gold would be the last person she’d ever let in them.

“Did he harm you?” Hook demands in a quiet voice, full of deadly intent.

His tone brings her up short; Emma stops and stares at him. “Noooo,” she says slowly. “All in one piece.”

He scans her one more time, and now she thinks that maybe that’s what he was checking for the first time. Somehow, that thought makes her even more nervous. She takes a sip of her drink to steady her nerves, then crosses to the bed to hand him the other glass.

She realizes, halfway there, that he’d thrown one leg out from beneath the sheets when he’d sat up. The bedclothes are bunched over his lap, but she has an unbroken view of him from his head all the way down to where the toes of his right foot are splayed slightly against the wood floor. It’s almost impossible not to look when there’s so much of him on display, and it takes nearly a superhuman effort to wrench her gaze back to his smirking face.

“Aren’t you a little pale, for a pirate?” Emma asks. His fingers brush against hers as he takes the glass, and she can’t decide which of them is actually trembling.

He winks at her. “I was a gentleman long before I was a pirate. Old habits and all that.”

“Right,” Emma says. If it *was* his hand that was shaking a moment ago, it’s steady now as he takes a swig. He makes a face at the taste of the orange juice, then downs the rest of the glass in three long swallows. He holds the glass out again, as if he’s ordering another round. Emma swears if the word *wench* pops out of his mouth, she’s going to deck him. Instead she just raises an eyebrow. “Sorry, buddy. That was last call.”

“Cruel,” he says, and deposits the glass on the bedside table. Emma sips from hers more slowly, though she’s tempted to down it much like he did. It’s been a hell of a night.

“You didn’t tell him I was here,” Hook says.

Emma snorts. “Yeah... I just stitched you back together. Next to being forced to make a hat at gunpoint, it’s the best damn sewing job of my life. Like I’m gonna let Gold come up here and ruin it.”

“Hat?” Hook’s face is utterly priceless. She saves that mental image to enjoy later.

“Later. Maybe. You should lay down.”

“What? No bedtime story? I want to hear more about the man who pointed a gun at you. Tell me, darling, is he still alive?” Hook’s tone is light, joking, but there’s a razor edge of steel under it that Emma is determined to ignore.

“Bed.” She sits her glass down on the nightstand and takes him by the shoulders, pushing him gently back against the pillows. He complies, swearing softly under his breath until he’s comfortable once more. Without looking (much) she lifts the sheet so he can get his leg back under it, pulls the blankets back up over him and, perching on the edge of the bed, tucks him in as if he were Henry.

He detaches his hook and hands it to her. Silently, solemnly, Emma takes it. The metal is cool and smooth against her palm, the curves of it familiar. Emma lays it on the bedside table, next to her revolver.

“Thank you,” Hook says, quietly. She can feel the weight of his gaze on her and it makes her uncomfortable. Gratitude, genuine actual gratitude from him, is both unexpected and somehow embarrassing.

“You’re welcome.” Emma, who can face a dragon or stare down Rumpelstiltskin with equanimity, suddenly finds herself unable to meet Hook’s eyes. Instead she looks around for something, *anything* to distract her from the weight of this moment.

In his rush to grab his hook earlier, Hook had knocked over the sewing kit. Emma rights it and picks up the scattered items that had fallen out: several spools of thread, a sandwich bag full of ribbon bits, a plastic container full of pins, and a thimble. She puts everything back but the thimble; she fiddles with it, switching it restlessly from one finger to another.

Hook touches her arm, his fingers sliding slowly down the inside of her wrist, lingering slightly on the flower tattooed over her racing pulse, then across the sensitive surface of her palm. He plucks the thimble from her finger and examines it with an expression bordering on bemusement.

“I’ve not seen one of these in a very long time,” he says.

“It’s just a thimble. They stick them in sewing kits all the time, but I don’t know anyone who even uses one.”

“Mmmm,” he murmurs, and Emma can tell he’s close to sleep now, his voice a drowsy mumble. “As you say, lass.”

Hook slips it onto the tip of his ring finger, where it looks incongruous compared to the heavy rings he’d retrieved when she wasn’t looking. She wonders how he got them back on one-handed. He curls his hand into a fist, tucking the thimble into his palm, then settles deeper into the pillow. Emma looks around the room, trying to decide if she should go downstairs to sleep or pull up the chair.

“I appear to have stolen your bed,” Hook says. His eyes are mostly shut, only the faintest hint of blue peeking from under his thick lashes.

“Yeah, I caught that,” Emma says. She looks at the open window and thinks about Gold watching her through it. She thinks about Hook laying here, vulnerable, wounded. She thinks about him letting her stitch him back up, handing her his hook, and the tiny thimble tucked into his palm.

Then she notices that her drink has magically disappeared, leaving only an empty glass behind.

He smiles at her, sleepy and smug as a cat.

With a sigh, Emma gets up and closes the window, latching it tight against any intruders. She turns off the bedside table lamp, then goes around to the other side of the bed and crawls under the blanket beside him. Her bed is decently sized and there’s space enough between them so that they’re not touching, but she lays on top of the sheet anyway, for modesty’s sake.

“What are you doing, Swan?” he asks, startled back to wakefulness.

“Trying something new,” she says, curling her hands under her pillow and yawning. “Go to sleep, Jones. We’ll figure the morning out in the morning.”

And even though she can feel his eyes on her and the warmth of his body only a few inches away, Emma drifts easily off to sleep.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma had a face-off with Mr. Gold, wherein they both lied to each other. Upstairs, Emma and Hook share an honest moment and a thimble is stolen. Emma falls asleep on the bed beside Hook.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by Peaceheather (with a cameo betaing by Wolfie. THANK YOU SO MUCH.)

For the record, this chapter started off kind of short. Then I edited it and it suddenly grew two more pages.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sound of the door slamming downstairs jolts Emma awake. Sunlight is streaming in through the window, birds are singing cheerfully outside, and the alarm clock informs her that it's a quarter after eight. For a moment, Emma simply lays there, listening to Mary Margaret and David bustling around as they come in. Reluctant to actually get up, she snuggles deeper into her pillow, inhaling the aroma of clean sheets and something else that's tickling her nose and making her feel warm and relaxed all over. She takes another deep breath, trying to place the scent—

—and then the events of the night before come screaming back, in all their gory detail.

Hook.

Emma flips over and props herself up on one elbow, inexplicably afraid he'll be gone, as if the night before had been a dream worth reliving instead of a blood-soaked nightmare.

He's still there.

She's reminded of the night she sat by his bedside in the hospital. Hook's face is even more bruised by daylight, his cheekbone slightly swollen below the burst capillaries. She can see now several smaller contusions scattered across his skin. His eyes are shut, dark lashes contrasting strongly against the pallor of his face. He looks battered, but peaceful. He's so still, he looks...

For one horrible, awful moment, Emma's heart stops.

He looks dead.

“Hook?” she whispers. He doesn’t respond.

Emma stretches out a tentative hand. *No. No he can’t be dead. It was just a cut! Please, he can’t be ...*

The relief that washes over her when she touches warm, living skin is nearly palpable. His eyebrows twitch slightly and he makes a noise that’s half groan, half grunt, but he doesn’t wake.

“Emma, are you up yet? We brought breakfast!” Mary Margaret’s voice precedes her knock against Emma’s open door by mere seconds. She pokes her head into the room before Emma can stop her or warn her or even turn to face her. “Emma—What in the *world?!?*”

She twists around in time to see Snow White turn bright red and abruptly avert her eyes toward the ceiling. Mary Margaret’s voice drops to a dramatic whisper, “Emma why is *Hook* sleeping in your *bed?*”

Emma opens her mouth, ready to explain, except—

“What?!” David’s voice calls up from downstairs, sounding alarmed. “What’s wrong?”

Mary Margaret’s eyes go wide with panic. It’s at this exact moment that Emma realizes Hook is pretty much naked—which is fairly obvious since at some point in the night he’s knocked the sheets down to mid-chest and his black leather, I’m-such-a-bad-boy pants are draped over the foot of her bed, right beside his belt. And, *of course*, all of his bruises are on the side that Snow can’t see.

“It’s not what you think,” Emma says, quickly. But David’s footsteps are already pounding up the stairs. She rolls out of bed and interposes herself between Hook and the door, just in time. Snow raises her arm to stop David before he barrels into the room, so instead he comes to a skidding halt in the doorway, one hand braced against the frame to keep himself from slamming into it.

Emma takes a step toward them, hoping to block the view.

Whether it’s because David spent a huge chunk of his life watching over sheep and keeping track of all of them, or because he was also born with the natural instincts of a battle-hardened warrior, or maybe it’s just because he’s her *father*, it takes him less than a second to process the scene in front of him. His eyes focus on Emma, then seem to leap from her, to the incriminating pants, to the naked guy in the bed. “What the hell is that bastard doing—”

It’s a good thing, Emma thinks later, that Snow is even faster on the uptake than Charming is. She snags him by the back of his belt and yanks on it as if it’s a collar, just as he starts to lunge. “Whoa, down boy. Maybe we need to hear Emma out *before* we go leaping to conclusions?”

“He’s *injured*,” Emma says, before David can add to the problem. “He showed up last night. Gold hurt him. Bad. He didn’t want to go to the hospital.”

“So you let him sleep in your bed?” David asks, his voice a little strangled.

Emma plants her hands on her hips, her backbone straightening. She cares about her parents, she really does, but it is *weird* as hell sometimes that they’re practically the same age she is. She gets that David has a ton of fatherly instincts that have gone completely to waste, but Emma is a big girl, with a kid of her own.

“Okay, first of all, I am twenty-eight years old. If I want to let a man sleep in my bed it is nobody’s business but mine. You don’t have to agree with my choices, but you need to respect them. Besides that, he could barely walk last night, let alone do anything else. Moving him wasn’t really an option.”

“How’d he get up here in the first place?” Snow asks.

“Climbed through the window, I think,” Emma says. She glances back at Hook, who still hasn’t woken up yet, despite the heated discussion taking place in the same room. Emma frowns. The David situation seems to be in hand, so she crosses to the other side of the bed and leans over to check his pulse. It’s there, steady and stronger than the night before; his skin is warm but not *too* warm.

Something still seems wrong to her, though. An uneasy feeling settles uncomfortably in her stomach.

“He climbed through the window, while injured?” Mary Margaret asks. She crosses to the window and looks out and down, much as Emma had the night before.

“Touchy subject. Don’t ask,” Emma says. She shakes his shoulder gently. “Hook? Wake up.”

This time he gasps as if he’s in pain, but still doesn’t rouse. Alarmed now, Emma pulls the sheet down to his waist, revealing her patch-up job from the night before. Carefully she peels back the bandages to check the wound. There’s blood dried to the gauze, and his infernal chest hair is stuck to the damn bandages, so she has to work extra slowly. But when she finally peels the bandage away from the sutures, the cut doesn’t *look* as though it’s any worse than the night before. He’s stopped bleeding and has begun to scab, the flesh around the stitches is bruised and swollen; but the cut doesn’t *look* infected. Emma fishes the Tylenol out of the first aid kit and heads for the bathroom to get him some water.

“What the hell?” Mary Margaret moves to the side of the bed to get a better look at his injury. “Gold did this?”

“That’s what Hook said. Then Gold turned up later to tell me that he’d caught Hook lurking around his shop and gave him a ‘warning.’ I think Gold was spying on the apartment, too—which, gotta say, is not really a comforting thought.” Emma rinses out Hook’s glass in her bathroom sink and refills it with water. “He didn’t seem to know Hook was here, though.”

“Why didn’t you call?” Mary Margaret asks. “If Gold really was trying to kill him again...”

“I handled it,” Emma assures her, coming back around the side of the bed. “He left. I ... It was late and I didn’t want to wake you.”

“You stitched him up by yourself?” Mary Margaret arches a perfect black brow, though her look is more impressed than incredulous.

“What? I can sew, when I have to,” Emma says, feeling defensive despite the praise. So what if she’d wanted to swallow her own tongue rather than jab a needle into his flesh the night before? Nobody but Hook needs to know that, and she knows he would never rat her out. She sets the water glass down next to the Tylenol.

“Nice color you picked for him.” David hasn’t moved from his spot at the foot of the bed; he has his arms crossed, and is scowling at the sleeping pirate. “Suits him, I think.”

Snow moves to his side. “Charming.”

“What?”

“Not helping,” Snow says with a shake of her head.

“Hook? C’mon, wake up,” Emma shakes him again, gently at first, then harder when he doesn’t respond. Her heart pounds against her ribcage. “*Jones!*”

Hook’s lashes flutter, then his eyes open blearily. He gazes up at her, his eyes slowly focusing on her face, then gives a pale imitation of his usual toothy smile. “Hello, beautiful.”

Relieved, Emma sits back on the edge of the bed. “Oh, good. You’re still obnoxious.” She gives a weak laugh. Her stomach feels like it’s in knots.

Hook’s gaze flicks from her face to Snow’s, then over to David’s glower. “Well,” he says, his voice rough with sleep and pain. “Isn’t this awkward? I hadn’t expected to make it a family affair. How ... charming.”

David’s mouth compresses into a thin line, and Snow puts a hand on his chest to keep him from lunging again.

“How about we hold off on poking the dragon until I get some painkillers in you?” Emma suggests. She helps him shift upward and tucks her pillow behind his head. Then she hands him three Tylenol, and holds the water glass for him. “Swallow these. Don’t chew them.” Hook gives her a look that clearly says *I’m-not-an-idiot*, pops the pills into his mouth, then takes the glass from her and downs them like a pro. He grimaces afterward and hands her back the glass.

“What’d you do to make Gold attack you *this* time?” David asks.

“Nothing,” Hook says, tiredly. “I was minding my own business—”

“By which you mean ‘spying on him,’” Emma mutters before she can think better of it.

“As I said, darling, minding my own business. Not bothering anyone. Don’t let the limp fool you, he still *moves* like the Dark One. Popped up behind me, bashed me in the face with his cane ... It all gets a bit blurry after that.”

Snow leans closer to examine the stitches. “What’d he cut you with? It must have been razor sharp.”

An expression flickers over Hook’s face so quickly Emma’s sure if she hadn’t been watching him closely she wouldn’t have seen it. For just a split second, he’d looked *unsure* and just the tiniest bit afraid. It’s not the sort of expression that she ever expected to see on his face, and the fact that it was there, however briefly, sends a chill up her spine.

She realizes, then, that Hook’s not entirely sure *what* Gold did to him. Rumpelstiltskin would hardly show him mercy, and the fact that Hook is still alive and relatively unharmed sets warning bells ringing, loudly.

“A knife of some kind, I think,” he murmurs. “And I’ll have you know, I was completely unarmed—”

“Except for your hook,” David says.

Hook just levels him with a flat glare. “Aye. Except for that.”

His hand is laying next to Emma’s thigh, curled once more into a loose fist. It’s trembling, very, very slightly. She might not have noticed if she hadn’t been sitting so close. He’s barely got any strength left, she realizes, and he’s using all of it so as not to look weak in front of David. This pissing match is sapping him, but his gaze never wavers, and his jaw is set.

“Knock it off, you two,” Emma says. “Hook, you really should go to the hospital. Now that David and Snow are here we can—”

“No,” he says. His eyes flick to hers and his voice softens to something that’s almost, but not quite, a plea. “I can’t fight him like this. You abandoned me in the hospital once before, Swan. As you so kindly pointed out then, he had the advantage. You’d leave me to his not-so-tender mercies once more? Chain me to a bed, perhaps, with no way to escape when he finally comes to finish me off?” The look on his face is furious, but she can see through him right now to the underlying hurt.

You’d leave me here to die?

You’d have done the same.

Actually, no.

“I didn’t—” She wants to say that she didn’t abandon him. Not that time. She’d *hid* him from Gold, gone with Gold to New York because he’d threatened to kill Hook if she didn’t. She wants to say that she’s never truly abandoned him, she’s always made sure that he would survive whatever situation she’d left him in. She’d done what she could to protect him. But that admission would cost Emma more than she is willing to spend just now. “I’m trying to

help you, okay? If you don't trust me to protect you in the hospital, can I at least try and sneak a doctor in here?"

He searches her eyes, then seems to come to a decision; he nods once. A weight lifts marginally from her shoulders.

"Good," she says, letting him see her relief on her face.

When she looks up, she's surprised to find that Mary Margaret and David are both still standing there, watching them. David's face is clouded, but there's a look on Mary Margaret's face as if she's just found the solution to a difficult crossword puzzle problem and she's not sure she likes it. Her mouth pinches slightly, then her shoulders square.

"We can run interference," Snow says. "I'll go get Whale and sneak him in without anyone seeing. David can keep an eye on Gold and let us know his movements."

David's look gets slightly more confused. "Why am I the one watching Gold?"

Snow smiles sweetly. "Because if you have to go get Whale, you'll only end up punching him. He's likely to be *slightly* more cooperative if I ask nicely," Snow says. She turns to her daughter and her smile turns just a touch more motherly. "Emma, you should, maybe... you know ... *get dressed?*"

Emma glances down at her black tank top and blue flannel pajama bottoms. They'd been more than adequate the night before, but David seems to have suddenly discovered an interest in the plaster pattern on the ceiling, and Hook's gaze dips to her chest and lingers there for a moment before meeting hers again. His eyebrows twitch upward and he doesn't even bother to hide his appreciative grin.

Right, Emma thinks. Time for a bra.

She's just about to get up, when Hook catches her wrist. "May the invalid request another sponge bath?" Hook says, tongue tucked against his teeth. "I'm feeling a bit ... dirty."

"Oh, shut up," Emma says, rolling her eyes and getting to her feet.

"Another?!"

Snow shoves David out of the room before he can have an apoplexy.

The instant they're gone, Hook goes completely limp. His head drops back on the pillow, his eyes shut and he grimaces. Emma chews her lip, tempted to ask him how bad it is, knowing that the fact that he's even letting her see him like this means it's pretty bad. That sour feeling in her stomach is creeping back.

"Will you be okay if I go grab a shower?" she asks instead.

"That depends. Will Prince Charming try to kill me in my sleep?" he says, sounding very much as if he wouldn't care if David *did*.

“Only if you keep baiting him,” she says, and heads for her dresser. “It’ll only take me fifteen minutes. I think you can stay out of trouble that long.”

He doesn’t open his eyes. “I’ll try not to expire from loneliness whilst you’re gone,” he says.

Emma pauses in the act of hunting for clothes in her dresser to stare at him. He doesn’t say anything further, so after a minute she collects some clean underwear, jeans and a t-shirt and heads for the bathroom.

She shuts the door behind her and leans against it, his words ringing in her ears.

He’d meant it as a joke. He’d *said* it as if it was a joke, dipped in a thick candy-coating of sarcasm, but Emma can see past his facade.

He hadn’t been joking.

And he hadn’t been lying.

At least, she thinks he hadn’t been lying. Emma drops her head into her hands.

When she’d rolled over and thought Hook was dead, that he might never look up at her and smile that ridiculous smile or banter with her or argue with her ever again, it had almost been like seeing Henry laying in that hospital bed, cold and unmoving.

They’re not even *friends*.

This. This is *exactly* what she’d been afraid of up on top of that beanstalk. The more time she spends in his company, the more Emma sees *him*—not Captain Hook, the villain out for vengeance, but Killian Jones, the damaged man underneath. The man who *is* lonely, who keeps dancing around her with words, baiting her for attention. The man who sees *her*. He’s under her skin now. Whether she wants to or not, she *cares* what happens to him.

She shouldn’t feel this way. She can’t *afford* to care about him. He’s team Bad Guy and Emma swore off bad guys a long, long time ago.

She lifts her head and meets her own gaze in the mirror. She looks lost.

“What the hell am I gonna do?”

Chapter End Notes

Not sure if I'll get the next chapter up tomorrow or not. If not, then it should be up on Tuesday evening sometime.

In the meantime, I'm over on Tumblr, if you want to come find me and chat or yell at me or ask me questions. I'm still kind of new over there and no one ever talks to me. :(<http://madlymel.tumblr.com>

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Previously: Mary Margaret and David returned home to find Hook in Emma's bed. Explanations are given and a plan is worked out to sneak Dr. Whale into the loft.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

My apologies to *Blackadder* for the blatant borrowing. (Not that I think he'd mind...)

Also, please bear in mind that I got my medical knowledge entirely from TV and a curse. Which makes me as qualified to practice medicine as Dr. Whale.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Emma showers, dresses, does the world's fastest blow dry on her hair, and then checks in on Hook before going downstairs to see what Mary Margaret had meant by breakfast. Emma sometimes wishes that Storybrooke hadn't been stuck in time so long that they'd actually missed out on Starbucks. She should have figured something was up with the town when there wasn't even a glimpse of McDonald's golden arches. Still, Granny makes some killer coffee, and the bag full of doughnuts and cinnamon buns smell good enough that she almost drools.

There's a note on the counter from Snow promising to call when she's on her way with Whale. In the meantime, there's little to do but wait, so Emma takes the sheets out of the tub and puts them in the wash with some bleach. Then she makes some toast, pours another glass of orange juice, and takes it back upstairs.

Hook isn't in the bed. For a moment she just stares, blankly, at the place where he should be, then she dashes around to the other side to make sure he hasn't fallen out. He's not on the floor, either.

When she hears swearing coming from the bathroom Emma has to put the plate and glass down on the nightstand because her hands are shaking. She flexes her fingers a couple of times, then stalks over to the bathroom door. "You okay in there?"

Silence descends. After a moment the door swings open enough for her to see Hook leaning heavily against the wall. He's found the sweatpants she'd brought up the night before and

managed to get into them, she notices, but his color is awful and he's sweating.

"Some assistance, at the moment, would be greatly appreciated," he says, his adam's apple bobbing heavily in his throat. He doesn't look at her.

"You could have said something before," she says. He gives a grunt that she interprets as *no-I-couldn't*. Emma slides an arm around his waist, guides his left arm over her shoulder, and then accepts most of his weight. Together they make their way slowly and painfully across the bedroom, though it takes some careful maneuvering to get him into bed again. When he lays back, Hook is pale and panting, though outwardly Emma can find no reason for it.

"There's something wrong," she says, checking his bandages for what seems like the twentieth time. "It doesn't look infected, but I don't think you should be this weak."

"No," he agrees quietly. "No, I should not."

Emma hesitates. "Last night, when Gold was here, he said something. I didn't think anything of it at the time, but ... He said 'turnabout is fair play.' Do you think ..."

"That he poisoned me? The thought had crossed my mind." Hook sneers. "Let's just say I wouldn't put it past him."

Emma's phone chooses that moment to ring; she snatches it up with only a glance at the screen. "Are you on your way?"

"Charming's watching Gold. He'll call me first if it looks like Gold is going to leave his shop. I've got Whale and some supplies. We'll be there in five minutes."

"Hurry," Emma says, the uneasy feeling churning in her stomach. She takes a deep breath. "I think ... I think he may be poisoned."

"We'll be there in three," Snow says, and hangs up.

Hook is watching her through bruised lids.

"Such concern," he says, wryly. "What could I have possibly done to merit the heroes all riding to my rescue?"

Emma doesn't have a good answer for that. He's done plenty that should have left him on her See-No-Evil list. But Regina and Gold are both guilty of far worse, and their motivations are, for the most part, inexcusable. But she's tried to give both of them the benefit of the doubt. Hook's motivations, by comparison, are nobler by virtue of being simpler. He wants revenge for the woman he loved. He's traveled across worlds to achieve it. There is something almost admirable about that, even if his methods leave a *lot* to be desired.

The hole in Hook's heart is as deep and dark as the wishing well—but what he's lost can't ever be returned. And despite the fact that she *knows* that he would fill that hole with Rumpelstiltskin's blood, if he could, Emma can't help but worry for him. She shouldn't; she should be doing everything in her power to stop him, to protect the innocent people who

might get caught in the crossfire. Instead, Emma *cares*, because he can never have anything but a hollow victory. Maybe he doesn't know that yet, but she *does*.

She raises her brows. "You chose to come to me, remember? If you didn't want the heroes to help, I'm pretty sure Regina could have snapped her fingers and fixed you like that. But you chose to come through my window, buddy. Guess you're going to have to let the good guys do what we do best."

Hook's expression goes still and quiet; his eyes meet hers steadily. "Indeed I did."

That nervous feeling claws at her stomach, so Emma distracts herself. "I brought you some orange juice. I think I read somewhere that it's good to stay hydrated when you've lost a lot of blood." She presses the glass into his hand and watches while he sips at it. He manages a few swallows before his hand starts to shake again. His rings and the thimble still capping his finger chime against the glass like little bells. Emma supports it for him and he scowls at her over the rim while he finishes off the rest of the juice.

"Toast?" she asks, setting the glass back down. He makes a face. "Water?"

"Tell me a story," he demands. Despite the beard scruff, and the hair on his bare, muscled chest, Hook still somehow manages to look like a little boy.

Emma rolls her eyes and wracks her brain. "Once upon a time, there was a happy little sausage named Baldrick. The end."

He stares at her deadpan face, then chuckles softly. "That was the *worst* story I've ever heard, and I've heard most of them."

"Blame Blackadder. I'll have to borrow Henry's book if you want something more detailed. He's the storyteller in the family, not me," Emma says.

"Where is the lad?" Hook asks, peering around the room as if Henry might've been hiding in a corner or under a rug all this time.

"He's ... with Neal. For the weekend," Emma says. Hook's eyes drift to her chest and Emma realizes she's touching the place where her pendant used to lay. She scratches at it, as if that was the problem all along, then drops her hand to her lap.

"Neal, his father? Neal who is the Crocodile's son, Baelfire?" Something flickers in Hook's eyes, there and gone again too fast for her to read.

Emma shrugs. "What are the odds of that, huh? I mean, I met the guy eleven years ago, all the way across the country. I didn't even know any of this ... that *Storybrooke* even existed. Then ... well, stuff happens, we split. I end up in jail, pregnant, put the kid up for adoption and I don't see either of them for ten years ... then Henry, who somehow ended up *in* the cursed fairy-tale town I'm supposedly destined to save tracks me down and ... and all *this* happens, and Neal's tied up in it, too. And not because of me or Henry, but because his father is freaking *Rumpelstiltskin*."

Hook's gaze softens. "I've been known to gamble on occasion, and I'll tell you, lass: when the odds are stacked that high, we call it fate."

Now it's Emma's turn to make a face. "Really not a big fan of the idea that someone else might be pulling my strings."

"On that, darling, we are in complete agreement."

Downstairs the front door opens. "We're here!" Mary Margaret calls up as they enter. A moment later she appears in the doorway with a harried and hungover-looking Dr. Whale in tow.

Hook tenses up, and it isn't until that moment she realizes that he'd been relaxed. Emma puts a hand on his shoulder and squeezes it gently. "Good guys," she reminds him.

"That," he says flatly, "is not a *good* guy. Trust me, we know our own kind." His eyes fix on Whale and he watches the doctor warily. "I wouldn't trust *this* guy with a corpse."

Emma snickers. "Funny you should say that—"

"I can leave, you know," Whale says. "I don't normally do housecalls. And I charge extra for assholes."

Emma grabs the doctor by the arm and hauls him away from the bed. "He's in *pain*, serious pain, okay? Cut him some slack. We think Gold might have poisoned him somehow. *You* are going to help fix him or I'm going to have David start doing random DUI checks on your route home. Understood?"

"Whatever you say, Sheriff." He picks up his bag and pops it open, pulls out a blood pressure cuff and a stethoscope, and gets to work. Hook endures the indignity of being poked and prodded by glaring steadfastly at Emma, as if it's *her* fault he's gotten himself into this mess. Finally Whale pulls the bandages back and examines the wound, glancing up at Emma in surprise.

"I think your stitching is neater than mine," he says. Coming from Dr. Frankenstein, Emma can't quite see the compliment. "Why pink, though?"

"All we had," Emma says before Hook can respond.

"Well, it's neat and they're holding well. I don't see any signs of infection. I'll take some blood and run it at the lab to see if I can find any traces of poison. Your blood pressure is a little low. Mary Margaret mentioned you'd lost some blood. I'll set you up with an IV before I go. That's, uh, a way to get more blood and liquids into you. Good thing we had your records from the car crash. Fresh off the boat from fairy-land, you probably have no clue that you even *have* a blood type, let alone what yours might be ..."

Hook's eyes slide to where his prosthetic weapon lays on the bedside table, then meaningfully back to Whale. Emma can't help but marvel how, weak as a kitten, Hook still

manages to exude more menace than ten guys his size.

It really shouldn't look that good on him.

Whale shuts up and gets a needle taped into Hook's good arm. He draws blood quickly, then sets up the IV, draping the bag off of a coatrack that Emma fetches from the corner of the room.

"How long until you can get the blood work done?" she asks.

"It'll be a few hours, probably. I might not know till this evening," Whale says.

"Rush it."

"I do have other patients, you know," he reminds her, looking down his nose like he thinks he's *House*, for fuck's sake. It's a good excuse, but Emma's not in the mood.

"It's Saturday. The only thing you normally nurse on a Saturday is a hangover and a bottle of JD. Rush it," she tells him.

Whale glares, but there's not much he can say to that, so he doesn't. He packs up his bag, leaves them a list of instructions and his pager number, and heads downstairs. Snow follows him out, already on the phone with Charming, trying to determine Gold's whereabouts before Whale leaves the apartment.

Emma moves to follow them, but Hook says, "Stay, lass."

She hesitates in the doorway. "You should rest."

"Keep me company." It's phrased as an order, as if he expects her to obey; she does, but only because she can hear the note of pleading beneath it, and because she's worried about what Whale will find in Hook's blood. So Emma perches on the edge of the bed, and out of habit now, reaches for his wrist to check his pulse. It's there, beating softly beneath her fingertips, and her own heartbeat speeds up in response.

Her fingers smooth absently over the soft skin of his wrist, then she touches the tattoo that lays along the inside of his forearm: the heart, deeply shaded with black, cut through with a dagger that she recognizes now as Rumpelstiltskin's. Vines grow behind it, and it's wrapped in a scrap of parchment bearing the name *Milah*.

"What was she like?" Emma asks despite herself, certain that he won't answer. In this, Emma thinks, they are kindred spirits; they guard their pain jealously, as fiercely as any dragon. She remembers the look in his eyes, when she'd first asked about the tattoo; the way Hook's smile had shut off as if she'd flicked a switch, and his eyes—Emma has seen those same eyes staring back at her out of countless mirrors for over ten years. While they've crossed so many of their boundaries in the last few hours, this one, she thinks, is insurmountable.

And yet, perhaps it is because they've lowered so many of their defenses, that Killian Jones closes his eyes and speaks in a voice gone hollow with grief and pain: "She was one of the bravest people I have ever known. Intelligent, cunning, determined to live the life she

dreamed of rather than the one fate had handed her. She had been miserable, shackled to the village coward, dying slowly day by day of shame and boredom. The Crocodile claims I stole her ... He's wrong. She commandeered *me*. Stole my heart and hijacked my ship. I would have sailed to the ends of the earth at her whim, stolen the moon from the sky if she had but asked me to. She found me, and she loved me. And then she died for me. That *monster* reached into her chest, tore out her heart, and crushed it before my eyes because she had dared to make her own choices, to love someone other than him, to be free."

Emma swallows, thickly, her eyes on the mid-afternoon sunlight streaming through the window. Somewhere inside her there is a small voice, barely a whisper in her heart, and it both understands Killian's pain and resents him for it. However briefly, he had known true love. She envies him that.

Then, so quietly that Emma is almost certain she imagined it, he says: "She would loathe what I have become."

When Emma looks up, startled, he has drifted off to sleep.

She sits beside him for a long time, watching the sunlight dance across the floor and over the foot of the bed, one hand touching the place on her chest where her swan pendant used to lay. She thinks about Neal, and tries to remember the first time he kissed her and is shocked to realize—she can't.

Hook sleeps. Emma paces. She goes downstairs and nibbles at something only because Snow makes her. Her mother watches her with wary eyes, as if she knows something but isn't sharing it just yet.

David comes home and demands to know how long "that pirate" will be staying. Snow drags him off to their room and there follows a whispered conversation and then David's loud exclamation of "You've *got* to be kidding me! He is not—!" which is quickly cut off by Snow clamping a hand over his mouth and giving him a pointed stare.

Emma mostly ignores all this in favor of glaring at the phone, willing it to ring, or peeking in on Hook.

She's heading back upstairs to check on him when she stumbles, barely catching the rail. Her stomach clenches hard, the uneasy feeling that's been with her all day now a searing pain in her stomach. Emma clutches, white-knuckled, at the rail. Something is *very* wrong.

"Hook?" she gasps.

The pain lessens, the cramp easing up enough that Emma takes the stairs again two at a time. It is five steps to the bedside, five more to round the bed. He's curled himself into a ball, his right hand pressed to the wound in his side, and his left arm clamped around his middle.

"Hook!"

When she shakes his shoulder, he doesn't respond. His breathing is labored, his skin leached of all color. Even his lips have gone gray, and they're peeled back over his teeth in a skull-like grimace of pain. "Hook!"

"What is it?" Mary Margaret bursts through the door and rushes to Emma's side. David is only a pace or two behind.

"I don't know!" Emma tries to shift him to his back, tries to pull his hands away from the wound. "He just—"

Hook *screams*, and it's like someone has punched her in the gut. It is an awful sound, as though someone has their fist clenched around his heart and for an awful, horrible, terrible moment Emma wonders if that's not the case. Her entire body goes cold, and all she can think of, all she can remember is Graham, collapsing in her arms, his hand pressed to his chest, and the cold linoleum of the station floor while she held his body and wept.

"No," she says, her hand reaching out to twist Hook onto his back. Her palm slams down on his chest, but she knows already—he still has his heart. Gold wouldn't have taken his heart; taking it would have kept Killian from feeling the pain of his loss, and she knows now how deeply that pain runs. Gold *wants* him to suffer. Whatever is wrong, she doesn't think it's his heart.

No, this is something else.

"Help me hold him," Emma says and David moves to one side of the bed and wrestles Hook's right arm up, while Snow does the same to his left. Hook cries out, trying to curl back in on himself; but he's still weak. Emma straddles his thighs, holding him down even as she tears at the bandages. He arches up under her, trying to buck her off, but Emma clamps her thighs over his in a vice grip and tries to block out the sound of his ragged breathing and growls of pain.

She pulls the gauze away.

Then they all freeze, staring at Hook's wound.

He lays still, finally, moaning.

Emma's cell phone rings.

She fishes it out of her back pocket and, after three tries, manages to hit "answer" even though she can't stop staring at Hook. Her hand shakes as she brings the phone to her ear.

"Hey, it's Whale. So I ran his blood work and good news: we couldn't find any of the standard poisons in his system. Everything came back negative. Weird thing is, we did find something else in his bloodstream. It's pretty faint, and I don't even know what it means, but ... he's got trace amounts of gold in his bl—"

"Yeah." Emma hears herself respond, her voice far away and hollow. "I think we figured that one out. Thanks for your help. I've got to go."

She hangs up and simply stares at Hook's abdomen, where the hot pink sutures, the scab, and the skin around it, have turned to solid gold.

Chapter End Notes

Hold tight, there are bumpy seas ahead.

(Oh, and for the person who wanted Hook stuck in bed a bit longer ... congratulations. You got your wish. :))

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Previously: Dr. Whale paid a housecall. Hook's wound has turned to gold.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They call the Blue Fairy.

(Emma thinks that Regina would probably be more of an expert on this sort of thing, but she's out for obvious reasons.)

Then they prepare to go through the same cloak-and-dagger routine to fetch Blue without Gold's knowledge: Charming once again plays lookout, while Snow slips across town to the convent.

Emma sits by Hook's side and watches as the gold inches slowly away from the wound, gleaming in the light. The stitches she'd sewn so carefully the night before, amused by the thread color, glitter where the sunlight catches them, fused with his skin. Even the soft hair that runs down his torso has turned to stiff gold where it lays too near the injured flesh. The edges of it shimmer with magic, creeping steadily outward.

He pants in pain, his muscles locked, veins standing out starkly over the corded muscles of his arms and neck. Emma pushes the sweaty hair back from his forehead and clasps his hand tightly. He squeezes hers back, nearly to the point of breaking it.

"Emma," he gasps, rousing briefly. His voice is raw and raspy with pain; she has to lean forward to hear him better.

"I'm here," she says.

"What is—"

"I don't know," she says. "I ... The cut, it's turning to gold."

Hook laughs, a hollow, mirthless, frantic sound. "Oh, that's ... bloody brilliant." He struggles to inhale between words. "A fitting punishment ... for a pirate, I suppose." He swallows,

hard; his jaw flexes as he grits his teeth. “Should have guessed.”

“What are you talking about? What did Gold *do*?”

“Dagger,” he says. “Thought it ... gleamed.”

His eyes shut tight, and his hand clamps harder against hers as another spasm takes him. When she looks down, the shimmering edges have spread another few inches.

“Hook! C’mon, fight it,” she says. “Snow went to get help. You just need to hold on a little longer, okay?”

He hisses, breathing heavily through his nose. “Won’t let him ... win this way.”

“Jones—”

“Don’t leave me,” he says, suddenly, his eyes latching onto her face as if he is drowning and she is the rope.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she says.

“It’s so—” he says, and then whatever he was going to say is lost in a cry of pain. Mercifully, perhaps, he passes out, loosening his bruising grip on her hand. He doesn’t rouse again.

The gold creeps across Hook’s belly in an ever widening pool. Emma wonders what it’s doing beneath the skin. She wonders how long he has left. She wonders, desperately, how to *fix this*. This isn’t poison, it’s magic, and aside from a few very hasty lessons from Rumpelstiltskin, Emma doesn’t know how to fight magic. Not this kind of magic, anyway.

Her hand hovers over the wound, uncertainly. She knows it is possible for magic to heal physical wounds, but this is more than just physical. It’s possible that anything she were to try would only make it worse.

“Emma!” The door slams open downstairs and footsteps pound up them. Snow rushes into the room, Mother Superior—the Blue Fairy, once upon a time—looking uncharacteristically rushed and flustered behind her. Emma moves aside so that they can get a better look at him, but she doesn’t release his hand.

Blue leans over Hook briefly. She reaches out a slender hand, but does not touch. “How long has he been this way?”

“He was injured last night—” Had it really only been last night? It feels to her as if it happened a lifetime ago. “The gold thing just started about an hour ago.”

“It’s a curse.” The words are not unexpected, but Emma reels anyway. “I have seen its like before, in our world. It worked differently there, more quickly. Merely touching something that carried the curse turned anything instantly to gold.”

Emma’s not sure which is more horrific: this creeping torture or poof! golden statue.

“King Midas’ curse,” Snow says.

“Yes, his hands were cursed. Though the curse could be placed on anything,” Blue explains.

“Anything? Like a dagger?” Emma asks.

Blue looks up at her and nods.

“So, what happens to someone that’s turned to gold?” she has to ask.

The Blue Fairy gives her a look that is, oddly, full of pity. “They are trapped by it, for eternity. Not dead, but not alive either, their souls forever lost in a netherworld.” Her soft voice is gentle and sad, which somehow only makes the words worse.

“Like the Sleeping Curse?” Snow says.

“Yes. However, I’m afraid that there is only one known way to break this curse, and it does not exist in this world.”

“What is it?” Emma says.

“The waters of Lake Nostos,” Snow says. “Charming once rescued a man who had been turned to gold using the water from the lake.”

“The lake we jumped in? That was a portal back to this world? *That* lake?”

“That would be the one,” Snow says, her brows creased with worry.

“There is something else,” Blue says, before Emma has even finished making a plan in her head. “I do not know if it is because magic works differently here now, or if the curse has been altered in some way; but if, as you say, he was cut with a cursed blade, he should have turned to gold instantly. However, you say he was injured last night, and this only started an hour ago?”

Emma nods; Snow confirms it.

Blue frowns, her hand hovering over the injury once more. She closes her eyes and her hand shimmers slightly. “There is some other magic at work here. Dark magic, and light, battling. Who treated this wound?”

“I did,” Emma says. “But, I - I just stitched him up. I didn’t *do* anything—”

Downstairs the door slams open with so much force it sounds as if it’s been blown off its hinges.

Hook comes awake as if he’s surfacing suddenly from the depths of the ocean, gasping for breath and panicked. He releases Emma’s hand, shoves her away from the bed, and lunges for his hook. A blade suddenly slashes down, embedding its razor-sharp edge in the nightstand between Hook’s fingers and his weapon.

“Ah, ah, ah, *captain*,” says Rumplestiltskin.

He’s standing between Emma and the bed, a pirate cutlass in one hand, his cane in the other. He looks over the room, coldly appraising them all.

At that moment, David comes skidding through the doorway. “He’s coming!”

“Next time,” Emma says, through gritted teeth, “You *might* try calling. It’d be faster.”

“Well, isn’t this a *charming* gathering,” says Gold. “Here I am, trying to do the community a service and rid us of a dangerous animal, while you all are trying so valiantly to save it.”

Hook *snarls*, throws back the sheets, and lunges for his adversary with his one good hand cocked into a fist. The instant he sits up, however, the gold shimmer grows stronger, and with a scream he falls back on the bed, writhing in pain. The IV line pulls free from his arm and dangles uselessly next to the bed.

A cold smile curls across Gold’s face. “As you can see, he doesn’t *want* to be saved.”

“What did you do?” Emma demands.

“I told you, dearie. I gave him a warning,” Rumple says. He lifts the sword tip and places it against Hook’s throat. “I *warned* him that his quest for vengeance would be his undoing. That the darkness inside him would consume him until there was nothing left for him but his hatred. And then ... well, then I ensured it. Quite clever of me, really. I admit, I hadn’t expected it to take so long. I half expected to find a solid gold pirate statue crouching on a rooftop like a gargoyle this morning.”

His gimlet gaze turns toward Emma. “That’ll be *your* doing, I expect.” Gold’s smile is almost reptilian. “Heroes. Never can trust ‘em to kill off the villain. No, you just have to try to save *everyone*.” He turns back to Hook, the sword tip pressing slightly harder into his skin. “Forget about all the innocents who will suffer and die, just so that one man might have a chance to be redeemed. Sometimes, you just have to know when to cut your losses, dearie.”

Hook breathes hard, his hand clenched against the gold of his stomach. “Do it,” he says. “Kill me now, in cold blood, in front of witnesses, whilst I can’t fight back. *You coward*.”

“Oh, I’ve got something much worse than death in store for you.” Gold sneers.

Emma reaches for her gun, but Rumple slashes out with the cutlass and knocks the revolver across the room, out of anyone’s reach.

Gold contemplates the blade with humor, then turns the tip of it back to Hook who is staring at him with cold fury. “Now who is the coward?” Gold asks, tipping Hook’s chin up with the blade. “Once more letting a woman fight for you. What was it you said, all those years ago? Ah, yes...” He leans closer, his voice drops to a mocking imitation of Hook’s. “A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, *deserves* what he gets.”

Hook knocks the sword aside and lunges again, this time managing to reach for his hook and clasp it in his hand before another strong shimmer of magic envelops him. He arches

backward, a scream tearing raggedly from his throat. Emma is horrified to realize that the gold now covers most of his abdomen, the shimmer spreading even over the waistband of his sweatpants. Where flesh and fabric have turned to metal, he can no longer move.

Gold smirks. “Oh, I know all about your little death wish, dearie. You think that dying will reunite you with your *one true love*. I told you the day I killed her: death would be too good for you. But good news! You’ll have your precious vengeance to keep you warm for the rest of eternity, and I hear it’s cold where your soul is going.”

“Stop it!”

Emma doesn’t know how, but she’s suddenly between them, and she’s holding the cutlass. Gold looks at her with surprise, and if he’s surprised it’s nothing to the way that she’s feeling. Emma schools her face into an *I-meant-to-do-that* scowl, adjusts her grip on the sword, and steps more solidly in front of Hook, the blade a shining barrier between him and Gold.

“I don’t care if you *are* the Dark One or ... whatever. You have no *right* to do this.”

Gold points a gloved finger in her direction. “I’m doing you a favor, Miss Swan. I warned you, he’s a danger to anyone connected to me, and that includes your loved ones. He’ll stop at nothing to destroy me—and you have the evidence of that right in front of your eyes. The more he hates, the more the darkness in him controls him, the faster the curse will consume him.”

“Emma,” Hook gasps. “I would n—”

“You’re wrong,” she says, as cold and icy and *furious* as she’s ever felt. “You’re wrong and you *know it*. He would never hurt Neal and he would *never* harm Henry. Because they’re *Milah’s* blood, and he loved her more than you ever could.”

Gold nearly snarls in fury, and suddenly there’s something *more* behind his cold, dark eyes. Whatever it is, it is ancient and implacable and not entirely human. For the first time, Emma can see beyond the Storybrooke veneer of the charming, soft-spoken pawnbroker, and the thing that’s coiled beneath that facade is scaled and horrible, with the kind of smile that suggests that it likes to play with razorblades. Gold lets loose a high-pitched giggle that creeps her right the fuck out.

He points his free hand toward the ceiling, like he’s about to start an evil cha-cha across the room. “So heroic! So *naive*.” He twirls his finger airily, then points at Hook. “Not that it matters anymore. There’s only one way to break *this* curse, dearie. And, as *he* knows all too well, that hope is long dead. He’ll be yard art by nightfall. Perhaps you could turn him into a birdbath.” His eyes light up with unholy glee.

Emma takes a step forward, raising the cutlass threateningly. “Get out.”

Gold bares his teeth in a crocodile grin. “Or maybe you could melt him down for coin; at least then he might be worth something.”

Inside Emma something swells and surges; then, a tidal wave of energy bursts out of her, strong enough to toss Gold across the room and into a wall. It feels much like it did when Cora tried to take her heart. “Get out.”

Gold slithers to his feet and props himself up on his cane. He eyes her as if she is some stunning new creature he’s never seen before. Then he laughs again, that light giggle skipping like spiders down her spine.

“Oh, now this *is* funny. If it’s all the same, I’d rather stay and watch.”

Emma advances on him, sword held at the ready. Her body is almost *thrumming* with magic, she’s so angry. She doesn’t even want to think about what its use will cost her, and at the moment, she *really* doesn’t care. Her eyes narrow, focused entirely on her target.

“You’ve done enough damage, and I can promise you this: if we can’t break this curse, I will make sure you *never* see your son or your grandson, *ever* again. I *will* find a way.”

Gold’s smile turns into a sneer. “Well, good luck with that, Miss Swan. Let me know how it turns out.”

And then he vanishes in a cloud of red-purple smoke.

Emma blinks, glancing around the room, ready for him to reappear; but he’s gone. Mary Margaret and David seem to stagger, and Emma realizes that Gold must have done something to prevent their interference. They stare at her silently, in shock. Blue is somehow still perched on the edge of the bed, pressed up against the footboard. Her eyes are wide as she, too, studies Emma, who suddenly feels self-conscious.

“What?” She lowers the sword warily. “It’s just a thing ... that I ... do. Sometimes.”

“Emma.”

She turns back to the bed, to Killian, who is trapped, half propped against the pillows. His voice is a ragged whisper, as if he can’t quite get enough air into his lungs. He reaches out a hand for her and she sinks beside him on the bed. Instead of taking her hand he touches her hair, brushing it back from her face. His smile is pained, but his eyes are open wide and the color of the sea, so clear she thinks she can see through to the bottom of his soul. “Have I told ... you before that you’re ... bloody brilliant?”

“Hook—”

“I liked it better ... when you called ... me Jones,” he says, having to pause to draw air into lungs that are probably more than half metal. How he’s even talking is a mystery only magic can explain, but if a man can be made out of wood and still speak, it only stands to reason that a man made of metal can do the same. He grits his teeth and hisses as the curse takes a little more of him, the shimmer now halfway up his ribcage and descending past his hips.

“Damn,” he gasps.

“We’re going to break this,” she tells him. Her heart is pounding wildly somewhere in the vicinity of her throat. “That’s what the good guys do, right? We break curses and save pirates

in distress?”

His mouth twists derisively. “Not this ... time, darling.”

“He said there’s a way to break it.”

“Aye,” Hook turns his arm over and lays it across her lap so she can see the tattoo there. “But the only woman ... that ever loved ... me enough ... to die for me ... did.”

“Jones—”

“May I have ... my hook?” He lifts his left arm, slightly. “If I’m to spend ... eternity trapped in hell ... I’d feel better if I’m fully ... armed.”

“Is that supposed to be funny?”

He smiles up at her, his mouth cocky and brave, but Emma knows when he lies, even when he’s doing it without words. “My hook, if ... you’d be so kind?”

She picks it up from where it had fallen on the bed, and inserts it into the brace with a touch more force than she probably should. She grips it, hard, and looks him in the eye. “You have to fight this. You are *not* going to be stuck like this for eternity.”

“Even ten hours ... can feel like an eternity ... when there’s something ... you want to get back to,” he says. He swallows with difficulty and closes his eyes. “If you would ... show me mercy ... kill me, before ...”

“No!” Emma stares at him. “Are you insane?”

“Probably,” he admits. “Your pistol ...”

“*No*,” she says and shakes her head. Emma clutches at his shoulder, her other hand latched onto his hook as if it is a lifeline that she doesn’t dare let go. The gold creeps up over his collarbones and begins to spill down his shoulders. Her eyes burn. This is worse than Graham. Worse than Neal’s betrayal. She can *stop* this, she knows she can. She just doesn’t know *how*.

What good is it to be the savior if you can’t *save* people?

“We are going to *fix* this,” she insists. “If I have to find a way back there and drain the whole damn lake, we will *fix* this.”

“I’m not ... worth it,” he rasps, the gold shimmer sliding up his throat like a lover’s hands. His voice is so quiet now she has to lean forward to hear him, and it *echoes* slightly as if she’s hearing it through a metal pipe.

“That’s not true,” she says. “Remember? I know when you’re lying.”

His hand moves against her thigh. “Take ... this?” She glances down to see that his arm gleams gold now nearly to the wrist, and it lays heavily across her lap. His fingers are still

flesh, though, and he slips the thimble from his fingertip, then cups it in his palm. "I'd have ... liked ... to have ... given you ... real one, but..."

She takes it, then grips his hand tightly, as if she can anchor him here by force of will alone. "Jones, don't you do this."

I'm magic. I'm magic. I'm not Milah, but I'm magic. True love can break any curse, right? I'm the product of true love, so maybe that's ... maybe that's enough.

His eyes linger on hers, and she feels his fingers solidify, warm flesh turned to cool metal beneath her hand. "Dead guy ... of ... year ... picked me ... remember? ... This is," he fights to breathe. "This is ... just ... another ... adven ... ture."

Emma wants to tell him that the best adventures are the ones you take with other people. She wants to remind him that he needs someone to keep him out of trouble. She wants to shake him, but there's nothing left to shake. She'd shackle him to the bed if only it would keep him from leaving. But she's out of time.

"Jones, I am **not** done with you."

With tears scalding her face, Emma does the only thing she can do: she leans forward, her hair falling around them like a curtain, and kisses him, just as his lips turn to gold beneath hers.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter has ALL the drama. Jeeeeeze.

Anyway, I just want to state for the record that I *love* Rumple. He's one of my favorite characters, and I love him most when he's giving into his dark side. That doesn't mean I think he's beyond redemption, but for the purposes of this story -- there's no love lost between him and Hook and I'm playing off that. Hook brings out the Dark One in ways that few others still can.

What's that saying, though? All villains are the heroes of their own stories? I think that's especially true of Hook and Rumple.

BTW ... you may *think* you know what's going to happen next. But don't count on it.
;)

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Previously: It was revealed that Rumpelstiltskin used a cursed dagger to injure Hook, and now he's slowly turning to gold--the curse fueled by his own inner darkness. Rumpel turned up and pissed everyone off before Emma managed to get the upper hand. In a last ditch attempt to save Hook, she kissed him, just as his lips turned to gold.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In Henry's stories, true love's kiss is the answer to everything. There's that brief moment where the entire universe seems to hold its breath; then a wave of magic pulses out, righting whatever is wrong, filling the hearts of everyone within its radius, and reuniting parted souls. When she'd kissed Henry and woken him, when Snow had kissed Charming, that's what it had felt like. Warm and pure and perfect, as if that single moment was concentrated from a million wishes, dreams, hopes, and promises all come true.

That is *not* what happens this time.

As Emma presses a kiss to his lips, she feels them change from warm and soft to cold and unyielding. Then, suddenly, it's as if all the light, all the hopes and dreams she's ever held close to her, are being sucked from her soul. Desperate to hold on, unwilling to give up, Emma throws herself into the sensation, following it wherever it may lead. Darkness rises around her, closes in hungrily, and then all she can feel is cold so deep she aches with it in her bones.

The transition is abrupt and brutal; she lands back in her body with a bone-rattling *thud* that knocks the wind from her. Emma gasps like a fish on dry land, trying to fill her lungs with air.

When she opens her eyes she is not in her bedroom, kissing a pirate turned to gold.

She blinks hard, scrubs at her eyes with her fists until she can only see spots, certain that she's gone blind. After awhile she realizes she's not dying from lack of oxygen, even though whatever she's breathing feels about as natural as inhaling glass. She closes her eyes again and tries to relax, recalling the basics of some crap meditation class she'd tried once on the

suggestion of her OB/GYN when she'd been in prison. She focuses on steadying her breathing, then opens her eyes and lets them adjust.

The sight before her, such as it *isn't*, gives her pause.

She is standing on a dark beach, where the sand is black and the waters are dark and still, and the sky is empty of every star. There is no breeze, no waves; not a single sound breaks the perfect silence that bears down on her ears till they threaten to pop.

Despite the lack of starlight or moonlight, she can see the empty beach stretching for miles in every direction. Nothing moves along that dark, empty shore. Nothing breaks the perfect line of water and sand that stretches as far as she can see to the black horizon.

Emma is reminded of a painting she saw once in a museum during a school field trip. She'd laughed at the absurdity of it: a black square painted on a black canvas, the price tag in the millions of dollars. Now she wonders if the artist hadn't dreamt something that looked like this: black sea, black sand, black sky, and only the inky surface of the water and the empty void of the sky tells her that there is any difference between the three.

Nothing here is warm, or soft; even the sand beneath her boots is hard, and when she touches it to see if it's real, it cuts her fingertips like shards of glass. Emma jerks her hand away from it quickly, not liking the sensation at all; it's frigid and her skin seems to *cling* to it, like a damp finger pressed against a frosty window pane. The air, or *not-air*, around her is cold like she's never known before, so cold it cuts through cloth and skin, and when she inhales it flays her throat and ices her blood, making every movement painful and slow.

It is not, suffice to say, what she expected would happen when she kissed him. Not that she'd expected that her kiss would break the curse; after all, Hook's true love had been Milah. But Emma isn't a quitter, she's a fighter, and there is no way she is going to let Gold win without putting up one heck of a fight.

She's never seen a netherworld, and this is about as far from a fiery room full of flaming curtains as it gets, but she'd be willing to bet that's where she is. And somewhere in this vast and empty landscape, Hook is wandering, lost and alone, unaware that somehow Emma has followed him.

"Hook!" Emma's voice sounds oddly flat and thin, as if the nothing around her is swallowing it before it can travel too far. "Jones!" The name leaves her mouth, but then seems to drop to the ground, solid as a pebble. She won't find him that way.

She doesn't belong here. *Nothing* belongs here, because this is where Nothingdwells—where it is born, and where it goes to die. Emma feels as though she is past the edge of the universe, looking out into whatever void lies beyond the stars, at the absolute end of time and space.

It's depressing as hell.

Emma wraps her arms around herself, and bounces in place a little in a futile attempt to get warm. It takes a moment before she realizes that she's not wearing what she was a moment ago: she's back in her jeans and leather boots, her black tank top and red leather jacket. There

is a dagger tucked into her boot that looks a lot like the one she'd stowed there while stuck in the Enchanted Forest. She frowns down at her clothing, unsure why her trip to Nothing Land necessitated a costume change; still, she's glad of the extra layer against the cold. She zips her jacket up tight, and stuffs her hands in the pockets to try to warm them up—only to discover something else that has come along with her. She recognizes the shape of it before she pulls it out her pocket.

It's the thimble.

Carefully she turns it over in her palm. The metal is warm, or at least, less cold than everything else around her. Something niggles at her brain, something she should be remembering ...

Emma slips the thimble onto the tip of the ring finger of her left hand and examines it. It's a common, ordinary thimble, made of cheap metal and slightly dented on one side. What was it Killian had said? *I'd have liked to have given you a real one, but...*

A real one *what*?

And then the answer comes to her: a half-remembered quote from a book she'd read many, many times as a child.

"Surely you know what a kiss is?"

"I shall know it when you give it to me."

On the heels of that thought, several things about Killian Jones begin to make an awful lot of sense. Awful in the sense that if what she suspects is true, then his life has been even more tragic than Captain Hook's has any right to be.

How the hell did you get up here?

There's still some boy in this old pirate, yet. I never could resist an open window.

All it took was the happy thought of seeing your face one last time—

Of all the fairytales and fantasy stories she'd ever read as a motherless orphan, *Peter Pan* was the one that had resonated the most deeply. Discovering that Captain Hook was *real* had been, in some ways, even more surreal for her than learning her mother was Snow White. He is, in some respects, *exactly* the way she'd always imagined Hook to be: bloodthirsty, handsome, and never more dangerous than when he's being a gentleman. But Killian Jones is somehow *more*: he is bravery and cockiness personified. He's ridiculous, boyish, and so lost that she aches for him. And something about him makes him seem as *familiar* as a long-lost friend.

Emma's heart pounds, and for a moment the cold recedes and all she can feel is a giddy sort of joy bubbling inside of her. She wants to know, needs to see him one more time—

The thimble suddenly *glows*.

“What the hell?”

A tiny, shimmering, blue-green light rises from the thimble to hover in front of her astonished face; it is slightly larger than a firefly, and Emma can almost swear she hears the faint chiming of tiny bells. The light is unsteady and dim; but Emma thinks if she could reach out and touch it, it would be something warm and small but solid, cupped in the palm of her hand.

She arches an eyebrow instead. “Tinkerbell? Seriously?”

But the light doesn’t chime or resolve itself into a pint-size person with wings or anything. It just hovers in front of her, flickering, waiting.

“Can you help me find him?” she asks. She doesn’t really expect a response, and none is forthcoming. But the light floats away, down the beach, drifting like a dandelion seed on the wind. If there were a wind. Which there isn’t.

Emma tucks her hand back into her pocket and follows.

Her boots make no sound on the sand, not even the gritty crunch of glass she’d expected. Her feet don’t sink into it. The water, if that’s what it is, looks as flat and hard as a glass tabletop, and she can’t help but wonder, if she stepped on it, whether she could walk on it, too.

Or maybe it would swallow her up, like a black hole.

Emma stays away from the water.

Time passes. Or maybe it doesn’t. Whatever time sense she normally has is completely screwed up here, and with no landmarks or stars, it’s impossible to tell how much distance she covers or how quickly. The only reason she knows she’s moving at all is because the line of the water undulates very, very slightly where it meets the sand. The tiny light floats ahead serenely, though after a while she decides not to look at it directly. As the only pinpoint of light in the entire world, it leaves afterimages and phantom spots dancing across the black landscape. So mostly she watches the line of the water, and keeps her little will-o’-the-wisp in her peripheral vision.

Her exposed skin has long since gone numb from the cold, and she can’t really feel her fingers or toes. She keeps her hands tucked deep in her pockets and stumps along, wondering if you can get frostbite in a netherworld.

The silence weighs on her. It presses against her eardrums, until she has to clench her fists to keep herself from wiggling a finger in each ear in an attempt to clear them. The void around her smothers all external sound, so that her heartbeat becomes a bass drum, pounding in her head. She swears, after a while, that she can hear the blood rushing through her veins, the stretch and pull of her muscles and ligaments. She can even hear the tiny, annoying *pop* her left knee makes as it flexes—a little souvenir left from tackling Neal in Manhattan, most likely. Emma grimaces, feeling like the world’s most disgusting one-man band.

All she has left to drown out her awareness of herself and keep her company are her thoughts and regrets.

Maybe it's because this is practically hell, but for once it feels okay to admit: she's lonely. Emma has never been the kind of person who liked crowds. She'd learned the lesson early on in life that she was better off solo. There are days in Storybrooke when she feels overwhelmed by how many people surround her, count on her, *need* her. For the first time in her life, she's part of something bigger than just herself, and sometimes it's *exhausting*. Being alone usually relaxes her; it's a return to the status quo.

This place is *not* relaxing.

This is the wish for solitude gone horribly, horribly wrong—like a *Twilight Zone* episode, but without the entertainment factor.

Emma walks, and walks, and walks some more. She walks until she misses the Enchanted Forest, where everything was only a “bit of a journey” from everything else. She walks until she misses Boston and its tangled web of streets that make about as much sense as a knotted ball of string. The light drifts ahead of her, neither fast nor slow, in a more-or-less straight line that follows the still and silent water.

Oddly, she never tires or gets hungry. It seems like a small mercy in this place, where she doubts that she will find either food or sleep. The prospect of sitting down and resting the ice cubes that her feet have become isn't even tempting. The thought of being in that much contact with the ground, of possibly touching the sharp not-sand with her bare skin, sends a shudder of revulsion through her.

Still, she misses the *idea* of food and rest. For what seems like hours she attempts to drown out her thoughts by picturing all of her favorite foods and drinks, trying to remember what they taste like. Eventually she starts going through foods in alphabetical order, just to see how far she can get before she finds Hook. She makes it all the way through to zebra snack cakes and zinfandel before she gives up on that tactic.

Hours pass. Possibly days, or weeks; it's difficult for her to tell. She knows she's been walking *far* longer than should be humanly possible. Her world has become a metronome of placing one foot in front of the other, interspersed with the occasional bout of swearing under her breath.

Emma thinks longingly of home. She almost wishes that Mary Margaret had dived in after her—except that would probably have required her mother kissing Hook, too ... and *there* was a thought Emma never wanted to have, *ever* again. It's just that, aside from following the little blue-green light, she has no plan on how to find Hook. Finding bad guys is what Emma is really good at, but it's not like she can trace his credit cards or hack his email here. And when she does find him, she has no idea how they'll get home. She's fairly certain that Rumple had only booked a netherworld vacation for one, and Emma is a stowaway. Whether that will make any kind of difference, when it comes to getting them out of here, she has no clue.

She wonders how much time has passed. Whether Henry will come home tomorrow—or *came* home yesterday, or last week, or whatever—to find his mother in a coma, her lips glued to a golden half-naked pirate statue in her bed. It's good to know that she'll be able to have left him something *really* traumatizing to talk to Dr. Hopper about until she gets back, although if Regina finds out she'll probably have Emma's rights revoked on the basis of indecent exposure or ... something. Something horrible, probably; Regina is always so good at finding *something* horrible to accuse Emma of.

She thinks about Regina, who has now lost her witch of a mother and may be planning her revenge at that very moment. She thinks about her own mother, who is slowly coming back from the scary place Cora's death had sent her to; and her father, who is trying so hard to hold his wife together.

Eventually Emma is forced to think about Neal, only to find that she's already come to a few conclusions: he has a fiancée, he's moved on, he's *never* going to apologize so she might as well forget about it, and he's ... really trying with Henry. Which, if she's going to be honest, is the only thing she *truly* wants from him. She certainly doesn't want another chance with him, as Gold insinuated—probably as an attempt to manipulate her into doing something he wanted. All Emma really wants is for Neal to be there for Henry, to be a good father, to not ditch *him* the way he ditched her. Henry deserves a family that loves him and supports him, no matter what.

That topic exhausted, and no end to the beach in sight, Emma resigns herself to the last card in her mental Rolodex: Hook.

She had been wrong about Killian Jones, back on top of that beanstalk. Or, she'd been wrong in fearing she might be wrong about him. If she'd done things differently, offered to help him, trusted him ... Hook had told her, in Rumpelstiltskin's cell, that he wouldn't have abandoned her. At the time her instincts had told her that he was speaking the truth. She hadn't wanted to believe it, hadn't wanted to trust. But there are so many choices he's made, things he's said or done, that make her think he isn't entirely the villain he's painted himself as.

He's definitely still dangerous. And *definitely* obnoxious.

But Emma's found she kind of likes that about him. Maybe a little *too* much.

Emma has never believed in soul mates. Despite the evidence of her own parents, it seems logistically impossible for there to literally be a perfect match out there for every single person in existence, and even if there were—what are the odds that you will find that person? What if you're born on opposite sides of the planet, or hundreds of years apart? In the world Emma grew up in, there are no happily-ever-afters. Maybe it works differently in fairyland, but in her world, hearts just don't match up like two pieces of the same puzzle.

Still ... there's something about Killian Jones that resonates with her own heart. He *sees* her more clearly than anyone else ever has; and Emma realizes that she, perhaps, is the first person to see him in a very, very long time. When she looks in his eyes, she can see the pain and loss he tries so hard to hide, and the loneliness that he wears like armor. She recognizes it, because it's the same weight she has carried her entire life. He has gotten Emma to open

up more easily than anyone she's ever known, and the temptation to just spill her entire soul into his hand is nearly overwhelming. She's *never* felt that way about anyone before. It's exhilarating and terrifying.

Sort of like ... flying.

Speaking of—her guiding star seems a little farther ahead, so Emma picks up her pace. She doesn't catch up right away, however, and it's not until she breaks into a jog that she realizes that it's moving faster, as though all this time it's been floating down a stream and now it's met up with a swiftly flowing river.

The cold burns the back of her throat and her lungs until breathing is painful. All she can think, however, is: *Wonderful, I'll find him and my nose will be running*. She has no idea how long she'll have to maintain this pace—she just hopes that her little fairy-light doesn't get too much more zippy or she won't be able to keep up.

When she first sees him, Emma thinks it's her vision going wonky from the exertion: he's another shadow on top of a shadow in a world full of shadows. At first he looks like just a spot, and then the spot gets bigger and she can see the dull glint of metal, so she speeds up. He's laying facedown, his hook arm outstretched and his head pillowed on the leather sleeve of his right forearm. The toes of his boots are in the water, and Emma is disturbed to note that the water doesn't ripple around them. He doesn't move at all.

Her fairy light chooses this moment to get peppy, and it zooms across the empty beach to wheel dizzily around his prone figure. Finally it stops and hovers, growing brighter and brighter until it looks almost like a tiny blue-green star hanging in the empty sky. Emma bursts into a sprint.

Fifty paces away from him, she sees Hook suddenly roll over onto his back and squint up at the light above him, shielding his eyes from the glare. Relief pours through her, though she doesn't slacken her pace.

By forty paces he's stood up. He's dressed in his full pirate regalia once more: black leather from standing coat collar to pointy-toed boots. His cutlass hangs at his side, and his hook gleams in the light of the little star.

At thirty paces he reaches up and plucks it out of the air, cupping the light in the palm of his hand.

And at twenty paces away, just as she's about to call out to him, Hook balls his hand into a fist and crushes her star into dust.

Okay, before anyone freaks: it wasn't REALLY Tinkerbell. We know what fairies look like in OUAT. This was more like the spell that Charming used to find Snow.

(And that choice may have been deliberate ...)

Thank you to EVERYONE who has reviewed. I'm behind on responding, and for that I apologize.

Credit for the two lines of dialogue I blatantly stole from "Peter Pan" to J. M. Barrie.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Previously: Kissing cursed Hook didn't have quite the effect Emma had hoped. Instead she's been sucked into the cold, empty netherworld he now inhabits. She gets a little help finding him, led by a tiny floating light. However, when she finally does locate him, he crushes her light into dust.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by Peace Heather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Emma skids to a silent stop. Her heart is pounding in her chest, and her breath is burning in her lungs, but her disbelieving eyes are fixed on Hook's fist. He opens it, and tiny, black shards of stardust trickle from his hand to mingle with the rest at his feet. Then he wipes his hand on his coat, as if he's touched something vile and wishes to be rid of the sensation.

It was just a light, just a tiny little spark in the darkness of this god-awful place, but Emma feels its loss keenly, as if it had been a friend. She feels like he has just snuffed her own, personal guiding star. Her gaze lands on the cold, gritty stuff beneath her boots and she realizes, with rising horror, that this isn't sand—it's stardust. It's the shattered hopes and dreams of an uncountable number of worlds, broken into tiny, icy bits.

The temperature seems to drop around her, and if she'd been cold before, it's *nothing* to what she feels now. She pauses, hands on knees, trying hard to catch her breath and trying harder to ignore the burn of her lungs and throat from the glacial *not*-air. Her breathing is harsh in her own ears, but she knows that the sound of it is being swallowed up by the void around them.

"Why," she manages, even though every breath feels like she's swallowing razor blades. "Why did you do that?"

She's not sure that he can hear her; she can barely hear herself.

Then Hook turns to face her, and Emma stops worrying about breathing. She's far too shocked to breathe.

The look on his face is as bleak as the world around them. His fair skin seems unnaturally pale, bleached to the color of bone by the weird not-light, and his dark hair is black as ink. With the kohl rimming his eyes, he looks like a Tim Burton movie come to life. In any other place it would look silly, a goth caricature of a pirate; but here, now, the effect is horrific. It's as if this world has cut away the last of the softness from his features, and what is left is beautiful, sharp and lethal as a sword.

She's not entirely sure what she'd hoped for; after all, she's never been the kind of person to fling herself into someone's arms. But Killian looks as unapproachable as a fortress. There is *nothing* in his expression, not pleasure to see her, relief or even anger. His face is empty, almost soulless, and it chills Emma to the core.

Killian Jones has left the building, she thinks with a touch of hysteria. All that is left of him now is Captain Hook.

His gaze flicks over her with all the gentleness of a whip lash, and Emma feels as though he's not just seeing through her, he's stripping her down to her soul. She gets the impression that she's the absolute *last* person he wanted to see. *Well, that's too bad, buddy*, she thinks. After all, she's just spent what feels like more than a year of her life *walking* through hell to find him. So Emma straightens under that sharp scrutiny, tucks her hands back in her pockets, and stares right back.

"Why did you do that?" she repeats, in case he didn't actually hear her last time. The void seems to swallow her voice again, as if she's talking to him from the wrong side of a soundproof pane of glass, but she knows he hears her. His eyes narrow to dark slits.

"Bad form," he says, which really isn't the answer she was expecting. *His* voice doesn't seem to have any trouble traversing the not-air. His low, dark growl is the first thing she's properly heard in ages, and it sends a shiver skating down her spine.

"What?" she asks, because, *really*?

With slow, measured steps, Hook prowls closer, then begins to circle her slowly. He studies her, his gaze slicing up and down her body, but there's none of his usual lasciviousness in the act. No, this is detached and piercing, as though he's looking for chinks in her armor. In the darkness of the netherworld, his eyes are no longer blue, but black and empty as the sky.

Emma's played this game before, though. She lifts her chin and studies him right back—and she *really* doesn't like what she sees. From this close, she notices that his unnatural pallor is partially due to *frost*. It's painted over his skin in weird, branching patterns, as if it's following the veins below the surface. His hair is slick, the ends tipped with rime. Even his clothes seem coated in a thin layer of nearly invisible ice, like the stuff that lurks in patches in the middle of the road. Whenever Hook moves, the ice cracks and shatters, only to reform almost instantly.

She swallows hard, remembering that he'd been laying on the sand as if he'd dragged himself out of the water, the tips of his boots still in it. Suddenly, she's *really* glad she didn't try to walk on it.

The circle he's making around her tightens gradually, until he finally stops in front of her, just beyond arm's reach. Hook's hand rests lightly on the hilt of his sword and his lips turn up in a cold smile that doesn't touch his eyes. It's only at this moment, staring at it, that she realizes that this is the smile he usually reserves for everyone else. She's seen it before, but never once aimed at her.

It takes Emma less than a second to decide that she *hates it*. She kind of wants to punch it off his face. She wants his real smile back, the one that had a promise tucked up in the corner of his mouth, and lit a light in his eyes that seemed to beckon her home.

Maybe something of that longing shows on her face, because that cruel, awful smile widens in a way that only bares his teeth. Her fist, gone numb with the cold, abruptly itches.

"Remarkable," Hook says. "I would applaud your efforts but, well ..." He lifts his left arm in a gesture that somehow manages to be both explanatory and threatening. "Really, this is all quite impressive. But still, *very* bad form."

His hand, resting on the hilt of his sword, shifts fractionally in a way that makes Emma's pulse speed up in response. "Jones—"

"Hook," he says quietly, his voice laced with threat. "Call me Hook." He raises dark eyes, shadowed beneath black brows, to meet hers. "Better still, call me *Captain*."

Emma affects a confidence that she doesn't quite feel. She hates that he's scaring her. "I thought you liked it better when I called you J—"

"Have you ever seen someone gutted like a fish?" His voice is quiet, conversational. She gets the message loud and clear. *Jones* is off the table. She has a feeling that *Killian* wouldn't even get her a warning.

"What the hell has this place *done* to you?"

"You should know," he says softly. "After all, you did it."

Emma blinks at him, confused. "I'd ask if you're drunk, but I'm pretty sure this place isn't stocked with rum."

"No," he says, taking a step closer to her. "No rum."

Another step. "No light."

Another. "No warmth."

And another. "No laughter."

He circles around behind her, close but not touching. "No stories to be made. No adventures to be had."

His breath ghosts over her throat, and she realizes that it's cold. *He's* cold. It seems to emanate from him, as if he's carved of ice. "No *love*."

Then he moves past her, and Emma attempts to remember how to breathe.

“All the things a man longs for, thirsts for, craves—none of them exist here.” He pauses, half turns so that she can only see his face in profile. His voice is low, quiet, and deadly. “Which begs the question: what are *you* doing here?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. Kinda leapt without looking, I guess. I *thought* I was ... I don’t know, rescuing you.”

Hook chuckles, and if she’d ever thought that sound was mirthless before, she realizes now how wrong she was. *This* is mirthless. This is the laughter of a man without even the faintest glimmer of hope.

“Oooh, rescuing me, are you?” His voice is mocking, cruel. “Just a moment; I’ll have to fetch my reticule.”

Emma has no idea what a reticule is, but she’s pretty sure he doesn’t have one. “Fetch whatever the hell you want, but could you maybe stop with the creepazoid act, so we can figure out how to get out of this place?”

He spins on his heel to face her again. “So commanding. So beautiful. So dangerous. Really, it’s a very good likeness, even down to that stubborn chin. There’s just one small problem, darling.”

She frowns. He thinks her chin is stubborn? “Yeah? What’s that?”

“Emma is many things: beautiful, cunning, fierce, and stronger than steel, but she’s not stupid. The only way to get here is to be cursed, and while she might be rather ridiculously heroic, Emma Swan is not so bloody stupid that she’d throw herself on the Crocodile’s sword for the likes of me.”

She blinks at Hook and wonders if he’d believe her if she told him it hadn’t taken a sword—she’d thrown herself on his *face*. So to speak.

Only she doesn’t speak. Instead she just gapes at him, dazed at the way he’d listed off all those adjectives as if they were indisputable facts, as if they are part of the rock-solid foundation on which his worldview is built.

“Emma Swan would *never* come for me.” He sneers, and in one smooth movement he’s drawn his cutlass and leveled it straight at her heart. “Draw your weapon.”

“What? Whoa. Wait... what?” Emma’s running out of W-words, but she holds her ground.

“Draw your weapon, demon, or are you too much of a coward to face me?” His sneer has progressed to a full-on snarl.

“Okay, first of all ... not a demon. Second, did you seriously just call me a coward?”

“Well,” he says sardonically. “It was that or codfish.”

For the space of three seconds, Emma is annoyed enough that she actually considers leaving him there. Then she figures that being stuck in this place has probably driven him all the way crazy, and he'd been halfway there to start. There's no way that Hook could have known that she would come after him, and he certainly couldn't have known that she's been searching for him for-freaking-*ever*. All he's known, clearly, is that he was trapped here. If it had been the other way around, Emma's pretty sure she would have left sanity several exits back as well.

She holds her hands out in the universal gesture of *please-don't-stab-me*. "Jones—Hook! Hook, sorry—Look, I don't want to fight you—"

"Afraid to die?" His stance is loose, relaxed, his sword hand steady. Frost crawls down the blade, painting deadly patterns over the steel. "As I recall, the only way the real Emma Swan could defeat me in a swordfight was if I *let* her."

Okay, pal, that is it.

"You know, on second thought ..." Emma sets her jaw in determination and reaches for the dagger in her boot. "I think I might enjoy this."

She wishes she had a sword; she's been practicing with David's sometimes, down at the station when no one is around, figuring it might come in handy. And, aside from the occasional damage to a desk or chair or potted plant, it's weird how familiar a sword grip feels in her hand, as if she'd been born to wield a blade. The dagger feels even more familiar, though that's probably due to a couple of years' worth of self-defense classes that included lessons on knife fighting. Bounty hunting isn't exactly a dainty profession.

Even so, it sucks being the girl who missed the memo and brought a knife to a swordfight. The dagger is wickedly long, but it still shortens her reach, and she's not quite used to the lighter weight. In addition, Hook is taller than her, his arms longer, his cutlass twice the length of the measly bit of steel in her hand. Emma's palms would be damp with nerves, except it's far too cold for that. Her fingers feel numb, which is never a good way to *start* a fight.

Hook's mouth twists sardonically; he lifts his blade slightly, and then the dance begins. They circle each other warily, weapons ready, measuring, assessing, waiting to see which of them will lead.

Hook makes the first move without warning, slashing at her quickly, forcing her into a retreat. He follows it up with another blow toward her shoulder, then one aimed at her thigh. Emma blocks, parries, dances back out of reach. There's no whistle as his sword slices the air, and their blades clash in eerie silence. He's *fast*, too, faster than she remembers. She's not sure if it's because the cold isn't affecting him the way it is her, or if—and here's a scary thought—he wasn't kidding about letting her win before.

Emma's not sure how she feels about that or what it even means, and now—with him bearing down on her in cold, silent, fury—*really* doesn't seem like the right time to be analyzing that.

Her arm aches, her feet ache, but she tries not to show it as they circle each other once more.

The trouble, she realizes, is that she doesn't *want* to kill him or even injure him. She just wants Hook to *believe* her, which he clearly doesn't. Whatever hope of escape he had left is gone, and she's willing to bet that he's decided she's a hallucination. Short of knocking him on the head and tying him up, she's not sure how to get him to listen.

Shame there aren't any umbrella stands nearby.

Emma will be the first to admit that she can come across as stoic and emotionless. She'd be the last to admit that it's because she feels *too* much, and it's safer to lock it all away where no one can hurt her. But right now her heart *aches* for him. The man she's seen glimpses of all along, the man he keeps buried beneath the smooth-talking veneer of a cutthroat pirate, *Killian Jones* —who is as lost and as hurt and lonely as she has ever been, if not more — he is *worth* saving. Worth more than this cold, empty netherworld.

She's supposed to be the savior, right? Well, she decides, she's going to save him or die trying.

Dying, unfortunately, seems to be the most likely outcome.

He spins, his coat flaring out dramatically, almost distracting her as his cutlass comes crashing down onto the blade of her hurriedly upthrust dagger. The force of it staggers her slightly, but she's been expecting that move, he'd used it before.

What she hadn't been expecting was for him to bring his hook around and slash it down, through the thick leather of her jacket, to embed the sharp tip in her unprotected shoulder. Emma cries out, her arm going numb, and wrenches herself free, stumbling backward. She touches the wound in disbelief, then meets his gaze. He waits several feet away, twirling his sword idly. He holds up his hook and twists his arm so the blood on it gleams dully in the not-light.

"What the hell was *that*?" she demands, her eyes wide with shock.

Hook gives her a one-shouldered shrug and a mocking smirk. "Well, I *am* a pirate."

"What happened to liking a fair fight?"

"Oh, I do," he says, utterly unrepentant. "My not killing you just then? That was me being a gentleman."

There's an awful feeling in the pit of her stomach, as Emma realizes just how much he'd *let* her win before. Her shoulder hurts like a bitch, but she grits her teeth and tries to ignore it. She really hopes he hasn't had time to poison it.

"Two weapons against one hardly seems fair," she says, staying out of his reach.

"Ah, well, you see you're not real. That's not exactly good form either, is it? Taunting a man with ... well, *you*."

"There's no taunting!"

His eyes drift over her, his lids heavy—not with the light flirtation he usually displays, but something deeper, darker, and hungry. “Isn’t there?” he asks, voice quietly intense. “I had thought ...” His voice deepens, roughens. “I had thought it would be Milah.”

Emma swallows hard, her heart sinking. *Of course*, she thinks. *Of course he wanted it to be Milah who came for him.*

Then he gives a bitter, mocking laugh. “But no. This is worse. ‘Tis far better to torment me with my greatest failure.” His expression is bleak and haunted. “I’ve betrayed my own heart. I deserve my fate.”

“Killian—”

She realizes her mistake half a second too late. Hook growls and launches himself at her so quickly that Emma has no time to think. All she can do is run. Ignoring the pain in her shoulder and the burning of her lungs, she whirls and takes off back the way she came. The void swallows the sound of their footsteps, the harsh panting of her breath fills her ears, and he is a silent fury behind her. She has no idea how close he might be, so she runs as if she has hell on her heels.

His hook snags the back of her jacket, tears into the thick fabric, and yanks. Emma falls backward. Her legs skid out from beneath her and she hits the frozen ground so hard that her tailbone probably isn’t going to thank her, later. Instinct kicks in, however, and she rolls blindly away from him.

Sensing how close he still is, she lashes out wildly with her dagger, only to have him kick her wrist hard enough to send it flying out of her clumsy grip. There’s a flash of metal in her peripheral vision, so she rolls again, frantic to get out of his reach—

—and plunges into the dark water.

Chapter End Notes

First, I massively apologize for the lateness of this chapter. When I wrote earlier and said that the story was finished, I really wasn't lying. It is finished. However, as I was editing chapter 9, I realized that it was pretty skeletal, and that it needed some major work for it to really accomplish what I needed it to.

So I started editing. Then I started rewriting sections. What STARTED as a seven page chapter became EIGHTEEN pages. Then I realized I needed to cut it up and rearrange how the chapters flowed for it to work.

The long and short of this is, this story is now an extra chapter longer than I'd originally thought. I don't **think** you'll complain. Anyway, the rewrites and the editing are the

reason why this is later than it should have been. I'm sorry about that, though I think the story will be much better for it.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma found Hook in the Netherworld. He believes her to be some kind of trick or demon and attacks her. In an effort to escape, Emma ends up falling into the water.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Cold.

Cold.

Cold like she's never known before penetrates her clothes, her skin. Nothing natural is as cold as she is right now.

The shock stops her heart, stops her lungs, stops even her *brain*.

The not-water—because water doesn't grip, it doesn't grasp or pull or push or press, and whatever *this* is, it's doing all of that and more—drags her deeper into its icy clutches. There is no light here. No hope. There isn't even the welcoming embrace of death to end the torment.

Emma *screams* and it steals her voice, too. It slithers into the wound in her shoulder and takes even her pain. All it leaves her is *despair*, thick and dark and choking. Every failure, every regret, every humiliation, every moment of her life when she has felt alone or abandoned or miserable, fills her mind and her heart until even her soul feels as if it will be crushed under the weight of it all.

... She is three and the only mother she's ever known is informing her that she's being sent away because they're going to have a real baby ...

... She is five and the social worker is shaking her head as she picks her up from the latest in a series of homes. She doesn't understand why none of the mommies want her ...

... She is twenty-eight and her little boy is laying in a hospital bed because she was going to run away and she didn't believe him ...

... She is sixteen and failing school and no one cares. No one even notices when she runs away. No one comes looking for her. No one ...

... She is twenty-four and spending Christmas Day staking out the rented house of a bail jumper, and watching the family in the house next door celebrating around their tree, together. They have a little boy who is about the age her baby is now and she pretends for just a moment that that's him and she's watching him opening his gifts. Her coffee is cold ...

... She is nine and she's got detention again because she beat up Millie Parker for calling her an unwanted orphan. She sits at her desk and reads Peter Pan and cries when Peter tells how his mother shut him out and she realizes that Millie was right and she is a motherless orphan after all ...

... She is eighteen and walking out of prison, and all she has is a bag and a set of keys to a stolen car and some clothes that don't really fit, and there is no one to meet her and nowhere to go ...

... She is ten and too thin and hungry, and she runs away for the first time. No one notices for two days. It's a cop who finds her living in a hollowed-out tree in the park who eventually returns her home. She's moved to another home, after that ...

... She is twenty-seven and she's spending her birthday alone in front of her TV, watching The Princess Bride and drinking rum alone ...

... She is twelve and she's got her first period, and she's so so so scared that she's dying so she screams and her foster sister bursts in on her in the bathroom and sees and starts laughing like it's the funniest thing she's ever seen ...

... She is twenty-eight and there's this guy, and he's kind and funny, and handsome, only he's dying in her arms and she can't stop it ...

... She is seventeen and ten seconds ago she was in love and going to Tallahassee with twenty-thousand dollars and starting a new life and ten seconds later she's going to jail and the man she loved is gone and he left her. And she is terrified and so so so alone and angry and no one wants her. No one needs her. No one loves her ...

... She is barely eighteen and she is laying in a hospital bed, in the prison infirmary, and after just over eight hours of grueling labor she can hear her baby crying. She wants to hold him, but they told her it'd be better if she didn't. His cries are going away, out of the room, and she can only lay there and sob while a guard watches dispassionately by the door and a nurse finishes cleaning her up like she's a mess someone made. How would she take care of a baby anyway? She's too young, too stupid, and broken. He should be somewhere where he's wanted the way she never was. There's someone who wants him out there, who will love him the way she never could, and take care of him the way she never will. And anyway she signed the papers three months ago, and he's gone and she doesn't even know his name—

Henry.

His name, she thinks, with sudden clarity, is *Henry*.

And *he* wanted *her*. He had loved *her*. Believed in *her* when no one else ever had. When anyone else, looking at her, only ever saw a broken thing. An ex-thief. An unwanted kid. A lonely, damaged woman. Henry had taken one look at her and seen a *hero*.

And then Mary Margaret, who had believed in her when Emma couldn't believe in herself. Who had called her family before they knew they really were. Who had loved her even before she'd known that Emma was her daughter.

Emma has a family. She has her son's love, and her parents' love. She's not alone anymore. And maybe it's selfish, maybe it's greedy to want more, but she *does*.

Killian.

She's here for Killian.

And if this is her despair she's drowning in, she can only imagine that his is a hundred times *worse*. To be driven so far to darkness, to have wandered as alone and lost as he has for so long ... Something Neal said to her, back in New York comes to her now—how, if he'd come straight to her world from the Enchanted Forest, he'd be a couple of hundred years old by now. And if Milah was Gold's wife, and Killian had loved Milah, how old does that make Hook?

Just how *long* has he been alone?

No wonder he's gone off the deep end.

All it takes, sometimes, is for one person to love you. To reach out a hand, or hop on a bus, to look at you with hope in their eyes and that certain, unwavering belief that *you* are the hero they've been waiting for all along, even if you don't feel particularly heroic. One person who, when everything is dark and you're lost and alone, is willing to *find* you, no matter how dark the place you might be.

When she looks in Killian's eyes, Emma can see the sort of man he once was. A heart that could love as deeply as his has loved can't be all bad. There's still good in him, buried deep. It's unreasonable, impossible, but it's why she's here. Because sometimes your heart just chooses, and Emma's, against all logic, has chosen *him*.

Magic *explodes* from her, sending out ripples through the *not*-water. Whatever it is, it *recoils* from her, its grasp on her loosening enough that she can claw her way back to the surface and from there, back up on land. Her hands touch the rough surface of the shore and her skin seems to freeze to it, but she hauls herself out anyway, soaked to the bone, ice already forming, cracking as she moves. Emma *crawls* out of the water, her hair a freezing, heavy weight on her back. She forces herself to touch the stardust, even though it cuts her palms and fingertips when she digs them into it, hauling herself further onto the shore, until she's entirely free of the ocean of despair.

Slowly, Emma rolls onto her back. Prying her eyes open, she stares up at the empty void of the sky, her lashes heavy and rimmed with frost. Her lungs don't appear to be working;

everything in her feels frozen solid. The weight of her clothes alone is almost crushing. If this were her world, she'd be a meat popsicle.

On the bright side, she thinks, it's warmer *out* of the water.

And she's not dead. Or dying. Yet. So. There's that.

"There's no escape that way. Believe me, I've tried."

It takes a supreme effort of will for her to turn her head to look at him. Hook is standing a few paces away, sword still in hand, watching her warily.

Emma suddenly coughs. Water—or *whatever* this hellish stuff is—bubbles out of her nose and mouth; it feels like she's choking on needle sharp icicles. Her stomach heaves, and this time she rolls over onto her side in a fucking hurry, heaving up lungfuls of black liquid. When it doesn't freeze, but pools together like mercury and runs back down to merge into the ocean, Emma wants to vomit all over again.

"What the ... *hell* ... *is* that stuff?" Her voice is a hoarse rasp in her own ears, and each breath wheezes in and out of her lungs. "And why ... why would you go in it *on purpose*?"

"For the same reason you did, I imagine," he says. "Escape."

"Yeah, well ... you were ... trying really hard to kill me," she gasps. "Sorry if I wasn't ... exactly cooperating."

"Who says I'm done trying?" His voice is quietly ominous.

Emma closes her eyes, exhausted now beyond the telling of it. Her lashes are probably going to freeze together, but right now she couldn't care less. "Could you just ... just give me a minute or two? And can we please ... move this cage match ... away from the fucking water?"

Hook is silent, so she takes that as an affirmative. She knows he won't kill her right now, while she's down. For all that he's gone over to the dark side, there's still that streak of honor in him that won't let him stab her in the back. Although, she's equally certain that if she doesn't get back up again soon, he'll pluck her off the ground and set her on her feet, whether she likes it or not.

The brief reprieve gives her a moment to *think*, but her thoughts are slow and muddled. This is wrong, all wrong. Emma had thought, when she kissed him, that it would be easy. Killian would wake up, and then ... well, probably not happily ever after or anything, but *something* good would have happened. On the other hand, she also knows that sometimes just breaking the curse isn't enough to fix everything. If that were the case, everyone in Storybrooke would be back in the Enchanted Forest right now and she'd have never even met Hook.

The fact that that thought makes her heart ache only confirms the realization she'd had a few moments ago. He may not want her; hell, he might *never* want her. He may still be in love with the ghost of a dead woman, but Emma's heart has chosen him. So she's going to save him.

Whether *he* likes it or not.

Somehow she's got to get him to listen to her, to believe, but she's so frozen and clumsy there's no way in hell she's going to beat him in a swordfight.

Time to use the *other* weapons in Emma Swan's arsenal.

"Okay," she says, tiredly. "Let's get this over with."

Her first attempt at sitting up is an epic failure—she's frozen to the ground. Ice cracks, and she manages to get her right arm free, but the rest of her is stuck fast. A second try frees her left arm and one leg, but she can't get enough leverage to pry herself up any further. She rolls her eyes in Hook's direction.

"Don't suppose you could play the gentleman one more time, and give a girl a hand up?"

He bows slightly at the waist, mocking. "Of course." But he doesn't put away his sword. He takes two steps toward her and bends down, offering her his hook to help her up.

Emma reaches up with both hands and grabs it. The minute she feels herself start to pull free, however, Emma locks her hand around the brace. With every ounce of her weight behind the move, she simultaneously *yanks* on his arm, catches his left boot with one leg and brings her outside leg up to slam her knee into the back of his.

Caught off balance, and with the choice of breaking his arm at the elbow or impaling himself on his own sword, Hook goes down face first. Without releasing his left arm, Emma rolls half on top of him, plants her knee in the small of his back, and then twists his hook free of its locking mechanism. While he's making out with the ground again, she manages to stagger upright and put several yards between them.

When he gets back to his feet, he's *furious*.

"You'll regret that, demon." Hook's hand tightens on his sword and he crouches slightly, ready to charge.

"You take one more step and your hook is gonna be a sinker," Emma says. She cocks back her arm, ready to throw it out into the black water. He immediately freezes, just as she suspected he would.

"You're bluffing," he says.

"Do I look like I'm bluffing?" Her fingers are numb, and she's frozen to the bone, but she's got enough determination in her right now that she bets she could pitch this one right out of the stadium.

Hook studies her warily, then seems to realize that she's *really* not kidding. He takes a step back slightly, rocking down onto his heels. "Emma," he says placatingly, an insincere smile plastered on his face. It's only marginally better than the last one and she *still* wants to punch him for it. "Let's not be hasty."

“Oh, so *now* I’m Emma? A minute ago I was a demon.”

“You’re still a demon,” he sneers. “Give it back.”

“Not on your life, pal. Not until you hear me out. I see you even *twitch* in my direction, and I will throw this out so far it’ll take you a hundred years to find it.”

“I’ve got the time,” he says, dryly.

“Yeah,” Emma says, and she can’t help the sadness that tinges her voice. “But now I know what’s waiting in there, and you and I both know if you have to go swimming again, you’ll never come back out.”

“Cozening wench,” he snarls. She has no idea what that means but she gets the general drift.

“Well, what did you expect? You’ve left me no *choice!*” she says, and realizes she’s shouting. Not that she cares. “I’m *freezing!* I’m miserable. I’m *bleeding!* I just had to relive a *lifetime* of failures. I am *not* going to add you to my list!”

“That hook is all I have left!”

“*No! It’s! NOT!*”

Her shout is loud enough that somehow it seems to break the sound barrier. Even Hook looks momentarily taken aback. A layer of ice breaks off of her and shatters on the ground at her feet.

Finally Hook retreats a pace, glaring at her with such malice that, if looks could kill, Emma would be nothing more than dust herself.

“What do you want?” he asks quietly. She rolls her eyes.

“I *want* to go home. I *want* to be warm again. I *want* to be laying on a beach someplace hot, sweating my ass off in a bikini, and drinking the world’s biggest margarita. I *want* Regina and Mr. Gold to stop acting like childish assholes. I want *you* to stop being so freaking stupid. I *want* a happy fucking ending! But we don’t always *get* what we want!” Emma’s grip on his hook tightens reflexively and he quickly puts away his sword.

Then she sighs. “However, I will *settle* for you just listening to me. Hear me out, that’s all I’m asking. And when we’re done, I will give you your hook back.”

For the first time, his face shows an emotion other than cold fury. “Why do this?” He stares at her, confused.

Emma takes a deep, painful breath and lets it back out again. “Because I came here to save you, you idiot. It took me forever to find you. And I’m *not* leaving without you.”

She waits, staring him down, letting him see that she is dead-fucking-serious.

Hook's jaw flexes, and he closes his eyes briefly. Then he looks back up at her through the shadows of his thick lashes.

"Well, then. I'm listening." He crosses his arms over his chest and strokes his frost-silvered beard, and Emma, who has a fucking PhD in reading body language, knows that he may be listening, but he's not willing to hear her. Not yet.

Emma lets her arm drop anyway, but makes sure she's still in a position to toss his hook into the water if he decides to *stop* listening. Her shoulder hurts like hell where he stabbed her, but she's so cold it's mostly just a numb ache. She *ought* to be half-dead from hypothermia, or more likely frozen completely solid, but apparently the rules of this world are a little different. Eternal suffering, isn't that what the Blue Fairy had said? Freezing to death would probably defeat the purpose of the punishment.

Unlike him, the ice that cracks off of her doesn't reform, and although she can't see her face, it doesn't feel like it's covered in frost. Her hair, on the other hand, weighs a metric ton. Emma shakes her head and feels the ice shatter and fall silently around her, hopefully not taking her hair with it. Vanity isn't really one of Emma's sins, but she loves her hair, and the last thing she needs right now is to end up bald.

Hook's mouth seems to tilt up at the corner in spite of himself. "Ice queen is a good look for you, darling. Perhaps you should wear it a bit longer."

That's half the problem though, Emma thinks. They ice themselves over, wear it like armor; wall themselves up, shut everyone out, and in doing so, they never seem to heal properly. Their wounds go numb until they can't feel them anymore, except for that empty ache that nothing seems to fill.

Even though she knows it will hurt like hell, Emma thinks that maybe it's time to thaw.

"I meant it, you know," she says. She holds up his hook. "This isn't all you have left."

"The crocodile destroyed my love," Hook says. "When he tore out Milah's heart he might as well have taken mine. Instead he took my hand and my happiness, and left me with nothing but pain and *fury*. I picked up that hook and stabbed him with it. He only laughed in my face. I swore that I would shake his hand with my hook, then tear him with it, limb from limb. So, *yes*, it *is* all I have left."

Emma's own heart aches for him, knowing how much he's lost. She takes a deep breath, steeling herself, and then lets herself do what she's wanted to do almost from the moment she met him.

"When I first came to Storybrooke," she says, her voice quiet, "there was ... this guy. Graham. He was ... he was one of the kindest men I've ever known, and I think ... I think if we'd had more time, if ... if *he'd* had more time, that I could have loved him. He made me feel ... hope. Hope that, even though my heart was ... even though *I* was broken, that I could learn to love again."

She turns the hook over in her hands; the metal is freezing to the touch and her fingers, cold as they are, actually seem to warm it slightly wherever she touches it. Frost crawls back over her fingerprints, but for a moment, she can see her dim reflection in the metal.

“One night we were at the station, and ... he kept saying that he didn’t think he had a heart. That someone—Regina—had taken it. I thought ...” Emma feels tears welling at the corners of her eyes, and her throat tightens around the words.

“I thought he was ... I don’t know. Drunk. Or joking or ... I didn’t know. I - I didn’t know that hearts were something that could literally be stolen. And then ... then one minute we were kissing and the next ... he just ... he just *collapsed* in my arms. And he died, right there on the cold floor. I think ... I think Regina must have crushed his heart because she didn’t like that he wanted someone other than her. That he w-wanted ...”

Emma chokes on the word. This is *hard*, harder than fighting a dragon or facing an ogre. But she makes herself do it, because she thinks, maybe, he *needs* her to. When she looks back up at him, he’s dropped his arms to his sides, and his face is carefully neutral. She’s crying, but the tears are freezing on her cheeks, hard as diamonds. Emma snuffles and makes herself keep talking.

“And it *hurt*. It hurt *so* much. Because for a moment I was really, *really* happy. For a moment someone had chosen *me*. And afterwards ... Afterwards, all I could think was that it was my fault. That if it hadn’t been for me, if I hadn’t ... If I’d just *believed him*, or trusted him or ... if I hadn’t come to Storybrooke at all ... then he’d still be alive. And that ... I just wanted him to be alive. To live. Even if it wasn’t with me.”

A sob breaks free and she has to pause to sniff again and wipe her numb nose on her ice-crusted sleeve.

“I hate Regina for what she did to him. For what she did to *everyone*. For the curse, and my family and everything that she has taken from me. But ... if I give in to that hate, then what makes me so different from her? She tore apart *worlds* to get her revenge, and never mind what it’s done to us, all it’s gotten *her* is pain and more misery. And if I were to try to get even with her somehow, Henry would *never* forgive me and I can’t lose that. I can’t lose him.” A sob wells up in her throat even at the thought, but she forges on. “Killing her would gain me nothing, and I would lose *everything*. Revenge, vengeance—no matter how much you can justify it, no matter how much the other person might really, *really* deserve it—it leaves you with *nothing*. Just ... this.”

Emma waves her hand at the empty sky and the beach of shattered hopes and the sea of despair. “Just this. So you’re wrong. This hook? It’s not all you have. You’re *alive*. You have your heart, even if it’s broken. You have your memories and even though she’s gone, you have the knowledge that Milah *loved* you. You had that, and you could have it again. You have a chance to heal. But you can’t do it if you’re bound and determined to stay here, to cling to all of *this*.”

Hook doesn’t respond. His eyes are as black and dead as a shark’s. But he’s still, so still that she thinks maybe he’s iced where he stands.

Emma wipes the frozen teardrops from her face and wishes she had a tissue or something for her nose. She hates crying; whenever she cries she feels like she's releasing all the tears she's pent up for months or years, and this is no exception. She's crying right now for Graham and Henry, for all the time she's lost with her family, for Neal, and even a little for Regina. But most of all she's crying for Killian, because he's lost, just like her—only she's afraid that maybe he doesn't want to be found.

That maybe Gold was right, and Hook doesn't want to be saved.

“Could you, I don't know, *say* something?” she demands, finally.

Hook's chin jerks infinitesimally, and when he speaks, his voice is tightly controlled, as if he's holding back some huge emotion. “Are you finished?”

She thinks about it, but in addition to the tears she feels like she's just let out all the words she's stored up for the last year, too, and now she's running on empty. Emma nods and takes a ragged breath, getting herself back under control.

“My hook then, if you please,” he says, holding out his hand.

Sighing, Emma crosses the space between them, swiping at her eyes to get rid of the last of her tears. When she's within arm's reach, she hands him his hook. He takes it from her and reattaches it, though his eyes linger on it contemplatively for a moment. Emma sighs again and turns away from the water, wanting to put as much space between herself and it as possible.

Hook moves so fast she doesn't even register what's happening until it's almost done. He's grabbed her and twisted them both around, so that she's leaning dangerously far backward and his hand fisted in the collar of her jacket is literally the only thing holding her up right now. Her feet scrabble on the ground for purchase and she can feel the ends of her hair dipping into the sea.

Worse, he's got his hook against the left side of her throat, its sharp, ice-cold point pressed like a promise in the soft hollow just beneath her ear.

Emma looks up into his black, black eyes, and all she can see is her own terrified face staring back.

Chapter End Notes

I am a feels pirate. I am here for all your emotions. Hand them over and no one gets hurt...

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma took a dip in the netherworld's swimming pool and experienced the literal version of drowning in misery. Her realization that she loves him is enough to save her from the water, but when she crawls out, Hook is still in evil mode. Emma, in a last ditch effort to try to reach him, opens up and shares her own pain, trying to convince him that revenge is a terrible thing to live for.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by Peaceheather

I had Chapter 11 all written. Then I started editing it and I realized that it sucked. I tried to fix it and ended up with a chapter with as much visual appeal as Frankenstein's monster, if it was falling apart at the seams.

So I trashed it and started from scratch. One chapter then expanded to two, again. After watching Sunday's episode I'm really glad that I did start over. I think there was a reason I wasn't feeling the previous version. Unfortunately work and life got in the way over the weekend, so I only just finished editing it.

Hopefully I'll have 12 ready to go by tomorrow.

Hook's expression is intent, almost predatory, as though he's hunting for something.

"Be still," he says softly.

Emma complies—she *really* doesn't want to go for another swim.

Hook's eyes narrow as he studies her face. She doesn't know what he's looking for; some sign that she's a demon still, maybe; who knows? Emma feels her pulse racing, but she sets her jaw and stares right back at him. Her face is made of stone, but if eyes are the windows to the soul, she leaves hers open, for him.

He's never been able to resist an open window.

She waits, trusting him not to drop her, willing him to *see* her and believe.

Hook's gaze flickers to her shoulder, and Emma's aware of the dull, low ache there. The water was cold enough that the injury itself has mostly gone numb, but her shoulder muscle hurts like a bitch. Her jacket is plastered to it, and every time she shifts slightly it pulls against the wound. Her hands are wrapped around his leather coat sleeve, but her right arm has begun to shake from the strain on it. He notices, and abruptly withdraws his hook from her throat to stare at her hands.

"Where did you get *that*?" he asks, his voice low and hoarse.

Emma follows his gaze, then slowly uncurls her left hand from its death grip. She holds it up so they both can see the thimble, which seems to have frozen to the tip of her finger. "You gave it to me," she says. "Just before you turned to gold."

He blinks, like a man still half asleep and dreaming. "Emma?"

"Hey, handsome," she says, not sure whether she should relax her guard yet or not. "Was kinda hoping you'd figure that out."

"I had to be certain," he says, frowning. "The water—"

Hook swears and jerks her upright. Emma's so relieved that she sags against him, and he has to half carry her up the beach. Once they're far enough away that she's not worried either of them will just fall in, Emma tries to stand on her own again. Her shoulder bumps his, and she hisses as it jars her aching arm.

"You're hurt," he says, and she's surprised by the thread of anger beneath his words.

"It's fine," she says, too tired to point out that it's his stupid fault that she's injured in the first place.

"No, it's not," he says quietly. "May I?"

She doesn't say anything, just gives a one-shouldered shrug and fumbles for the zipper on her coat. His hand arrests hers, pushing it out of the way. He reaches for the zipper pull and tugs gently. Watching Hook unzip her coat with that dangerous, intent look on his face leaves her feeling breathless and warm inside. "Clever device, this."

"Says the guy who does up all those buttons and buckles one-handed," Emma says.

His mouth twists into something that's a touch too bitter to be a smile. "Practice, darling." His tone is oddly polite and distant, and Emma peers into his face, trying to find a trace of the Killian Jones she knows. If he's there, she thinks he must be sleeping.

Emma helps him peel the leather away from her shoulder, wincing as it pulls on the wound. Ice snaps and falls, and Emma grits her teeth against the sudden pain. There's a hole in her shoulder, big enough she could probably stick her finger in it. Blood cakes the skin around it and partway down her arm. Ice rims the hole, but it's already begun to bruise and swell around the edges. It's no wonder her right arm feels weaker than the left.

“Yep, that’s gonna leave a mark.” Emma attempts to inject some levity into her voice but it falls flat.

“I could have killed you.” His face is coldly furious, but this time it seems to be directed inward rather than at her.

“I know,” she says seriously. “But you didn’t.”

“My apologies.” Hook shakes his head slightly, as if he’s not quite awake. The frost still paints sharp patterns over his face and tips his hair, and when he touches the mottled skin around her wound his fingers are inhumanly cold. Emma can’t help but flinch slightly. He withdraws his hand and scowls at the rime that coats the rings on his fingers. “I am ... not myself. I think I was ... Was I dreaming?”

Once more his gaze finds hers. “Am I dreaming?”

“If you are, I really wish you’d wake up,” Emma says.

He shakes his head again and focuses once more on her shoulder. “That wants bandaging. Here.” He fishes around in the pocket of his coat and comes up with a black handkerchief. It’s only a moment’s work to crush most of the ice from it; he folds it and presses it against the wound. “Your coat will serve to hold it in place, I think.” Together they get her jacket back on, and Emma zips it with clumsy fingers. Between the ice and the blood and the tightness of her sleeve, the makeshift bandage stays where it belongs.

“Thanks,” she says and tucks her hand into her pocket to help take some of the weight off her arm.

He doesn’t smile, though. Instead he moves away a few paces and stares out at the water. “How long have I been here?”

Emma shrugs. “I don’t know. Not much longer than me, I think.”

He looks at her sharply. “You followed me? How?” Once more his gaze rakes over her as though searching for more injuries. “Did he curse you for assisting me?”

“Who, Gold?”

His answering nod holds more than a hint of a threat, and she realizes how tense he is. “No,” she says. “No, I - I followed you on my own.”

“How then—unless you were cursed as well?”

Now it’s Emma’s turn to blink. “I don’t know. I ... You were turning to gold; and in Henry’s book a kiss usually breaks the curse, so ... I kinda ... kissed you.” She blushes, which turns out to be painful with her face already so cold.

“You kissed me.” His voice holds no inflection, not even the hint of a tease. She’d thought that Hook would make it into a joke, or a come-on, like he had when she’d grabbed him in the giant’s lair to stop him from triggering the trip wire. But his voice sounds so dead, she

can't tell if he's incredulous or disgusted or what. Somehow, that hurts more than she thought it would.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time." She looks down at her boots and kicks at the stardust under her feet. She instantly regrets that decision when her numb toes meet the frozen ground.

"True love's kiss ..." Hook's mouth twists bitterly and he turns away from her to gaze out at the black horizon. "True love's kiss only works if it's true love."

His quiet words hold all the physical force of a punch to the gut. Emma sucks in a breath, holds it, and mentally counts to ten. When she finally speaks her voice is steady enough, though smaller than she would like. "Look, I - I know I'm not Milah ... but supposedly I'm the product of true love. I thought ... I don't know. I thought maybe that would count for something." He doesn't even look at her, and Emma feels like crying again.

"Obviously I was wrong," she mutters.

"The road to hell is paved with noble intentions. Believe me, I know," he says. "Not that I don't appreciate the gesture, but I'd rather you hadn't done something so foolish."

"Didn't really have the option of asking, did I? I couldn't just ... abandon you."

"You've done so before," he says.

"Yeah, well ..." Emma rubs her chest, where her pendant used to lay. "I was dumb."

Hook finally turns to look at her, eyebrow arched.

"I should have trusted you," she says. "I shouldn't have left you up there."

"You'd have been wrong."

Emma frowns. "Huh?"

"I have been many things in my time. But I'm not a hero, never was. I was an arrogant lad, and a man brimful of conceit. I had been lost for a long time. I didn't know what love truly was, until Milah. The only person I'd ever loved until then was myself. But in her eyes, I was something else: a hero, like in all the tales I'd ever heard. For a time, I fancied it might be true. Then I lost her, and all my happiness died with her."

He takes a step toward her, stops and clenches his hand into a fist. "I swore my revenge: him or me. I've traveled worlds, crossed oceans and lands beyond your world's ken. Lived longer than should even be possible. I've stolen, lied, killed, even tortured. I would have sold my own soul to ensure his death. What makes you think I wouldn't have betrayed you to get what I wanted?"

She'd known this. Up there, standing in the giant's treasure vault, she'd known this. Emma *knew* the story of Captain Hook. Maybe her version included a real crocodile, but she'd known he couldn't be trusted. And yet ...

"I told you before. I'm pretty good at knowing when someone's lying to me," she says. "I wasn't really sure then. You ... I didn't want to trust my instincts. I didn't want to believe it. But they kept telling me that—you know, after you dropped the stupid blacksmith thing—that you only told me the truth."

"Aye, and I would have told you the truth right up until you'd taken me back to Storybrooke," Hook says, snidely flippant. His expression hardens. "You were a means to an end."

It'd be easy to believe him. After all, he's telling the truth, as far as it goes. He's just not telling *all* of it.

"Okay," Emma says and forces her numb legs to reduce some of the distance between them. "So why'd you come to me when you were hurt? You could have crawled off anywhere else to lick your wounds. Why'd you come to me?"

Hook's scowl darkens. "You shouldn't have followed me. I know how my story ends."

"And how's that?"

"Like this. Defeated by the crocodile. Consumed by darkness. Forever alone."

"What happened to revenge? I thought you were the guy who never gave up," Emma says.

"I tasted it," he says. "In your New York, before I made my way back to Storybrooke. I thought it would be sweet, but ... it was bitter."

Several things click in Emma's head. "That's why you didn't attack Gold. Why you were just spying on him. You ... you *weren't* trying to kill him."

Hook laughs, but there's no joy in it. "Oh, don't delude yourself, darling. I would have attempted it again, eventually. But I'll admit I wasn't in quite such a rush. It's a queer thing to think you've finished your life's work, only to find the satisfaction fleeting; odder still to realize that once it's past, you've nothing else to live for. Then to discover yourself back at the start, no closer than you were when you'd begun—let's just say that all of *this* is no more than I had expected." He gestures vaguely at the empty netherworld around them. "And no more than I deserve."

"So you're what? Giving up?" Emma's fists clench until her frostbitten fingers ache. She wants to punch some sense into him, or shake him. All this time she thought he'd been hell bent for revenge, but the truth is so much worse. Emma thinks that this is what defeat sounds like. She'd never have guessed that someone else's defeat could hurt her so much, too.

"Weren't you the one espousing the merits of forgiveness a moment ago? I seem to recall quite the lecture on the drawbacks of vengeance."

"Not forgiveness. I ... I can't expect you to *forgive* something like that. Or forget it. And I wouldn't want you to. But you can't make revenge your *entire* life."

“It’s been my life for the last three hundred years. You’d have me relinquish my reason for existence, just like that? And for what? What else is there?” He sounds weary, as if he feels every one of those three centuries. The look he gives her is unreadable, but not challenging; almost as if he hopes she’ll provide him with an answer.

Emma had wondered. She’d guessed. Hell, she’d known, somewhere deep down, thanks to fucking Neal and his random anecdotes. But there’s a *huge* difference between suspecting that someone is hundreds of years old, and actually hearing such a staggering number come out of their mouth.

When she’d gotten out of prison, Emma had spent two years looking for Neal. That was how she’d gotten into bail bonds in the first place. For a while she’d followed leads, listening for any rumor of him, going from city to city, trying to track him down. And then one day, she’d woken up and it just ... hadn’t seemed that important anymore. He was gone. Her child was gone. She could continue to cling to the past, or she could try to find herself a future.

Only her future, like her present, had been nothing if not bleak. She’d worked because it was something to do, it was a way to fill all the empty hours. It wasn’t until Henry had found her that Emma had discovered a better reason to keep going.

How can her pathetic little life compare to the epic tragedy that is the life and times of Killian Jones? A few years is a drop in the bucket compared to the ocean of grief he’s sailed for more lifetimes than she can imagine. She’d hoped ... but this seems as uncrossable as the black sea before her.

Emma stares at the water and frowns in confusion. “What the hell?”

“Jones,” she says. He’s still standing a few paces away, facing the glassy sea. His face is set, gaze unfocused, as if he’s looking at something else entirely. He doesn’t respond to his name.

“*Killian!*” she says, louder and sharper. “The water!”

He glances at where the waterline should be, then follows it to where it now *is*. They’d moved farther inland, after he’d pulled her away from the brink. She knows they had. But the water now lays silent and still only a foot or two from the pointed tips of his boots.

Hook backs away from it quickly.

“I walked along this beach for ages,” Emma says. “I don’t remember there being a tide.”

“There’s not,” Hook says, his brows furrowed in confusion. “It doesn’t move.”

For the most part, he’s right. There are no waves; not even so much as a ripple disturbs the placid, dreadful surface. Even so, Emma could swear that as she watches it swells an inch or two closer to their feet. He retreats until they’re standing side by side, several feet away from the water’s edge. For a time neither of them speak, they just watch as, slowly but surely, the distance between them and the sea is swallowed by the tide. When it becomes completely obvious that the water is edging closer, they share a glance.

Without a word, they turn and begin to head inland.

Whether it's because of her earlier dip in the ocean, or because she's so emotionally drained, the walk is much harder this time. Her legs feel like lead, her clumsy feet are solid blocks of ice in her frozen boots, and her arm aches every time she jostles it. Hook, on the other hand, moves as if he's out for a stroll on a warm spring day. She'd hate him for it, if she weren't so scared by what that might mean.

"Do you even feel the cold?" she asks.

"Not any longer," he says, and Emma wishes she hadn't asked.

When it feels like they must have gone far enough to escape the tide, Emma glances behind her, then swears. Hook follows her gaze. Though they've probably moved at least fifty yards from the shore, the water is still creeping after them.

"Can you run?" he asks.

"Yeah," she says, even though she's not certain she'll be able to go far. They break into a jog, and Emma grits her teeth against the shooting pain in her shoulder at every jarring stride. She clutches her arm to her chest to try to reduce the impact.

While they'd been still, on the shore, the cold air hadn't bothered her as much. Nothing, after all, could possibly feel even half as cold as the frigid water. Now that they're moving again, though, she's back to breathing in icy lungfuls that bite into her nasal passages and throat.

When she glances back, the water is still spreading toward them at an alarming rate.

"What changed?" she asks.

But Hook only looks behind them, then realizes he's outpacing her. He drops back to her side, and grabs her left hand in his frost-coated right.

"Hold tight and put some wind in your sails, lass," he says, and hauls her after him.

They run and the water pursues, devouring the stardust behind them.

In the last few months, Emma has faced dragons and ogres, giants and witches. There have been moments when she has been more scared than she can ever remember being, and she's not someone who scares easily. Regardless, there is something visceral and terrifying about the slow, inexorable approach of the dark water behind them. She escaped it once; she's not sure she can do it again.

Maybe that's why it's after them now. Maybe it's angry—and whoever heard of *water* being angry?—that she'd beaten it. Fairytales, Emma decides, really, really *suck* sometimes.

They run as if their lives depend on it, because it's entirely possible it does. Hook's hand in hers is so cold she fears that if she grips it too hard his fingers might snap off, but she doesn't dare let go. She doesn't dare stop, or even turn her head to see whether the water is still

flooding after them. The only sound in her ears is the loud thump of her heartbeat and the harsh rasps of her breath, otherwise they run in perfect, eerie silence.

Hook glances over his shoulder and swears fiercely. He yanks her arm so hard that Emma stumbles and nearly falls.

“None of that now,” he says.

“Where ... are we ... going?” she gasps, somehow getting her feet back under her and her legs churning again.

“Higher ground,” he says, as if that should be obvious.

Emma stares at him as if he’s lost it. “*What* higher ... ground?”

He jerks his chin in answer and Emma follows the motion. There, barely visible against the empty sky, is a black shape breaking the horizon. She can’t make out what it is, or how far, but with a destination now she gets a second wind, finally keeping pace with Hook.

“How did ... you know ... that was there?”

“I didn’t land on the shore, love.”

And that’s all the answer he seems willing to give.

Her legs are finally reaching their limit. Whatever immunity she’d had from exhaustion has been gone since she fell in the water, and her muscles burn from strain. If she gets home—*when* she gets home—Emma swears she’s going to take up jogging again. She finds herself wondering inanely whether Storybrooke has a gym. Then she wonders who runs it: Hercules?

Her eyes lock on the shape ahead of them, and as they draw closer she can see that it’s a great black rock rising up from the flat plain. The sides slope steeply up to a gently domed plateau. The face of it is dark and slick, with deep cracks and crevices that look as sharp as volcanic glass.

“We’re ... climbing ... *that*?” she asks.

“Just pretend it’s a beanstalk.”

“Your imagination ... is better than mine,” she manages between wheezing breaths.

Hook glances at her sharply, then chuckles. Emma’s so startled by the sound that she stumbles again. This time her feet shoot out from under her, and she throws out her right arm to catch herself. Her palm hits the dust and agony lances up her shoulder, causing her to cry out in pain. Her vision goes dark. Hook swears and hauls on her left arm. Before she knows what he’s going to do, he’s swung her up over his shoulders in a fireman’s carry.

He grunts beneath her weight, and Emma almost attempts to get him to put her down, but then he’s off and running again and all she can do is try not to unbalance him. Ice shatters as he moves, reforming as quickly as it falls from him. But Hook doesn’t let her go, his hold on

her never slips. Her leg is locked in place by his left arm, and his hand holds hers firmly. The position stretches her shoulder, which should be excruciating, but the chill that emanates from him helps numb the pain. When she glances behind them, the water is only a couple of dozen yards away. She twists her head around to face forward and tries to think fast thoughts.

The black rock comes closer and closer still. It looms over them a good thirty feet in the air, and where it meets the plain there are broken and jagged slabs jutting up around it, as if it had erupted violently from the earth. Scree litters the ground in a wide ring around it. Hook puts on a burst of speed as they get nearer, until he's almost flying. Emma's hair streams out behind them, and for the first time she feels something like wind, the cold scouring her face and making her eyes water.

"Can you climb?" he says, as they pass the outer ring of debris.

"Yes," Emma says, though she suspects he feels her nod better than he hears her.

He skids to a halt about ten feet from the base and lowers her to the ground. Hook's arm is steady as he helps her get her balance. When he glances behind them, whatever he sees causes him to scowl.

"Nothing for it. We'll have to climb."

Emma scrambles for the base of the rock; however, when she grabs for the first handhold, she hisses and yanks her fingers back in surprise. She'd been right before that it looked hard and sharp; she should have been expecting it to be viciously cold as well. Hook has already started up, however, his frost-coated skin apparently not registering the frigidity of the surface. He pauses and glances back at her, then extends his hand, his hook caught around a protruding bit of rock. He looks as much at home scaling the rock as he did ascending the beanstalk—several lifetimes spent climbing around in a ship's rigging will do that to you, she supposes. Emma envies him that, for a moment.

"Come," he says.

She grabs his hand tightly, braces herself for the cold, and lets him haul her up a few feet to the next handhold.

This is *not* like the beanstalk. There is no time for flirty banter or pointed insights, he doesn't waste breath on teasing her, and Emma is silent more because she's gritting her teeth against the pain than because she's shielding herself from him. Every stretch of her injured shoulder is agony, and she's forced to climb nearly as one-handed as Hook since her right arm can't bear her full weight. Her fingers feel for each crack and crevice, ignoring the sharp bite of the rock into her palms. After awhile, she realizes her hands are bleeding, but all she can do is wipe them off on her jeans when she can and keep on. Her jeans stiffen where the blood freezes, and she leaves red-tinged frost on everything she touches.

There is a sense of urgency that doesn't let her pause.

They are running out of time.

Emma doesn't look back, and she doesn't look down.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Previously: Hook realizes Emma is who she says he is, and admits that, now that he's tasted vengeance, it is no longer something he's in a rush to try again. Emma realizes that he's basically given up, thinking he has nothing left to live for. The tide begins to rise, and they head for higher ground.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by Peaceheather

passes out waders and umbrellas Sorry, loves, you're going to get a bit damp this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Emma has no idea how long it takes for them to reach the top.

The handholds as they near the plateau grow fewer and farther between. A few feet from the top, she realizes that there's too much distance between where she is and where she needs to be, and nothing at all to grab on to. Hook, at her side, comes to the same conclusion. He glances down, then with a snarl, he slams his hook into the stone face, embedding it deeply into the surface like a piton. He offers her his hand.

"Here," he says. "I'll give you a leg up."

Clinging like a spider to the cliff-face isn't the easiest thing to do. Her right shoulder is a tempest of agony, her hands feel sliced to shreds, and she's thankful her toes are nearly numb from the cold, otherwise they'd be bitching about being squished into too thin crevices. Under normal circumstances, with absolutely anyone else, the idea of letting go and trusting them not to let her fall would be unthinkable.

Emma chances a single look down. The water surrounds the rock, deep enough now that she cannot see the ground at all, and most of the rubble is below the surface. Emma meets his gaze, nods once, then puts her foot in his hand and lets him boost her the remaining distance. She scrabbles frantically at the smooth surface for a moment before finding a handhold; with effort she hauls herself up over the edge. Once she's sure she's not going to slide off, she swivels around on her stomach and extends her hand to him. He clasps it tightly, and with Emma as his anchor, he climbs up beside her.

The top of the plateau domes slightly, the slope gentle enough that they are able to crawl a few feet away from the lip. When they finally stop to sit, Emma feels tired enough to collapse; instead she props herself against his shoulder. Her hands are a mess, covered in a crust of frozen blood. The cuts aren't too deep, but they sting, so she lays her wrists on her bent knees and lets them dangle uselessly. She leans her head on Hook's shoulder and looks back the way they came.

Something seems odd, and it takes her a moment to realize that it's because the horizon is higher than it ought to be, the land has completely disappeared under the rising water. It's like someone turned on a hose underwater and now everything is filling up. She tries desperately not to think about what will happen if it rises far enough to reach them. There are no other peaks or mountains or hills. They're alone on an island, in the middle of an ocean of despair.

Hook stares out at the horizon, his eyes flat and empty as the sky. Despite the run, he still looks cold and distant, his expression bleak. Emma never thought she'd miss Captain Innuendo, but right now she would *pay* for him to leer, even just a little. Instead he remains silent.

Emma closes her eyes; nothing has gone right since she got here. Hook has given up on life, and Emma figured out too late that she *hasn't* given up on love.

"I'm sorry the kiss didn't work," she says, and she means it. But the hole in her heart that she'd thought he could fill aches with the knowledge that whatever was between them can never be enough. Friendship, or even reluctant partnership in the face of giants or curses, isn't the same thing as love.

"False hope is worse than no hope at all," she mutters, half to herself.

"Sorry you came after me?"

Emma opens her eyes, startled that he'd even heard her.

"No," Emma says. "I mean, yeah, I'm not real thrilled with this particular turn of events but ... I sewed you up with my bare hands, and then I watched you turn to gold. I thought you were going to die. And ... and I couldn't lose you like I lost Graham. I couldn't. So, no ... I can't be sorry for trying to save you. I'm just sorry I—I'm sorry *it* wasn't enough."

His eyes are hooded, and he studies her from beneath the thick fringe of his lashes. "Ridiculously heroic," he says, eventually. "You'd save even those of us who don't deserve saving."

"How do you know what you deserve?"

He flashes her that smile that isn't really a smile. "Oh, I think I know what I deserve better than most. I fought for it, after all."

"*This* is what you wanted?" Emma asks, incredulous.

“So it would seem.” His hook gently snares her wrist and pulls her hand closer to him. “This is getting to be a habit, darling,” he says, peering at the shallow slices across her palm.

“Got anymore scarves?” she deadpans, less because it’s funny and more to distract herself from the situation. If she thinks about all of it, she’s going to freak out, and freaking out has never gotten anyone anywhere.

His icy fingers gently trace a frost-edged cut, but the shiver it sends through her doesn’t seem to be connected to the cold. “You kept it,” he says, voice quiet. “Why?”

“What?” Emma frowns at him, but his eyes are on her palm.

“After you left me in the hospital, you took my hook. I found it in a desk drawer in your office, hidden beneath my scarf of all things.”

“Oh. Right. That.”

“Why did you keep my scarf?” His voice is low, barely a rumble in his throat. It sends a shiver up Emma’s spine. Or maybe that’s from his cold fingers tracing the lines in her palm.

Oh, who the hell is she kidding? It’s him.

It’s just *him*.

Exhausted, Emma bends her head and stares at the rock between her feet. “I’m not really ... used to someone ... *anyone* taking care of me,” she admits. “I didn’t ... I didn’t want to lose that.”

His jaw tightens, and then he sighs. “I wanted to see your face,” he says.

“Huh?”

“You asked why I came to you,” he says, his fingers still doing that slow, icy dance over her hand. “I wanted to see your face. It was selfish, really. Greedy.” He laughs, softly, and Emma turns to look at him incredulously. “I wanted you to frown at me. To give me that look you have, like I’d just done something wicked and you were attempting to be disappointed in me. Then I wanted to make you smile. When you look at me ... I don’t want you to stop.”

Emma’s hand trembles in his. His thumb kneads the base of her palm absently. “You make me feel. You make me want to forget. You give me hope. I think I hated you for that, a little,” he says. “I am sorry your kiss didn’t work. You shouldn’t have to pay for my faults. This is my fate, it should never have been yours.”

“It was my choice,” Emma says.

“It was the wrong choice.”

Emma nods. “Maybe. But it was mine to make.”

His eyes meet hers, and Emma feels for the first time like there's something stirring in those black depths. "I would send you back, if I could. Your lad will be missing you. And ... Neal."

Emma shoots him an incredulous look and jerks her hand out of his. "Oh, not you, too. Why does *everyone* think I want to get back together with Neal?"

"Forgive me the assumption, but he is the great love of your life, is he not?"

"*God*, I hope not," Emma says, exasperated. This is the *last* conversation she wants to be having, what with certain death creeping steadily toward her; yet she can't help venting the frustration that's been building in her ever since she found Neal again. "It's hard to love someone when they do to you what he did to me."

Now Hook does look at her, faint curiosity creasing his brow. "What *did* he do?"

She hasn't told anyone this story, mostly because she doesn't want them to feel sorry for her. And she doesn't want to poison them against Neal when Henry so obviously adores his father. Maybe it's because she knows Hook won't pity her, and he clearly knows Neal well enough that she doubts what she says will come as much of a surprise.

In any case, her mouth opens and she finds herself saying, "Oh, the usual. Set me up. Let me take the fall for a crime he committed. Turned me in to the cops, sent me to jail. Then he up and *vanishes* for ten years. Meanwhile, I had to give birth in prison and put my kid up for adoption ... I was only seventeen. Talk about having to grow up fast, right? Ugh."

Emma wraps her arms around her knees, though whether she's trying to keep herself warm or prevent herself from hitting something, she's not sure. "When I found him again, I asked him why. I mean, you'd think he'd have a good reason for that kind of thing, right? But no, he did it because fucking *Pinocchio* told him to." Emma sighs, exhausted with the entire topic. "I thought he loved me. Maybe he did. He just ... feared his father more."

"He is his father's son," Hook says. There's that low current of anger in him again.

"Milah's, too, though. Right?"

"Aye, which is why I won't kill him," he says. "Although, I confess, the urge to beat him makes my fist ache."

"With you there, buddy," Emma says.

"A fitting name he's chosen for himself, I must say. Implies cowering on one's knees." His tone is lighter than she's heard it since she got here, and when she looks at him the corner of his mouth is turned up fractionally, as if it wants to smile.

Emma chuckles. "Yeah, well. Henry adores him. And I can't tell Henry because ... I want him to have a chance with his father. I can tell he wants us back together, but he won't listen when I tell him it's not gonna happen."

"Isn't it?" he asks, quietly.

“No. I mean—sure, I loved him. Once. But that was a long time ago. When you find out your parents are sort of the gold medalists in the True Love Olympics, it kinda changes your standards, you know? I think mine are set a lot higher, now, than Neal can ever reach.”

The hint of a smile vanishes as abruptly as it appeared, and he scowls. She glances at him curiously. Hook’s fingers fidget against his knee, then he clenches his hand into a fist. “Shame you wasted a kiss on a lost cause, then.”

Emma stares. He seems almost dejected. She thinks back over their arguments and conversations since she’d told him how she’d attempted to wake him and suddenly things start to take on a new perspective.

“Wait a minute, you ... you thought that was a *pity* kiss?”

“True love’s kiss only works if it’s true love, darling. Your intentions were noble, and appreciated in the spirit they were meant, but I fear I’m much too far gone to meet your standards, princess.”

She blinks. “You know, for a guy who can read me like a book most of the time, I think you might have skipped a few pages.”

Hook drags his gaze away from the rising water and meets hers with a puzzled frown. “Pardon?”

“You’re an idiot.” He blinks at her in shock. “Do you even know *why* I went to New York with Gold?”

“I assumed you’d bargained with him for some favor and the price was your assistance,” he says flatly. His lip is curled in an expression of mild distaste.

“Yeah, well the *price* was getting Neal to talk to him. But I went to New York because he threatened to kill *you*. I went to protect you.”

Hook stares at her. “Why? I’ve given you little reason. Why would you—?”

“Because I care about you, *okay*?” Emma’s eyes burn. “And in my family, we *fight* to protect the people we love.”

The words are out of her mouth before she’s even aware of what she’s saying. By then it’s too late to recall them. He stares at her, his black eyes startled and wide; Emma wishes she could slap herself.

“Look, I know I will never compare to Milah. I know you’ve loved her for three hundred years, and given the chance you’d love her for three hundred more but—”

His eyebrows furrow in confusion. “Emma, I—”

But whatever Hook was about to say is lost when she yelps, suddenly, and scrambles to her feet. They’ve been so distracted that Emma hadn’t even noticed the water coming up over the edge, not until it touched the tip of her boot. The freeze is instantaneous. Emma hauls him up

to stand beside her and then stares with growing dismay as their sanctuary begins to shrink, inch by inch.

“There’s got to be a way out of this,” she says. “This can’t be how it ends.” Emma stands and looks out at the black sea and the empty sky. There isn’t even the glimmer of light anywhere. They’re completely stranded.

Hope, Emma knows, can be a stubborn thing, especially when you’ve been without it for so long—but even hope can be drowned. She clasps his frozen hand and wishes with all her might for some kind of miracle.

Water washes over her feet, ice cold and merciless. Emma can feel the pain and misery tugging at her, even through her leather boots. It grips her feet tight, as though it wants to yank her right off the rock.

Hook pushes her toward the center of the rock, giving her the highest ground possible. It’s not much, only a few inches, but it’s all he can give her.

A minute more, and the water covers her ankles and oozes steadily up her calves. Her feet begin to slip on the smooth rock, and Emma instinctively wraps her arms around Hook’s waist to anchor herself. He pulls her into his arms and for a moment she pretends that they’re back in the giant’s lair, and that the worst thing they have to worry about is a trip wire and an opiated giant.

His hand cups her face and tilts it toward his.

“Emma, I—I didn’t mean for it to come to this. Not for you,” Hook says. He stares at her, his expression desperate, and Emma knows that this is it; this is how it’s going to end unless something miraculous happens.

The water creeps past her knees, flowing faster now that it has a taste of them. It’s *cold*; so, so cold, and Emma can feel the despair tightening its grip on her. “Don’t suppose you have any last-minute escape plans?”

“Not unless you know how to fly,” he says sardonically.

Emma slides her hands up his back to clutch at his shoulder blades as she feels the water rise up over her thighs. “Fresh out of fairy dust.”

... never going to get home, never going to see Henry again, or my parents, and I failed at this, I’m not enough, what guy could ever love me, I’m too broken, too...

Emma presses her face into his shoulder and tries to block the thoughts from her mind. His arms lock tight around her. A panicked little laugh escapes. “Got any happy thoughts?”

“Not even—”

He goes still. Perfectly still, as if he’s been turned to gold once more.

The water rises sluggishly another inch or two, almost as if it's hesitating to see what he'll say. Emma pulls back just enough to look at his face. There's an odd expression on it, like he's just remembered something crucial.

"... One," he says softly. "Just one."

Killian blinks, slowly. His dark lashes lift—and his eyes are *blue*. Blue like the sea on a sunny day. Blue as the clearest summer sky.

A smile spreads across his face, and it's like the dawn rising. Emma has no idea what the hell he's grinning about; all she can feel right now is the cold misery climbing past her hips. The flow is now swift and certain, almost vindictive.

"You," he says, and laughs, bright and carefree. "You bloody, brilliant, *wonderful* woman." Even though the water is still rising, color washes over his cheeks, chasing away the frost. He looks at her and grins, cocky and self-assured and vain as a rooster about to crow. "You, Emma. Just you."

"Jones?"

"I preferred it when you called me Killian," he says with a wink. "In fact, I wouldn't mind if you wanted to scream it again. Perhaps with a little less alarm and a little more ... you know, enthusiasm."

"Is this *really* the right time for you rediscover your ego?" she asks, incredulous. The water yanks at her, and she realizes that her feet aren't touching the rock any longer. Bitter despair slides beneath her jacket, stealing what little breath she has left. It climbs quickly up her chest, and Emma can feel it trying to drag her under. She clutches at him to keep herself upright, and feels ice cracking under her palms. For the first time, though, it doesn't reform; all she feels beneath her fingers is worn leather.

"On the contrary, love, the moment could not be more opportune." His hand threads beneath her hair to cup the back of her neck. His fingers are inexplicably *warm* and Emma wonders if hypothermia is finally starting to set in. He hitches her closer, lifting her up in his arms.

"What are you doing?" she gasps, breathless.

"I know you tried, darling, but just this once, let someone else save *you*."

Water curls around her throat, the cold stealing whatever response she might have made from her.

His dark head dips and he kisses her, just as the water closes over their heads and they both sink below the surface into icy darkness.

She expects the misery and despair to swallow her whole. Instead her senses are consumed by the feel of his mouth on hers, which is fortunate because it's the only thing she *wants* to feel. They're *warm*, so warm that Emma gasps slightly, her mouth opening beneath his as if she could take his warmth into her through his kiss. Killian's body seems to flush with heat.

Beneath the water, all along the length of her, she can feel it radiating from him, keeping the cold at bay. His hand tangles in her floating hair, tilting her head slightly to give him a better angle. His other arm wraps tighter around her, until they're twined so closely together she feels like they're sharing the same space.

Her heart, which had been stuttering from the cold, suddenly speeds to life, fluttering wildly in her chest. Killian pulls away, and Emma, who has forgotten that breathing is even a thing, opens her eyes. To her surprise, the water isn't dark: a faint glow encompasses them, washing him in shades of blue. Killian is looking at her as if she's the most incredible thing he's ever seen. Another smile unfurls across his face, and suddenly a tiny speck of something floating beside his ear lights up like a firefly.

Then another, and another, and another.

The stardust, Emma realizes, as a hundred, and then a thousand and then a hundred thousand more tiny pinpricks of light in jewel-bright hues suddenly surround them like stars. Emma stares, wide-eyed in wonder; she can't tell whether she's floating or flying. If she reached out, she could touch them, pick them up like jewels and tuck them in her pockets.

As beautiful as the sight is, however, it can't compete with Killian. Light illuminates his face and dances in his gaze. Wherever they are now, words feel too small to contain what she feels. Instead she just looks at him, hoping he can understand the questions in her eyes. He raises his brows, though, and she can see similar questions in his.

Emma nods; even though her expression is solemn, joy makes her buoyant, bubbling inside her.

Killian smiles again, and now there's a promise hidden in the corner of his mouth, just for her.

When he bends his head to kiss her again, Emma meets him halfway. This is what she'd hoped kissing him would be like: *warm* and perfect.

Of course, the way he deepens the kiss and she rises to meet it may not be exactly *pure*, but neither of them has ever pretended to be a saint.

Her heart is brimful, all her love and happiness spilling over the top. Emma slides her right hand down to the open collar of his shirt, slipping under leather and linen until her fingers rest over Killian's heartbeat. It throbs in a rhythm that matches her own.

Magic blooms, wrapping around them in coils and curls, binding them together before bursting like a universe just being born, dissolving what little remains of the black emptiness around them and filling it, at last, with hope.

Might be a day or two before I can get 13 up. But hey ... at least it's not a literal cliffhanger, right?

I love all your reviews. My beta might love them even more. She quotes them at me. ;)

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma and Hook climbed a giant black rock to escape the rising tide. There was some emotional discussion, once they reached the top. But the water caught up to them. Just when we thought it would win ...

Oh, just go read the darn thing. I'm not going to spoil it for you. ;)

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Emma!”

At first, she can't move. Her whole body feels stiff all over, as if she's been stuck in one position for too long.

Then, a wind seems to move through her, and she's aware that she's kind of cold, really wet, and her lips are still on Killian's. Somehow, the first two sensations aren't nearly as important as the third. If she's going to be perfectly honest, she's been fantasizing about kissing Captain Hook pretty much from the moment she first saw him, and dammit, she *really* wants to enjoy this experience.

And he's kissing her back; Killian's right hand has come up to wrap around the nape of her neck, and he's holding her to him tightly. Her wet hair lays plastered to her shoulders and neck, long strands of it falling around them and dripping cold water everywhere, but his mouth is warm and he's plundering her mouth like ... well, like a pirate. Emma can't really find it in herself to object.

“Emma! Are you okay?”

Distantly she's aware that someone is trying to get her attention. She wants to care, really. But ... *kissing*. Kissing is an amazing invention. Whoever thought up kissing should get an award or something. Even though the position they're in is really awkward, and her neck is stiff, and her arm kind of hurts, and his beard is scratching her face, and he tastes a bit like orange juice and rum, this is still the best kiss of her entire life.

“*Emma Swan!*” That one is Mary Margaret, and her voice is loud enough that it starts to break through the pleasant haze that’s settled over Emma’s senses.

“Ignore them,” Killian whispers against her lips. Somehow he manages to catch her belt with his hook and haul her half on top of him. He tilts his head to get a better angle and then dives back in for more, and Emma lets him because she’s greedy, too. Seriously, she hasn’t been kissed this thoroughly in a long, long damn time.

“Uh, why are they all wet?” says a voice Emma dimly recalls is her father’s. With Killian’s tongue sweeping along her bottom lip, however, that doesn’t seem like crucial information. Of far more importance is the fact that, with his curse broken, they’ve apparently returned to her room, her bed, and their previous state of dress. Or undress, as the case may be, which is excellent as far as Emma’s concerned. Her hands rest on the bunched muscles of his bare chest, and she can feel the heat of him warming her palms.

“Emma, I’m not sure Mother Superior should be watching this,” Mary Margaret says.

That gets her attention. “What?” Emma’s eyes pop open and she jerks her head up; Killian groans in protest.

Mary Margaret and David are standing next to the bed, looking panicked, embarrassed, and awkward in varying degrees; meanwhile Mother Superior herself stands a few feet away, pretending great interest in a framed painting of an island hanging on the wall.

“Welcome back,” Blue says, when she sees that Emma’s no longer glued to the pirate. Her lips twitch with faint amusement.

Emma blinks and reality settles back into place. Right. Hook. Injury. Stitches. Curse. Gold. Netherworld. Kiss. Home. *Where everyone is watching her make out with Hook.*

“Oh my God, someone shoot me,” Emma mutters. She rolls off Killian and lands beside him on the bed. The pillow is convenient, so she attempts to smother herself.

“Are you blushing, Swan?” Killian asks. “Your chest is all red.”

“You shouldn’t be looking at her chest,” David says.

Emma rearranges the pillow to cover the low neckline of her t-shirt and her face at the same time. If she’s going to die of embarrassment, she would like to do so with some dignity. Maybe if she closes her eyes they’ll all go away, or it’ll turn out to have all been a dream—

“You’re bleeding.” Killian’s voice no longer sounds teasing.

“*What?*” Mary Margaret’s voice is suddenly closer, though still muffled by the pillow.

Killian lets loose a stream of profanity that causes even Emma, who is fairly proficient in it herself, to lift her pillow and look at him in impressed astonishment. It’s even more impressive because his accent and delivery make it sound almost like poetry. Emma hadn’t even known you could *do* that with profanity.

His expression is almost more pained than she's feeling. "Your arm, darling."

Emma twists her neck to peer at her shoulder, which, now that he's mentioned it, hurts like hell. Before her jaunt into the netherworld, she'd been wearing jeans and a t-shirt, which are now soaked through and clinging to her skin. The sleeves are short enough that she can see the hole in her right shoulder, the one that's approximately the size and shape that a large metal hook might make. There are bruises around it in shades that Emma's never even seen before, and blood has started to trickle down her arm again, thanks to the makeshift bandage vanishing.

Killian's face is contrite. "Emma, I'm sorry," he says softly. There's nothing but sincerity in his blue eyes. He glances over at Snow. "Might I trouble you for some bandages, m'lady?"

"Isn't anybody going to tell me what happened? Why are you bleeding? And *why are you wet?*" David sounds like he's about to burst a blood vessel himself.

Emma rolls her eyes. "It was an accident," she says, before David can put two and two together and come up with *murder Hook*. "And the wet thing? Long, long story."

Snow hurries around to her side of the bed with the first aid kit, so Emma puts the pillow back and sits up. Her hands, she notes, are fine. There aren't any scratches or cuts or even frostbite—which she'd half been expecting. The only injury that seems to have returned to this world with her is the spankin' new stab wound to her shoulder. She pokes at it experimentally; fresh blood wells up and she hisses at the pain.

"Stop that," Killian says, his voice fond but exasperated. "Trust me, love, never prod an open wound if you want it to heal." He puts his hand on her arm and uses his hook to lift the sleeve of her t-shirt so he can see the injury better.

"Says the guy sitting up with a *stomach wound*, if you open those stitches—"

"Emma, are you okay?" Mary Margaret sets the kit down beside her and perches on the edge of the bed. She clearly wants to hug her, but since Killian's still examining her arm Snow settles for grabbing Emma's hand; there are tears in her eyes. "I was so worried ..."

"What? Why worried? How long were we gone?" Emma asks, feeling a little hemmed-in with her mother stroking her wet hair away from her face, and Killian holding her arm still with his hook while he rummages in the first aid kit. David and Blue are standing at the foot of the bed, and Emma has to fight the urge to push all of them away and go hide somewhere to lick her wounds in peace.

"Five seconds," David says, looking somber. "I counted."

"Five *seconds?*" Emma's eyes widen and she shares a glance with Hook, who just arches a tired eyebrow. "Why are you all acting like I almost *died?*"

"You turned to gold, too," Mary Margaret says, her hands cupping Emma's face; her lower lip trembles. "And they were the longest five seconds of my entire life. Don't you *dare* do that to me again, Emma Swan."

“Wait, I turned to—”

“This is going to sting,” Killian warns. He dumps disinfectant into the wound and Emma nearly leaps off the bed.

“Fu—OW! Jeees—” Don’t swear in front of the nun, she reminds herself, gritting her teeth against the burn of disinfectant in the wound. On the heels of that, she wonders inanely if, now that the curse is broken, the nuns are still nuns.

She attempts to wrench her arm out of Killian’s grasp, but he locks his hook around her elbow and starts packing the wound with gauze. Which, for the record, *hurts like a bitch*. Emma settles for glaring at him; he just smiles crookedly up at her, his eyes twinkling through his lashes, completely unrepentant.

For some reason that makes her heart start fluttering again, so to distract herself she turns back to Mary Margaret. “I turned to gold? Why would I turn to gold? I wasn’t cursed.”

Snow keeps petting Emma as if to reassure herself that her daughter isn’t made of metal. “I don’t know. Just, one second you were fine and then you kissed him and ...” Her eyes well with tears and she makes a high-pitched sound like a puppy whimper.

Blue coughs delicately, but it somehow manages to draw everyone’s attention. She smiles gently. “If I may? I think I might be able to explain.”

“I wish someone would,” Emma says. She arches an eyebrow at her mother. “And could you maybe stop the petting thing? I’m starting to feel like Pongo. Also, towels might be nice.”

“Towels!” Mary Margaret says, as if Emma has discovered some brilliant new invention. “Of course! You’re soaking wet—wait, why *are* you soaking wet?”

“Like I said, long story,” Emma says, with a tired sigh. “Towels?”

“Right. Then explanations. You are not off the hook, young lady.” Snow suddenly glances at Killian, who regards her with blatant amusement. “Well, you are off... You know what? Never mind. I’m getting towels.”

She stands up abruptly and heads for the bathroom.

“Hold this?” Killian nudges Emma to get her attention, and she absently accepts the roll of gauze he proffers. He’s wrapped the end of it around her upper arm, tight enough to staunch the bleeding. David hands him a pair of scissors. “Thanks, mate,” Killian says and snips the gauze from the roll. He gently tucks the end in so it doesn’t unravel.

Emma’s mildly disappointed he didn’t use his teeth.

“Mind telling me how she ended up with a hole in her arm in the first place, *mate*?” David crosses his arms over his chest.

“A misunderstanding,” Killian says, meeting David’s measuring gaze. “I can assure you, it will *never* happen again.”

“I’ve got towels!” Mary Margaret says cheerfully, breaking the tension. She dumps a small mountain of terrycloth at the foot of the bed. Emma snags one and tosses it to Killian, then uses another to attempt to dry her drenched hair, one-handed.

“You said you thought you could explain?” David turns to Blue, who nods.

“Emma is the product of true love,” she says. “She carries powerful magic inside of her. But while true love’s kiss *can* break any curse, it only works if both hearts are willing.” She arches a delicate eyebrow at Killian.

His mouth tightens into a thin line. “It has been a long time since ...” He pauses and glances at Emma. She wonders whether anyone else in the room can see the shadows that haunt his eyes, or the grief that dwells behind them. He tries on a tentative smile that Emma can tell is all front. “I may have required some convincing,” he says, finally.

“Magic is tied to emotion; I believe that Emma’s feelings were strong enough to allow her to follow him into the curse,” Blue says, redirecting their attention. Emma feels Killian start slightly beside her. He’s looking at her now, she can tell, but she ignores him and focuses entirely on Mother Superior.

“Yeah,” she says. “I remember feeling like I was getting sucked down a rabbit hole or something. And then I was someplace else. It was some kind of ... netherworld, I think.”

Mary Margaret drapes a towel around her shoulders. “You mean like the Sleeping Curse? But I’m guessing this one wasn’t exactly on fire ...?”

“I *wish*,” Emma says with feeling.

“So, what, she followed him in and convinced him to come back?” David asks, frowning.

“I imagine it was slightly more complicated than that,” Blue says, gently. “However, once their hearts were aligned, *then* true love’s kiss was able to break the curse.”

Emma feels herself blushing again, and wishes she could go back to smothering herself. Instead she stares at her damp jeans, and wonders how long she has to sit here and die of embarrassment before she can go put on some dry clothes. Then, Killian reaches over and takes her hand in his, and when she meets his gaze, it’s as if everyone and everything else in the world falls away.

“You found me,” he says.

“Oh, please. I find bad guys for a living,” Emma says. “Did you really think you’d get away from me that easily?”

His face lights up with a grin, as if she’s done something she ought to be proud of, and Emma wonders if maybe she has. After all, she *did* find Killian Jones, buried deep beneath the surface of Captain Hook. She’s unaware that she’s smiling back at him until a laugh bubbles out of her; it seems to echo through the room, spreading like sunlight.

Mary Margaret turns to David. “What did I tell you? Pay up.”

At this the spell is broken; Emma and Killian both turn their heads to stare at Snow. There's a smug smile on her face and she's aiming it squarely at Charming. "I told you they were in love," she says to her husband. "Pay up, honey."

Killian smirks. "Oh, I *like* you, m'lady."

Blue, who has been standing off to the side, watching all of this with a coy, cat-like smile on her lips, actually gives a little snort of laughter.

"But he's a pirate!" Charming looks like someone's hit *him* with an umbrella stand.

"Oh, like *that* story never happens." Snow shrugs. "I don't care if he's a blacksmith. I just want my daughter to be happy. And apparently *he* makes her happy." She turns and narrows her gaze at Killian. "You *will* make her happy, won't you?"

"He'd better," David says darkly.

Killian looks up at Emma through impossibly dark lashes, his eyes sparkling and a smile on his lips. "So happy she can fly."

Emma's not sure which of them groan at that, but Mary Margaret seems to decide that's her cue to get up. "I'm going to go see about some dry clothes," she says. "David, can you help me?"

"Me? Why?"

"Because Emma can get her own dry clothes. I was going to loan some of yours to Killian," she says as she heads for the door. "You've got that one t-shirt that's a little too small on you..."

"That is my favorite shirt! You are *not* giving him ..."

"Congratulations," Mother Superior says softly. Then she smiles and trails Mary Margaret and David down the stairs, leaving Emma and Killian alone.

Emma turns to him and arches an eyebrow. "*So happy she can fly*. Cocky, aren't you?"

He leans closer and murmurs. "I can show you, if you like."

"Seriously?" Emma frowns. Considering recent events, she's no longer entirely sure what he's talking about.

"Well, darling, you *were* laying on top of me, and I *have* been celibate for..." He wraps his arm around her and pulls her closer, so he can whisper a number in her ear.

Emma draws back startled. "You have not!"

"And your blouse *is* very nearly transparent ..."

“That’s it, time to get up and dry off,” she says. However, Hook’s arms firm around her, unwilling to let her go just yet. Emma fights the urge to just nestle into them; but as good as he feels she’s cold, and her clothes are wet, and they’re soaking the mattress.

“I think I prefer you like this,” he says, tongue tucked against his teeth. Emma rolls her eyes, knowing already that he’s going to be absolutely incorrigible. Somehow, though, the thought only makes her grin.

She tries to extricate herself without tearing his sutures or dislodging her bandages. “*Ugh*. How does a guy with only one hand have a grip like an octopus?”

“We wrestle them for practice,” he says with aplomb. And Emma laughs in spite of herself, delighted.

It’s not until she’s in the bathroom, putting on dry clothes, that her joy begins to fade a little. She’d gone downstairs, so that Killian could use the upstairs bath in peace, and as she gingerly pulls on a clean top, she happens to glance at the towel rack where Killian’s vest has finished drying.

It’s just a vest; just a black leather vest with lacing along the seams, and brass frogs to hold it closed. The only thing fancy about it at all are the metal disks that are roughly sewn around the shoulder bits. There’s no reason why the fact that the vest is entirely hand-stitched should cause her to feel a little dizzy. None at all.

Except it is, and it does. Emma’s fingers trace the clean slice that matches the cut across his abdomen, and she realizes her hands are shaking.

She closes her eyes and breathes deep until she’s got things under control again. Resolutely, she brushes out her hair and blow-dries it for the second time in, technically, just a few hours. It’s tricky with her shoulder injury, but she manages, though the result is a tiny bit lopsided.

When Emma emerges from the bathroom, clean and dry, she’s got her heart rate back under control and her poker face in place.

Not well enough, apparently; Mary Margaret takes one look at her, then marches over and grabs her by the hand. She pulls Emma over into the corner by the window furthest from the stairs and peers at her for a moment.

“You’re freaking out,” she says.

“What?” Emma blinks. “I’m not freaking out. Who’s freaking out?”

“You are. I know that face. That’s your I’ve-just-seen-an-ogre-and-I’m-trying-not-to-scream face.”

“I don’t have a—” Her mother levels her with a knowing look. “Okay, so I have an ogre face, but only when there are ogres and there are *not* ogres!”

Mary Margaret crosses her arms.

“Why would I be freaking out? I broke the curse. Go me!”

A smile slowly spreads across Mary Margaret’s face. “Because you’re in love.”

Emma rolls her eyes. “I’m not freaking out because I’m—because of *that*.”

Mary Margaret tilts her head, and Emma’s reminded of Pongo when he’s trying to understand human speech. “Emma, it’s okay to be freaked out! I mean, you should have seen me when I realized I was in love with your father.”

“I *did* see you when you realized you were in love with David. There’s a picture in Henry’s book,” Emma says flatly. “Some people get photo albums with pictures of their parents in them. I get *fairy tale* books.” Her mouth twists. “And *then* I got to watch you do it all over again as Mary Margaret and David.”

“Okay, so, maybe that’s not—My point is that this is really new for you. It’s been how long since your last long-term relationship?”

“Ten years.”

Mary Margaret blinks. “Oh. Well. That’s ... a while. But don’t you see? It’s no wonder you’re unsure.”

Emma glances around to make sure no one is in earshot—in this apartment, you can never be too certain—and lowers her voice to a whisper. “Look, yesterday, everything was normal. Well, as normal as things can be, anyway. And then *he* comes crawling through my window and I stitch him up, and there’s a curse, and I get sucked into a *netherworld* and somewhere in there I realize that I’m in love with a *pirate* from *Neverland* and he’s been trying to avenge the death of the woman he’s loved for the last *three hundred years*. And I don’t even know how it happened, or when it happened, or why. So, okay, yeah. I guess I’m freaking out. A *little*. But ... I don’t know if I can even *do* this. I’m not *good* at this love crap. And he’s a pirate. He lives on a ship. He doesn’t have a driver’s license or a social security number or clothes with *zippers* on them. He’s more than three *centuries* older than me—”

“Emma—”

“—and then there’s Henry! What do I tell Henry? Henry just found out about Neal. How do I even bring another guy into the equation? And one that just tried to kill his new grandfather! And ... I don’t even know if Hook *likes* kids. Oh, god! What if he doesn’t like kids? What if *Henry* doesn’t like *him*? What if—”

Mary Margaret grabs her by the arms and stares her in the eyes. “Emma, breathe, okay? Just ... deep breaths.”

Emma nods and tries to wrestle her panic back into place. It’s nearly impossible. Snow is right, she’s freaking out, but this feels *worse* than ogres somehow.

Once Emma is no longer in danger of hyperventilating, Mary Margaret pulls her into a hug. Emma lets her; she lays her head on her mother's shoulder, and loves her so damn *much* that her heart feels like it might just burst. Snow pets her hair and holds her tight while Emma breathes in the scent of her mother's perfume, and thinks that if she'd had this her whole life, then maybe the situation that's waiting upstairs wouldn't be quite so scary.

Finally Mary Margaret pulls away and looks at her with what Emma thinks of as her Sweet-Snow-White face. "It's going to be okay," she tells her. "Just remember that, all the things you're concerned about, he's probably having the same thoughts, only three hundred times worse than you are. You just need to talk about it. Be honest with each other. I know it's scary, but if you're really in love then you will *find* a way to be together, one that works for both of you. You just have to have faith in each other."

"Uh-huh. 'Cause you and David had it so easy, right?" Emma says.

"No, we didn't," Mary Margaret admits. "But that's how I know it's true. Nothing easy is as worth having as something you have to fight for. And I know you, Emma— you're a fighter, and so is he."

Emma tilts her head back and stares at the ceiling, currently fighting the urge to stomp her foot like a frustrated teenager. "Why now, though? This is so ... It's just ... He's *Hook*. And things are ... complicated."

Mary Margaret smiles at her gently. "Sometimes your heart just chooses. It knows who you're meant to be with. Don't ignore it just because the timing isn't what you would have liked, or because things are complicated. True love is rare, precious, and worth believing in. I know it's scary, but you are so full of love. Just trust your heart."

She's right. Emma knows she's right; but knowing it and believing it aren't always the same thing. "What about Henry, though?"

"Henry just wants you to be happy. A real pirate captain? Are you kidding? He'll adore him."

"And Neal? What if he thinks I'm doing this just to ... I don't know, pretend I don't care about him and his fiancée? He keeps saying things like he *thinks* that, and I *don't*, but ..."

Snow looks at her carefully. "You don't love Neal," she says. "I wasn't sure until this morning, when I saw the way you looked at Killian. I don't know what happened between you and Neal, exactly, but when you're with him, you're tense, cautious, like ... like you're waiting for the other shoe to drop. But with *Hook*... you look at him the way I feel when I look at David. Like there's nothing else in the world but the two of you. So, does it really matter what Neal thinks?"

"No," Emma says. "When you put it that way, I guess not."

"So, you'll talk to him? Figure things out?"

Emma nods, reluctantly. "Could you ... maybe make me some hot chocolate first? It was really, really cold where we were."

Mary Margaret laughs. “I will make you all the hot chocolate you want, sweetie.”

They both smile, and the tight band that was clamped around Emma’s chest loosens enough that she feels like she can breathe again.

Chapter End Notes

I thought perhaps a chapter of some levity and light might be in order after the trauma of the last few chapters?

We're not quite done yet. One more chapter left, I think, and then an epilogue.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Previously: Emma and Killian returned from the netherworld. Some answers were given, choices were made clear to others, and panic attacks averted.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

My sincerest apologies for the delay in this chapter. I had some real life deadlines suddenly jump in the way, and then a minor plot hole that became a stumbling point. It's sorted now, I think.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

With the curse broken, Killian's strength returns quickly. While Emma was downstairs changing, he'd managed to get up on his own, and move without assistance. She half suspects that was because he didn't want David to be his crutch. Emma tries to convince Killian that he should go back to bed once he's in dry clothes again, but he just gives her a glare from beneath his heavy brows.

"I may be a gentleman," he says, lowering his voice for her ears alone, "but even I refuse to lay in *that* wet spot." Emma just stares at him until he grins and reaches out his hand to toy with her hair. "Come, lass, I've been abed long enough. And your stitches are holding admirably."

Which is actually an understatement. When they'd checked his sutures before Blue left, they'd discovered he was healing faster than should be possible.

"You were the one who tended his wound, Emma. Whether you were conscious of it or not, you wanted to heal him," Blue had explained. "It may have been your magic that held the curse at bay for so long; now it is speeding his recovery."

The idea that she might have healing powers in addition to everything else wasn't really something Emma wanted to discuss at the time. In addition, Blue had been hesitant to interfere with the healing of Killian's wound by trying to add her own magic to the mix. So they'd thanked her for her help, and David had taken her back to the convent. Emma and Killian had cleaned themselves up and Snow went into full-on motherly mode.

Now Emma's trying to convince Hook that he needs to rest. "If you won't rest here, there's a couch downstairs or ... Okay, probably not Mary Margaret's bed but ..."

"Swan, I'm fine. Halfway to mended, thanks to you," he says. He's half propped against the bedroom wall, wearing another loose pair of navy blue cotton pants and a black t-shirt borrowed from David. The modern clothes do absolutely nothing to make him look less like a pirate or a rock star. All they serve to do is soften him enough that Emma's tempted to snuggle up against him, just so she can press her ear to his heartbeat and reassure herself of his warmth.

Instead, she crosses her left arm over her chest and grips her right bicep, as if she can hold herself in place by sheer will alone. She'd cross both arms, but her shoulder is still sore, even with a couple of painkillers in her. "I just ... I don't want you to ..."

Killian's fingers trail along her cheek, then tip her face up to his. "I know," he says softly, and she knows he's talking about more than just his stitches. "Believe me, Emma. I know." For several heartbeats she gets lost in the blue of his eyes. Then his mouth quirks up in a half-smile. "Damn."

"What?"

"I've just realized that we're now up to four," he says. His fingers trace the shell of her ear, and Emma shivers a little.

"Four what?"

He leans a little closer. "Four times you've bested me, Swan."

Emma frowns and thinks it over. "Actually, I think it's five."

He arches an eyebrow and smirks. "Four."

She holds up a hand and ticks them off on her fingers. "No. There was the blacksmith thing, when I chained you at the top of the beanstalk, when I beat you at the portal, then again in New York. That's four. Stealing your hook in the netherworld makes five."

"Ah," he says, and leans in an inch closer. Her whole body feels as if it's swaying toward him. Somehow the space between them has magically decreased, until only the thinnest bit of air separates him from her. "However, the portal doesn't count. I let you win that one, as you may recall. So, stealing my hook makes four."

"Are we seriously keeping score?"

He gives her a toothy smile, his eyes twinkling down at her. "I'm a pirate, darling," he says, his mouth hovering over hers. "I always keep score."

Both hands shift to press against his chest, but Emma doesn't push him away. "Hey! There is no way you saw that punch coming. You did *not* let me win."

“Oh, yes, I bloody well did,” he says. His head dips, and then his mouth is on hers, and Emma forgets whatever she was going to say in favor of kissing him back. Together they twist until her back is up against the wall, and his body is flush against hers from chest to knee. Killian’s hand cups her jawline, and he angles her face so that he can taste her more fully. Emma’s more than willing; she threads her fingers into his thick, dark hair, and holds him exactly where she wants him.

His hook is a cool weight against her waist, and his hips press against hers, increasingly insistent; Emma groans and presses back.

The door closing downstairs, however, causes the wall to vibrate. They break apart, panting a little. Emma glances through the open bedroom door and sees David downstairs, hanging up his jacket. The scent of something warm and delicious teases her nostrils.

“I should go down and help with dinner,” she says.

Killian gives her a pained smile. “Aye. I’ll join you in a moment.”

It takes her a second to realize why, then Emma blushes to the roots of her hair. She slides out of his arms and has to suppress a grin the whole way down the stairs.

“Is Hook resting?” Mary Margaret asks, her smile a touch too innocent to be believed.

“Uh, no,” Emma says, arching an eyebrow. “I think he’s tired of being stuck in bed.”

“We could knock him unconscious again,” David offers. “I’ve got a crowbar in my truck with his name on it.”

“I just woke him up from a curse. Be nice,” Emma says, rolling her eyes. She opens a drawer and starts fishing out spoons.

“But I got it engraved and everything,” David says, leaning on the countertop with a mock pout.

Emma’s lips twitch, suppressing a smile. If only all conflicts could be solved this easily

Then the little worry that she hasn’t voiced yet niggles at her brain. She hasn’t been sure if it’s a good idea to bring it up in front of Killian, but she can’t put it off too much longer.

“What am I going to do about Gold?” she asks. Mary Margaret and David exchange looks, and Emma has a feeling she knows what they’re thinking. She perches on a barstool and plays with her spoon, twirling it absently on the counter. “They *hate* each other, and just because Hook is ... we’re ... you know, I don’t know if that means Gold’s just going to drop this thing. I mean, what’s to stop him from cursing him again?”

“Oh, next time he’ll do something far worse,” Killian’s voice comes from the stairs. “He doesn’t enjoy being beaten, especially at one of his own games.”

He descends slowly, wincing only once or twice, and swings himself up onto the barstool beside Emma.

“Food’s ready. I thought you could use something warm.” Mary Margaret finishes ladling soup into a pair of bowls, which she sets in front of Hook and Emma.

“How can I ever repay you for your kindness, m’lady?”

“You could start by not flirting with my mother,” Emma grumbles, tucking into her soup so she doesn’t have to look at him to see if he’s winking or not. Killian chuckles.

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” he says. He glances at his own bowl, then frowns, puzzled. “Why are there . . . letters in my soup?”

“Henry likes alphabet soup,” Mary Margaret says. “They’re just noodles. You can eat them.”

He pushes some of the letters around for a minute, then takes a cautious spoonful. He makes a face that Emma has begun to recognize as his *I’d-prefer-rum* face.

“So,” she says, looking at him pointedly. “What do we do about Gold?”

Killian’s jaw tightens and he stirs his soup with his spoon, not quite looking at her.

“Look, we both know that you can’t kill him,” she says. “You know how that story ends. Besides, he’s got magic. Like you said, he could do something worse next time. I’m not really sure what would *be* worse than cursing you to eternity in *that* place, but—”

“He could rip out your heart and crush it in front of me,” Killian says quietly, still not meeting her eyes.

Emma reaches over to touch his hand. “No, he can’t.”

Killian snorts and looks up at her, old ghosts haunting his eyes. “Who do you think taught Cora everything she knew? And Regina. I assure you, if he wanted to hurt me, he wouldn’t hesitate to attack you.”

“No, I mean he *can’t*. You probably don’t remember, because you were a little unconscious back there at the portal—you know, after I beat you—”

“After I *let* you beat me.”

“—but Cora tried to take my heart.”

Killian’s face actually pales, and it does something funny to Emma’s stomach to realize that the thought of it alone is enough to get that much of a reaction from him.

“She couldn’t do it,” Emma says, her hand wrapping around his. “Gold said it’s because of what I am. So, I’m pretty sure he can’t take my heart, either.”

“You can still be killed,” he says. His mouth is set in a grim line.

“Believe me, I know.” Emma rubs her shoulder unconsciously, and he immediately looks contrite.

“If he hurts Emma, he’ll lose Henry,” Snow says. “And maybe Neal, too. He won’t risk that.”

Killian’s expression darkens, further. “Rumplestiltskin murdered his own wife, the mother of his child. I think I know better than most what the crocodile will and won’t *risk*.”

“He did attempt to murder you,” Emma says. “Admitted it in front of witnesses, even. I could arrest him...”

“We had to enchant a cage to hold him,” David reminds her. “I really don’t think he’s going to let you put him in a jail cell. And even if you did charge him, what could we do with him? Keep him there forever?”

Emma puts her head in her hands and rubs her eyes. “You know, things were so much easier *before* I broke Regina’s curse. There is no good answer, is there?”

“I offer him a deal he cannot refuse.”

Emma looks up. Killian rubs his face with his hand and then looks at her steadily. “It is, after all, his one weakness. He simply cannot resist a bargain.”

“Killian—”

“I think it’s safe to say that I know what makes the Crocodile tick better than any of you; this is the only way.”

“He’s right,” David says grudgingly. “We can’t kill him, and we can’t imprison him.”

Emma searches Killian’s eyes, looking for some hint of his plan. “What are you going to offer him?”

He smiles at her. “Nothing I can’t afford to give. Trust me?”

And suddenly she feels as if they are back there in the giants’ treasure room, and he’s offering her his hand. She’d been stupid before. She knows better now.

Emma nods, once.

“Okay then,” she says. “Let’s make a deal.”

They meet at the docks near sundown. It seems like neutral territory; Emma doesn’t want Gold coming back to the apartment, and she has no idea what traps he might have laid in store for Hook if they were to go to his shop. Downtown is too visible, and too close to Granny’s. The last thing she wants is Henry or Neal getting involved in this.

So the docks it is.

Killian leans against a streetpost, once more clad in his black leather pants and boots, though he’s exchanged his shirt for one of David’s nicer black button-downs. He’d disappeared into

his ship briefly, on their arrival, and returned wearing his black sea-coat. It swirls around his calves, the buttons gleaming dully in the streetlight, but otherwise he's as black and ominous as a shadow. While she can't help but admire the picture he makes, decked out head to toe in black and leather, Emma wonders whether a shopping trip might be in her future.

If she still *has* a future after tonight's meeting. Emma stands beside him, her hands tucked into the pockets of her long wool pea-coat for warmth. David and Mary Margaret wait a few yards away, leaning against David's truck. Emma has her gun, and David has his, but aside from his hook, Killian is unarmed.

His face is set, determined, and unreadable.

Emma tries not to worry.

At seven on the dot, Emma hears the distinctive tap of Mr. Gold's cane, and looks up to see him strolling toward them, alone. He takes his time, and with the sunset at his back she cannot make out his face. He stops some twenty feet away and leans on his cane.

"Congratulations, Miss Swan," he says. "I see you managed to save the unsavable, after all."

Emma just gives him a tight-lipped smile.

Killian stands and steps into the pool of light cast by the overhead lamp. "You and I have some unfinished business."

"Indeed." Mr. Gold lifts his head and smiles, coldly. "Let me guess: suddenly you've discovered something to live for, and you're here to make a deal that will let you keep your miserable life."

Emma watches nervously as a muscle in Killian's jaw tightens.

Gold grins, snidely. "No, it's more than that, isn't it? You want a *truce*. A cessation of hostilities, as it were. A little guarantee that I won't harm you, in exchange for you not trying to harm me. Something we both know you'd only fail at if you were to try again." His smirk is cruel, and his eyes cold. "What? Did you think you could come here, crawling on your knees and promising that you've learned your lesson? And for that I'd be willing to let bygones be bygones? I'm afraid peace is going to cost you more than that, dearie."

Killian's eyes stay fixed on his enemy, his expression flat. "As you said, any attempt I could make would only fail. And even prior to your curse, I felt myself loathe to try again. I'm well aware that you may not be so ready to set our ... quarrel aside. I merely want your assurance that you won't harm anyone else in order to injure me."

"Ah, yes, because you wouldn't stoop to that yourself."

Killian's hand clenches into a fist. "You have my word; it won't happen again."

"A pirate's *word* might as well be written on water. Sorry, *captain*, you'd have been better off staying cursed. Since that didn't work, I'll just have to settle for killing you." His hand flexes on his cane, as if he's close to doing just that. Emma moves her hand closer to her gun.

“I’m willing to pay for peace,” Hook says. “Gold, riches, jewels, rare artifacts that even you can’t discover—”

“If that’s the best you can do, then I’m afraid there’s no deal. There’s nothing you could offer me that could even begin to compensate for everything you’ve taken.”

“*You* took Milah’s life!” Killian’s fist clenches.

“She took her own!” Gold sneers. “She chose you, and the consequences of that choice. No deal.” He turns to leave. Killian breathes deeply, then he turns back to look at Emma as if to reassure himself of her presence. But then the corner of his mouth twitches ever so slightly, and he actually *winks* at her. When he turns back toward Rumpelstiltskin, though, his expression is hard and determined.

His low voice carries even over the sound of the wind and the waves. “And what if I offered to return something I took? Suppose I could give you a way to restore Belle’s memories?”

Gold pauses, mid-step. “I’m listening.”

“What do you know of Neverland?”

“It’s a land of eternal youth, where no one ever ages. An annoying little world, that once had an annoying little king, who flew off and left it to its own rather nasty devices.”

Killian takes a step forward. “Aye, it is that. But it has one other distinguishing characteristic: Neverland makes you forget. Stay there long enough, and you forget who you really are, where you’re from, your loved ones, your pain ... everything.”

Gold turns fully to regard him—and for the first time, he looks *interested*.

Killian smiles. “Has it never occurred to you to wonder how *I’ve* managed to never forget?”

He shrugs out of his coat and tosses it over a nearby railing, then draws up his unbuttoned right sleeve with his hook. In the last light of day, with the streetlamp almost directly over it, the tattoo stands out starkly against his pale skin. He turns his arm, and Emma notices for the first time that the ink almost glimmers under the light, and it’s as fresh and clean and perfect as if he’d only gotten it a few weeks before.

Gold narrows his eyes, and Emma cannot decide if he suspects a trick or maybe he sees something she doesn’t.

“I made a bargain with a sea witch: squid ink and mermaid’s tears in exchange for ... well, that’s irrelevant,” Killian says with a half smile and a dismissive shrug. “The point is this—the enchantment is in the tattoo ink. Whilst I was in Neverland it protected my memories, that I might never forget Milah or my quest. Now, it must be done with her consent; but use it on Belle, tattoo her true name, and it will restore the memories she has lost.”

Rumpelstiltskin takes three steps forward, his hand outstretched as if he could snatch the tattoo straight off Killian’s skin. Killian draws his arm out of Gold’s reach. “Ah, ah. This is

personal magic; you know such things can only be given away willingly. Kill me and the enchantment dies with me.”

“You’re bluffing.”

“Am I?” His voice is quiet and self-assured, his habitual cockiness tempered in a way that Emma isn’t used to seeing. He lifts his chin and stares Rumple down. “Will this buy us peace? Your promise never to harm another in order to destroy me?”

Gold laughs, his eyes shrewd. “And what’s to stop you from harming Belle again the moment she has her memories back? Or my son?”

“I will admit that I wouldn’t mind schooling your boy, for the damage he’s done to Emma. But I will promise to leave it at that. Milah’s blood will never be spilled by me. As for your lady—so long as Emma remains well and unharmed, Belle will have no cause to fear me.”

Rumple studies Killian intently, as if he’s looking for the catch. “You won’t bargain for your own life?”

“As you said, mine is worthless. But I will bargain to protect that which I love.”

Emma keeps her mouth shut. Much as she hates being a bargaining chip, Emma recognizes that this moment has been three centuries in the making. She cannot always save Killian, but she can try to be the light that guides him home.

“Deal,” says Mr. Gold.

Killian extends his forearm. When he speaks, his voice is solemn and the words almost seem to have physical weight: “Then take it and use it well.”

Gold produces a small bottle in a puff of reddish-purple smoke and extends a hand just above Killian’s forearm. For a moment, nothing seems to happen. Then, much like the ink on the parchment that had freed them from Rumplestiltskin’s cell, the tattoo lifts from Hook’s skin like smoke. Gold waves his hand and the ink funnels into the bottle, filling it with a dark bluish-black liquid that shimmers as if it is flecked with diamond dust. He stoppers the bottle with a cork and tucks it away in his inside breast pocket.

“Well, I’d say it’s been a pleasure doing business with you, but it really hasn’t.” Once more he turns to go.

“Gold,” Emma says, striding forward.

He smirks. “Yes, Miss Swan? Something you’d like to add?”

She looks him in the eye. “He may have promised to back down, but I didn’t.” Gold’s eyebrows arch and an amused little smile plays across his face. Emma thinks about punching him for it. “No more curses. Not on him, not on *anyone* in this town, or my original threat still stands. I don’t have to kill anyone to hurt you. All I have to do is send Neal and Henry across the town line and out of your reach. They don’t *need* magic.”

Neal and his father's relationship is precarious, at best. If Emma asked Neal to run, and take Henry with him, she knows he'd be gone without a backward glance.

More importantly, Gold knows it, too.

Of course, it's not like Gold is the sort of person to let something like that stop him. But it would be difficult for him to find Neal again in the outside world, especially without her help. Emma is sick and tired of superpowered magical beings running around causing havoc just because they *can*. As if having power gives them the right to hurt people.

"You want to keep your son and your grandson?" Emma says. "You want Belle to stay with you, once she has her memories back? Then you need to start using all that power for good instead of evil. And not because of some *deal* or bargain or whatever. You need to do it because it's the right thing to do."

Gold's smile is enigmatic, unreadable. "Are we done here, Sheriff Swan?"

"For now," she says. It's impossible to tell if she got through to him or not, but she stands her ground anyway, claiming the upper hand. Once more he turns to go, but then he pauses and says over his shoulder.

"Funny thing about curses, dearie ... they're made to be broken."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Emma says.

"You're a clever woman, Miss Swan. I'm sure you'll figure it out," he says, and strolls off up the street, whistling a jaunty tune.

Emma waits until he's out of earshot, then gives a full body shudder. "That is one creepy, creepy little man."

"Crocodile," Killian says. He reaches out a hand and brushes her hair back over her shoulder, then leans in beside her ear. His voice drops to a deeper register, causing a shiver to dance down her spine. "Have I told you today that you're brilliant?"

She gives him a *look*. "Uh-huh."

"Such a brave, beautiful lass." He slides his left arm around her waist and inches closer. The smile on his face is bright enough to outshine the setting sun.

"What do you want?" Emma asks, willing to play along this time.

Killian unexpectedly sobers. He brushes his knuckles over her cheekbone. "You," he says, all the levity gone from his voice. "Just you."

There are logistics to figure out. How exactly do they go from being loners to ... whatever they are now? Emma never expected to find True Love, and she's not entirely sure what to do with it now that she has it. He's a three hundred and fifty-eight year old *pirate* that walked straight out of a storybook and into her life. And if she's right about his past, he's probably even older than that, not that he seems to have matured much beyond thirty. Killian doesn't

have legal ID, or a social security number, just like she told Snow—and she’s pretty sure anything he could put down on a resume would be considered grounds for immediate arrest. He’s cocky, arrogant, and he flirts with anything that *moves* — and yet, if what he whispered in her ear earlier is true, he might as well have been a monk for the last few centuries.

She may not know how to handle all this yet, but Emma knows, deep down in her gut, that he’s hers. She knew it the first time she laid eyes on him. How terrifying is that?

“What do we do now?” she asks.

He does something obscene with his eyebrows and his tongue that tells her *exactly* what he’d like to do now.

“I mean after that,” she says, without thinking.

“After?” he says, with a widening grin.

“Shut up. You know what I meant.”

He leans closer, till all she can see are his blue eyes and all she can smell is his clean, slightly spicy scent. “Feel free to elaborate. Details are appreciated.”

“Jones—”

He makes a noise, deep in his throat, that’s almost a purr. Heat shoots through her, and she leans closer without quite meaning to. “Killian,” he reminds her.

“Killian—” Her voice sounds breathless. Emma Swan doesn’t *do* breathless.

“Much better,” he murmurs approvingly, his lips moving against her cheek in an almost-but-not-quite kiss. His beard scrapes roughly against her skin, and her thoughts dissolve into a puddle of absolute *need*. Emma’s hands slide up against his chest, and she turns her head to give him better access. His lips brush against her cheekbone, her jaw. His nose rubs slightly against hers. She can feel his breath ghosting across her lips.

“Ahem.”

“Busy just now, mate,” Killian murmurs.

“Yeah, mauling my *daughter* in the middle of the street,” says David. “And wearing my clothes while you do it. Please do me a favor and burn that shirt.”

Emma steps back, feeling her face flush hotly. Right. Middle of the street. In front of her parents. Probably not the best place for a make-out session, even if they hadn’t quite gotten to the making out. She feels like a horny teenager—and it’s been a *long* damn time since Emma Swan has felt like a horny teenager. There are a million reasons why that ought to be a Very Bad Thing, and yet, for the life of her, right now she can’t recall a single one.

Snow has a smile on her face that’s just a little too bright, and she’s clasping David’s right hand as if she’s physically holding him back. “Well,” she says. “That went ... well.”

“Yeah,” Emma says, trying to put her brain back together.

“So, David and I are going to go ... home. You want to meet at Granny’s for breakfast?”

“Breakfast?” David asks, frowning.

“Say, around ... ten?” Her grin is almost blinding.

Emma just blinks at her, slowly. She wants to be sure she’s hearing her right.

“Breakfast?” David asks again.

“Emma?” Killian asks softly.

“Sure,” she says, slowly. “Ten sounds ... good. I was going to meet Henry there then, anyway.”

“Great!” Snow says. “We’ll get the big booth.”

“We will?”

“*Yes, we will,*” she tells Charming, squeezing his hand. He winces. “And Hook?”

“M’lady?”

“Did you know I can hit an ogre’s eye with a single arrow from fifty paces?”

Killian smiles. “You are a woman of many talents, m’lady.”

“I think you two need to talk. True love is rare, and wonderful. But it still takes work and honesty and trust,” she says. “I just ... wanted to be clear on where we all stand.”

“Exquisitely clear,” he promises.

She smiles at him, a queenly sort of smile now, and heads for the truck, hauling David along behind her. The last thing they hear, as Snow opens David’s door and practically shoves him in, is Charming: “But *I* wanted to threaten him—”

“You can do it next time, dear,” Snow says, and climbs inside, cutting off any further attempts to overhear their conversation.

Emma and Hook stand on the docks and watch until the truck pulls out and heads back into town, leaving the two of them alone. The wind is cold, but not icy, and the stars twinkle above Storybrooke. Behind them, the waves lap peacefully against the docks, while seabirds call their goodnights and fly off to roost.

“Your mother is terrifying,” Captain Hook tells Emma.

“Yeah.” Emma smiles. “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

There will be an epilogue coming. A little more patience with me, while I clean it up?

Thank you for all the lovely reviews, and I hope you all enjoyed the finale as much as I did!

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Previously: Killian and Emma (with a little backup support from Mary Margaret and David) confronted Gold and found a peaceful resolution to Hook and Rumple's conflict. Hook offered up a possible cure for Belle's memory problem.

Chapter Notes

Beta/Edited by PeaceHeather

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There is no plan. Not one they talk about, in any case.

Killian takes her left hand in his right, uses his hook to snag his coat and sling it over his shoulder, and they meander down the dock. Cora's invisibility spell died with her, and the masts and furled sails of the *Jolly Roger* glow in the setting sun. Beyond the harbor, the ocean is a deep blue, and the stars have come out above. It looks like something out of a fairytale, Emma thinks, bemused.

Probably because it *is*.

There is a moment when they reach the end of the dock and the gangplank, when he pauses to gauge her expression. "What?" she asks, feeling a little self-conscious under his scrutiny.

His lips twitch. "Not sure I should let you aboard my ship, *pirate*."

"Uh, excuse me. I'm not the one with a hook for a hand, buddy."

"You stole my ship. That's an act of piracy, Swan." He winks at her. "Told you you'd make a good pirate."

Emma shrugs. "I didn't steal it. I just ... borrowed it, without permission. But with every intention of giving it back."

"And *that* is the difference between the heroes and the villains," Killian says. Before Emma has any clue what he's about, he drapes his coat over his arm, covering his hook, then bends and scoops her up in both arms. "When I steal a thing," he says, making his way up the gangplank, "In general, I have absolutely no intention of giving it back."

“*Stitches*,” Emma reminds him.

“Will be fine so long as you don’t try to escape,” he says. He pauses and gives her a considering look. “You weren’t planning to try to escape, were you, darling?”

Emma gives him a mock glare. “Seriously?”

He only grins. “Well, I *am* a pirate. And you are a princess—at least by birth if not by preference,” he adds quickly when she opens her mouth to object. “Are there no stories in your land where the pirate kidnaps the princess, and carries her off to his cabin to ravish her?”

“Yeah,” Emma admits, dryly. “There might be one or two.”

“Well then, you might almost say this was the fine hand of fate,” he says, unrepentant.

Although she’d never admit it, she kind of does like the feel of being carried in his arms. Still, she has a reputation to uphold. “You’re about to feel the fist of fate if you don’t put me down.”

Killian winks at her, but sets her down on the deck easily. “Tough lass.”

“And don’t you forget it, buddy,” she says, hands on hips.

His gaze rakes over her, and his eyes darken. “Not even in Neverland,” he says, and his voice has gone husky and deep.

Emma feels her own body respond. Now that she’s admitted that she wants him, that she loves him, and now that she knows what he was willing to give up to be with her, to change—well, she sincerely doubts even Gold could bottle this feeling.

There are issues to sort out, later. And they will. But for right now the most important questions have been answered, and all that’s left is the two of them, standing on the deck of his ship beneath the stars. A man and a woman, not a princess or a pirate, a hero or a villain. Just them, Killian Jones and Emma Swan.

She takes a step toward him, then another. Her hand reaches up to comb through the hair at the nape of his neck, and he lifts a lock of her hair from her shoulder and tucks it behind her ear. Then she pulls him down to her and kisses him the way she’s wanted to since he bandaged her hand on top of a beanstalk.

With the taste of him in her mouth, and his hand fisting against the small of her back, she wonders if maybe he’s right—maybe she would make a good pirate.

This, she thinks, I’m not giving back.

Much, much later, they are stretched out on Killian’s narrow bed. The only light in the room is from the moon and the stars, shining in through the large window that makes up the rear

wall of his quarters. Emma remembers wandering in here, on their way back from New York. In daylight, the cabin is an old-fashioned mix of dark wood furniture, bolted to the floor, and sumptuous fabrics covering his bed. Maps are nailed to the walls and several chests are stacked in the corner. There's even a cabinet full of books, the glass doors firmly latched shut.

In the dark, it's small, cozy, and full of shadows. Moonlight washes across the table and floor to pool beside the bed. Waves rock the ship gently. Emma lays with her head on his left shoulder, her fingers painting idle patterns in the hair that is sprinkled liberally over his chest. He has his left arm wrapped around her, bare of both hook and brace. His right hand trails lazily over her arm.

Being in love was never quite like this, with Neal, she thinks. She'd been so young then, everything was new and nerve-wracking, like some crazy adventure. Every moment had felt stolen, like any second someone was going to come along and take it away. It had been like riding a roller coaster, and she'd never wanted to get off. Emma knows better now. Roller coasters tend to come to a screeching halt. You can't live on them.

During those painful months when she'd been stuck in jail, carrying a child she was too young to take care of, trying to decide how to give it its best chance, she'd decided that love simply wasn't in the cards for her. Abandoned by her parents, abandoned by the system that was supposed to take care of her, abandoned by the man she thought had loved her, and forced to abandon her own child—people like her didn't *get* happy endings. Happy endings only existed in fairytales.

And now she's living in a fairytale. She's found her parents, her son. She found the man she thought she'd loved, and discovered that first love doesn't always mean true.

She's not entirely sure what true love does mean, exactly. Except ... she'd read something once, some quote scribbled on a bathroom wall—because that's where most people like to write their wisdom. It said that loving someone *because* is easy; but loving someone *despite*—despite knowing all their flaws, all the darkness inside of them—is pure and perfect. Killian is, perhaps, as imperfect as a man can be. But laying here, with her head on his chest, listening to his heart beat beneath her ear, for the first time Emma Swan feels like she's *home*.

They lay there quietly, listening to the waves lap against the ship's hull. Through the window, the stars shine brightly.

"Killian," she says softly, breaking the silence. There's something that's been bothering her.

"Hmmm?"

"Did you *fly* through my window last night?"

He laughs outright and catches her hand in his, bringing it to his lips. He presses a kiss to her palm, and she can feel him smiling against it. "My clever, brilliant, beautiful Swan. *Whatever* gave you that idea?"

It's hard to tell in the dim moonlight, but Emma's pretty sure he winks.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry it took me so long to wrap this. The epilogue was a bit longer, originally, but some of the things in it ended up getting absorbed into earlier chapters as I did my rewrite. Then I debated about whether to add anything else, but in the end decided that I wanted to just keep it short and sweet.

Thanks to everyone who followed along with this story, who favorited and commented and rec'd it. I appreciate it so much.

Even though my Killian=Pan theory has been fairly well canonballed, there's still a thread of hope there that I'm not giving up just yet. Can't wait till Season 3! And hopefully I'll have some inspiration for some more CS fics over the summer.

Also, it's appropriate that I posted this today, because it's PeaceHeather's birthday. Send a few birthday wishes her way, would you?

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!