



Koraz/The Enchanted Forest

Once Upon a Time (TV) · Original Work · Not Rated · 4500 words

by Arukir

Contents

Koraz/The Enchanted Forest..... 3

Chapter 1: No Deal (Or, Don't Piss Off A Maniacal Pixie) 3

Chapter 2: No Deal Part 2 (Or, Don't Piss Off A Protective Shadow)..... 10

Chapter 3: Believe (Unbelievable)..... 15

Koraz/The Enchanted Forest

Fandom: Once Upon a Time (TV), Original Work Rating: Not Rated Category: Multi

Warnings: Creator chose not to add warnings, No content warnings apply

Characters: Rumplestiltskin | Mr. Gold, Belle (Once Upon a Time)

Tags: Original Character(s), Magic, Not Beta Read

Words: 4500 Chapters: 3 chapters Status: In progress Published: 2024-03-04

The Destiny Freaks come to Storybrooke

Chapter 1: No Deal (Or, Don't Piss Off A Maniacal Pixie)

The Dark One really should be more careful with customer relations...

Paige has a temper. She'll never pretend not to. She's an arrogant, mutated Mage with control issues and insanely powerful magic she can barely control. But she cares about her Assistant.

Paige Mistbloom stared at the Dark One, rather unimpressed. Her assistant was scarier, for stars' sake! Well, when he wanted to be, anyways. At that moment, he was just a clumsy teenager in a dorky bowtie, somewhat hiding behind her as he avoided the 'demon's' gaze.

She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, wishing he'd choose another time to have his fun and spend now helping her with intimidating the Dark One.

"Well, dearie?" Rumplestiltskin giggled, lounging sideways on a large stone. "Get to it, I don't have all night. Not that I don't love the choice of venue," he gestured broadly to the murky swamp, surrounded by wickedly dark trees. "but why, exactly, did you summon me?"

Paige suppressed a scowl at the word 'dearie', her need of his help outweighing her annoyance at a stranger calling her such. "Hello, Dark One, I hope you are in good health. I am sorry if I have disturbed you with my summons, but I require information."

"What sort of information?" The so-called imp sat up, crosslegged, and leaned forward with a giggle. It reminded her in equal parts of a child trying to hide their excitement and her Assistant when he had a new trick he wanted to try; same thing, really, but the inherent mischief in his eyes reminded her enough of the boy next to her to be endearing.

Paige smiled "We were told that you know a great deal about rare magical artifacts, and were hoping to learn more about something called the Ironbranch Dreamcatcher. Whatever you could tell us, especially where it is and how to use it, would be helpful."

"The Ironbranch Dreamcatcher?" The maniacal giggle that followed made Paige smile brighter, especially when Eric failed to suppress a similar laugh, though still under his breath. "Yes, yes, dearie, I know all about that. But what would you give me, in return for information? Nothing is without a price, after all."

Paige disagreed with that, but shrugged casually. "Well, what do you want for it?" She didn't care what he asked, certain she could negotiate if the price was too high, and refuse if he remained stubborn. And, besides, she had other methods if she got too desperate.

"Hmm...." The imp made a show of twirling his hands and tapping his chin, as if thinking deeply. Finally, he pointed to the boy half-cowering behind her. "How about your little servant? I could use some more staff."

Paige quirked an eyebrow. "Serv- you mean Eric?" She turned to look at said boy, now shaking and stepping back in the familiar role of the Coward. She turned back to the imp, awed at her friend's acting skills, but annoyed that he was leaving it to her to protest. "He's not my servant, he's my assistant. He helps with my sewing and such."

"Servant, assistant, whatever." The Dark One airily waved his hand, dismissively shrugging. "Either way, it's a small price for information the likes of this, dearie."

Paige hummed, considering. "Well, what exactly do you need him fo-"

A hand on her arm, not painful but surprising, cut her off. She turned to find neither the clumsy Assistant nor the shaking Coward, both replaced by the rather furious Trickster.

"Miss Mistbloom, if you trade me to a demon lord..." He said it low and warning, the respectful address the only thing marking a little of the assistant still active.

"Well, it's not like you couldn't just escape." Paige argued. She needed him to agree to this, he wasn't hers to trade without consent, nor would she ever wish him to be. "You are good at that thing, after all."

"And if the deal is magically binding, miss?" He let a bit of panic show on his face, and Paige wilted. He normally acted with excitement at the chance to test his escape

skills, but he'd been bound by too cruel of masters to find much fun in it anymore. Still, she continued to try half-heartedly.

"I-I'm sure I could undo the spell..." She tried, earning a brief red flash from the other's eyes and an unimpressed glare.

"Uh-uh, no breaking deals with me, dearie." The Dark One waved his finger in admonishment. He added in a mutter "Though I doubt you could undo even my simplest spells."

"Paige." It was half-imploring, half-threat as Eric's blue eyes turned nearly black. The Trickster wouldn't accept being caged except in service of a trick, and the fact that Paige had tried to force the trick was unlikely to end well.

"Sorry, Dark One" Paige sighed. "I would be willing to do it if Eric was," he normally would jump at such a chance, why did this guy scare him so much? "but he's not, so you'll have to pick a different price."

Eric smiled softly as he became the Assistant once more, though no longer hiding behind her.

"Sorry, dearie, but my prices are nonnegotiable." The demon giggled as he jumped up, standing on the rock with a dramatic flourish of his hands. "It's the little servant, or no in-for-ma-tion." He punctuated each syllable of the final word with a head tilt and a wagging finger.

"Please, there has to be something else you want." Paige implored, clasping her hands together. She wouldn't beg, and would have punished him if he tried to force her to, but was still open to mild pleading. They really did need this info, after all.

Eric stayed quiet as the two began to go back and forth. He was unsure if his employer was trying to beg or not, mentally noting that he was much better at groveling than she. His sense of dignity worked differently than his friend, and he would have been perfectly willing to for the knowledge had he not been so angry at Miss Mistbloom for trying to trade him away like a servant after just denying his status as one. Technically, he was a servant and a slave, just not to her, and he got enough of that sort of treatment from his mistress without getting it from his friend - not that Paige knew any on that.

He inwardly sighed, already deciding to cut her a break. He would actually be perfectly willing -even excited - to go through with the plan if he wasn't scared of angering said mistress by getting bound to someone else, so he really couldn't be mad at Paige for knowing him well enough to guess his reaction. Still, this slight definitely called for a

couple spring-loaded pies and switching the labels on her hair dyes. He was just weighing the possibility of being cursed into a marmoset form for the week vs how tame his pranks toward the witch had gotten, when shouting brought his attention back to the others.

"Now listen, dearie, my price is set!" The Dark One scowled. "If you weren't willing to pay, you should never have summoned me! Perhaps you don't realize this, but my time is valuable. Perhaps you need a bit of help learning that?" He raised his hand in a flourish, colorful smoke surrounding it.

Eric flinched with a giggle as Paige's eyes widened. Oh, this guy was in trouble.

"Are-are you threatening me?!" Paige raised a hand to her chest in affront, her mage blood screaming against the concept of such a being daring to even think of bringing harm to her.

"Well, yes, dearie, that is what the ominous smoke means." The imp giggled, turning to Eric. "What do you think? A snail for a month, or maybe a flower for a year. Though a clock would be better to teach her time management."

Eric didn't get a chance to answer as a notebook was shoved into his hands, Paige locking eyes with the Dark One with a snap of her fingers and a mutter of "Truth."

Purple the same shade of Paige's eyes flashed in the green-scaled man. Demon or not, he had started human, and Paige's magic knew humans.

His mouth flapped a few times as the imp struggled, but he answered Paige's repeated demand of information regarding the Ironbranch Dreamcatcher with a stream of facts that Eric hurried to write down. The boy winced, partially remembering the first time that particular had been used on him, partially at the revelation that they'd need blood for the spell - blood magic was very rare back home.

When she was satiated with the amount of knowledge, Paige released the truth spell, though Eric suspected she was suppressing the other's magic based on the lack of smoke and the way that golden-green-gray fingers were snapping almost nervously.

Paige reached into her bag with a scowl, rummaging around a bit before pulling out a book and throwing it at the Dark One's chest.

The Dark One caught it automatically, seeming almost in a daze, as Paige explained. "The fact I forced you to tell me is for threatening me, but the information was useful and deserves payment. That's a book of human spells from my home. They're simple,

but none in your land will know them, and you could even claimed to have created them if you wish."

She turned, beginning to walk from the swamp. "Come on, Eric, we've got a lot to do."

Eric started to follow, but paused, addressing to Dark One. "Err... Be careful with lying for the next few days. Miss Mistbloom's pretty powerful, and her truth spell takes a while to completely wear off the first few times, so you might blab a few truths if you aren't paying attention."

"Eric, why must you give annoying people free advice?" Paige asked over her shoulder with a sigh.

"Can't help it, miss; I'm a sucker for a fellow shadow in trouble." Eric shrugged as he happily caught up to her. "Besides, since when do I ever ask for payment? You know me, something for nothing, one direction or the other."

His wide grin was evidence enough of his honesty, always happy to help or steal or more likely both, and Paige regarded him as living proof against the Dark One's price-based philosophy. Said Dark One appeared in front of them in a puff of smoke, his magic no longer restrained, and Paige had to stop quickly to avoid hitting into him.

Eric bumped into her and jumped back, his face twisting in apology even for an accidental touch. She quickly patted his head, quietly assuring her touch-craving friend he did nothing wrong, before staring at the man in front of her with a quirked eyebrow.

"Who are you?" He hissed, the playful lilt gone.

"Miss Paige Zephyr Mistbloom, of the 974th Weird Forest Flowerborn Bloom. Identity number 01-974-773." Eric had answered for her, the Trickster reveling in given such uselessly true and exact information. Anyone from back home would have understood all of it, but it would sound like gibberish to an Enchanted Forest native.

The Dark One blinked. He growled, modifying his question. "What are you?"

Paige giggled, a daintier, softer sound than the imp's own, bringing to mind gentle bells. "Well, there's a question with many answers. For instance, my passion is being a pilot." A snap of her fingers and she was in a stereotypical pilot's outfit, complete with scarf and goggle-hat, albeit various shades of purple and somewhat sequined.

"Though, by birth, I'm a Flowerborn witch of the Weird Forest." Her wand, a deceptively simple purple stick, appeared in her hand with a flourish.

"By choice, I'm a fashion icon." Her ears pointed and grew, switching between forms before settling on long and softly tufted.

"By magic, I'm practically half-sprite." Thin, transparent wings appeared from her back, glittering a soft violet.

"But I think it can all be simplified rather simply." Paige smiled sweetly and leaned her head a bit closer to the Dark One. "I'm pretty, I'm not from around here, and I'm more powerful than you. So leave. Us. Alone."

He opened his mouth, his scowl deepening, when Paige snapped her fingers. "Freeze." It looked easy despite its power, but the spell wasn't a Mage spell, and should have been near impossible for her to learn. Three weeks of intensive study had proven that everyone was lucky she was more interested in her wings than her wand, and had turned half the forest against Simon the Sorcerer for ever being smitten enough to teach the damn thing to her.

Though it had earned him a cheek kiss, so Simon fully considered it worth the fact she'd used his own spell on him at least once. The amount of havoc those two had caused since then had started a forest-wide vote on whether or not banishment was too extreme, quashed by the many thousands of flowerborn living there. Eric had refrained from voting, choosing instead to hide in the Shadowrealm and watch from afar until the whole thing blew over.

Present-day, Paige walked slowly around the petrified Dark One. Eric couldn't tell if he was avoiding her gaze or if she'd been annoyed enough for the spell to freeze his eyes as well.

"Truth." Paige snapped, still walking around him. Whether a Mage was a warlord or seamstress, they did not take well to threats or annoying people, and Paige was of the sort that didn't take well to disrespect or disregarding free will willy-nilly. "What's your name?"

Her eyes glowed as she forced power into the spell, and the poor guy gave ten different answers. Rumplestiltskin, Mr Gold, Weaver, Imp, Dark One, Papa, Beast, Rumple Von Stiltskin, Crocodile, and Spinner.

"Rumplestiltskin." As Paige spoke, Eric felt the hairs on the back of his neck prick up. Since when could the pixie use name magic? Oh, that was bad. Oh, that was fant-

astic. It was both, and none Eric's many mindsets would be able to deny that. "Leave us. Now."

Rumple gasped as his ability to move and magic returned full-force. Then, as if by command of his Dagger, he felt himself pulled away. It was forceful, by not painful as he appeared in his own castle.

"Rumple?" Belle jumped up from where she was reading by the fire, rushing over to him. "Are you alright? Did your deal go well?"

He held up the book he'd nearly forgotten about, studying it. "I'm... Not entirely sure, love."

Confusion caused him not to notice the endearment slipping past his mental filters, but Belle smiled as she urged him to sit down and drink some tea, slowly coaxing the bizarre story from him.

Chapter 2: No Deal Part 2 (Or, Don't Piss Off A Protective Shadow)

A continuation of No Deal (Or, Don't Piss Off A Maniacal Pixie). Out for a walk with Belle, Rumplestiltskin runs into the Witch's Assistant -- and learns a bit more about him.

And that's all she wrote. I always planned to actually write them getting ice cream, but...

A month after the incident at the swamp, Rumplestiltskin walked arm-in-arm with Belle through a small village, testing out some of his new spells. They were simple things, changing the colors of cloth and such, but it pulled on a source besides his Dagger - an interesting feeling that made him feel calmer, more in control, like the Spinner but not so weak.

His lovely day was rather rudely interrupted as a teenaged boy quite nearly ran straight into Belle.

"My deepest apologies, Miss, I- Rumplestiltskin?" Dressed in tattered peasant garb, pale face and dark hair smudged with dirt, it took a moment for Rumplestiltskin to recognize the boy for the witch's assistant; Eric, the giggling, advice-giving, self-proclaimed Shadow Being with the color-changing eyes.

"I remember you, from the swamp." Rumples growled, looking around for any hint of purple. "Where's that boss of yours? Forcing confessions out of shop owners, perhaps?"

"She's not here." Eric's face flushed with panic as his eyes darted around. He spoke quickly, pleadingly. "Look, I know you're probably mad, probably want to fight, but I really don't have time right now. So here's a deal, leave me alone right now and we can continue this later at a location of your choosing, please."

"Are you alright?" Belle spoke before Rumples could, which was probably for the best if he was being honest. "You look scared. Is someone after you?"

Rumples bristled, annoyed that she was expressing such concern over the boy. But as his eyes started to make out the outline of a bruise hidden under the dirt on the boy's cheek, the father in him made his face twist in similar worry.

Eric appraised each of them for a second, before seeming to melt a bit into a tired smile and a soft chuckle. He looked much, much older than his sixteen years in that moment. "When is someone not after me, Miss? I've been a wanted lad for years, now.

But my fear is not for myself. It rarely is.” The last was muttered, and most probably not meant for their ears, but it didn't sound bitter to the listening imp.

“Who's it for?” Belle asked, stepping closer. Rumple scowled; had she completely forgotten what this boy and his accomplice had done?

Eric hesitated. He didn't really know how angry the Dark One - oh, what a fantastic name! If only he'd thought of it first - was about their last meeting, nor how much he blamed Eric. What if he hurt her? He felt more the Brother than the Trickster at that moment, and the need to find his charge beat his paranoia by a hairsbreadth.

He held up the simple picture. A young girl with shoulder-length black hair smiled from the paper, large eyes sparkling, partially covered by her bangs. “Her name's Amelia. I've been baby-sitting her for a long time, I've never lost her like this. I just turned around, and she was gone.” He let sadness and panic show in his voice and body, but only a bare fraction of what he felt. It was better if they thought his was the panic of a friend charged with protection, rather than the one of a bond-brother.

“Witch's servant and babysitter? Not exactly a traditional mix, is it?” Rumplestiltskin sneered, though his eyes took in every detail of Amelia's image. Humans were easy to read, and Eric knew that the man's protective instincts were starting to flair, as any parent's would in the face of a missing child.

Eric frowned. “I'm not Paige's servant.” He was used to playing servant, both willingly and not, but that was almost always part of a scam. Either way, those he was the servant of never fared well. He served the Pixie, sometimes, but he cared too much about her to be her servant. Not that the Dark One needed to know any of that; let him think it was merely a matter of terms and pride.

“Yes, yes, you've said.” Rumple rolled his eyes. That particular sentence would've been expanded upon, had a scream not pierced the air.

A young girl, the same from the picture, had jumped out of a cart with her hands bound. A man stumbled out as it screeched to a halt, muttering curses and holding his hand over his bleeding nose.

Everyone looked over to the scene, except the girl, her eyes focusing on the boy. “Eric!” Rumple barely kept pace with the boy as Eric ran over and pulled her into his arms, cutting swiftly through the ropes with a hidden knife. She threw her arms around him. “Th-they said they were going to sell me to goblins.”

“Shh, kiddo, you can tell me later.” he hugged and rocked her. “Are you alri- uninjured?”

“My wrists hurt.” she sniffled. “A-and I think my arms have bruises.”

Anger and a hundred other emotions chased each other on his face as he gently stood up, but his tone with her was soft. “Okay, kiddo, I’ve got to deal with this. Stay with Mr Rumpelstiltskin, he won’t hurt you.” This was accompanied by a glare that held just a little of the pleading boy from earlier, directed at Rumpelstiltskin.

It was Belle who answered. “Of course. But what will you do?”

A grin spread across his face, manic and dangerous, as he rolled up his right shirt sleeve - a gold vambrace stuttered with gemstones hidden there. “Oh, I’m going to teach them a lesson about kidnapping little girls - especially little girls with dark shadows.”

Amelia hugged the strange woman’s leg as she watched her friend turn towards her attackers. Black smoke had already engulfed him, leaving him clean-faced and dressed in better clothing, his cloak clasped almost comically with a bright red bowtie.

Amelia’s attackers were still trying to get the crowd to clear enough to move their cart, unaware of her guardian’s approach, or his anger. She smiled, watching as he became something quite dangerous, only the crowd causing the Showman to have any hold at all. Lucky for them, she thought, though not very lucky - Eric could be ruthless when protective.

She watched him as he spouted off some poetic nonsense, both threatening the bastards and egging them into attacking first. He easily sidestepped, snatching things from their pockets and lazily slicing bits of their clothing with his absently-flicked playing cards. He played with them for a few minutes, which strangely calmed her, reminding her that these guys weren’t too big a threat - she could have fought them off herself, if she’d gotten desperate enough to call upon her hidden power, to waste it on these ruffians. She suspected that was one of the only things securing their lives at that moment.

Bored, or at least feigning it, Eric took out a purple blade and made an expert cut on each of the brutes’ arms. One-by-one, they fell to the ground, convulsing.

Eric turned his back on them and smirked cheekily at Rumpelstiltskin “Oh, don’t worry, I haven’t killed them!” he gestured airily. His tone and face darkened, though he

still smiled. "Just crippled them. For life. How badly depends on the quality of the town's healer - hope it's a newbie."

Rumplestiltskin tensed as smoke curled around the little girl, but relaxed at her pleased laughter. The smoke took the form of a gigantic lizard with flaming eyes, lifting Amelia into the air and holding her up with her tail.

"Oh, little one! Look at you!" The lizard tutted, worried, as her smoke replaced the girl's clothes and cleaned her face. She sounded just like a human teenager as she began to brush Amelia's hair. "It's going to be a while before we can interrogate these word-I-shouldn't-say-in-front-of-yous about who else they might've hurt, so hows about some ice cream and going back to your fam early? Kristina's not going to be happy about, so let's get her ice cream as well."

"If my sis can't pound them into the dirt for hurting me, she's going to turn on you." the girl glanced between Eric and the lizard. "So maybe we tell her after the interrogating?"

"Oh, but imagine how much more fun she could make the information-gathering process." Eric argued darkly. "It would certainly teach them not to steal from the Shadow Thief. Especially not to steal my family."

"No telling my sis until we're far away." Amelia said stubbornly. "I don't want to even think about what she'd let herself do to those men, and we'd probably not learn anything."

"Ugh, fine." Eric rolled his eyes.

"Promise." Amelia demanded, crossing her arms. Rumple found himself impressed by the determined look she gave the boy. "Promise me you won't hurt them anymore than they already are, and you won't tell my sis until I say so."

Eric whined for a second, looking cornered. Finally, he sighed and bowed briefly. "Alright, I promise I shall not hurt them any more, excluding them giving me a good reason." at Amelia's quirked eyebrow he smirked and added "And their mere existence does not count as a good reason, in this case."

The lizard continued. "You're not getting the second one, though. The next time we see your sister or parents, we're telling. We've gotta look out for you, little one."

"Are you- What are you people?" Rumplestiltskin asked, eyes flickering between the floating lizard, the convulsing brutes, and the smirking boy.

“Ahh, well...” Eric shrugged. “We're travelers, from another world. I can tell you more, if you'd care to join us for some ice cream?”

Chapter 3: Believe (Unbelievable)

What if Eric and Henry were friends?

I honestly have no clue what this was about, or where it might've been going, I can't even remember when I wrote it...

The boy chuckled, wrapping his cloak around himself. He stood in the middle of the darkened street, grinning, uncaring of the battle about to go down.

The Evil Queen and Wicked Witch were poised for battle, the Dark One keeping everyone away, but the fight had been interrupted by the strange boy with hair and cloak both as dark as a moonless night.

His skin was pale, almost as white as his frilly-sleeved shirt, but a dark energy seemed to come off of him. A bright red bowtie served as the clasp of his cloak, and his vest and trousers were black. His eyes snapped open, eliciting gasps as pale blue darkened to nearly black before lightening up again - switching back and forth as if they couldn't decide which sort of blue they wished to be.

And always with that grin, one that looked faked and real, breaking only for laughter as bare feet moved him slowly closer to the would-be battle. It was a startling image, broken by a single shout.

"Eric!" Henry broke from the crowd, ignoring the battle as he ran towards the newcomer.

The boy's eyes widened for a brief second as he was tackled, causing him to briefly stumble, but he kept his footing and returned the Believer's hug. Next to the thirteen year old, his age couldn't have been more than sixteen.

"You came back!" Henry grinned almost as wide as the boy - Eric - had, leaning back but still holding onto his arms, as if afraid he'd disappear.

Eric's grin was smaller now, softer, his eyes settling on almost-black with small light streaks. His arms fell to his sides, but he made no move to escape Henry's hold. "Apologies, friend, for being away so long. I've had an... interesting couple years. From your letters, it seems like you have, as well."

"Wait, Eric?" Regina asked, her stance relaxing as she stated in disbelief. "As in your imaginary friend?"

“I told you he was real!” Henry stated firmly.

Eric frowned. “And I told you, Son Of Fairytales, that she'd never believe you if you told her everything at once. Sometimes a lie of omission is better than an unbelievable truth.”

— end of “Koraz/The Enchanted Forest” —